

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 15, 2004**

**1:30 p.m.**

Date: 04/03/15

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Now, hon. members, would you please remain standing, and I'd invite you and all members in the galleries to participate in the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau.

### Hon. Members:

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

**The Speaker:** Please be seated.

head:

### Introduction of Visitors

**Mr. Jonson:** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly His Excellency Georgiy Mamedov, ambassador of Russia to Canada.

Alberta has a long-standing relationship with Russia that dates back over 30 years in both the energy and agricultural sectors. Alberta and Russia share common challenges and opportunities because of our shared northern geography, wealth of natural resources, and unique aboriginal populations. The government of Alberta has special twinning relationships with three subnational areas in western Siberia. Mr. Speaker, the number of Alberta companies active in Russia has increased substantially since the year 2000. This increase is due in part to the Russian government's legislative reform.

Mr. Speaker, this is the ambassador's first visit to Alberta. I would ask that our honoured guest please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

**Mr. Norris:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on this glorious Alberta day to introduce to you and through you some constituents of mine who are visiting the Legislature today, the grade 6 class of Callingwood elementary school. They are here with their teachers, Mr. Wilcox and Mrs. Eastman, and their parent helpers, Mrs. Elniski and Mrs. Gillard. I'd ask them to rise and please accept the warm welcome of this House today.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Transportation.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature an

honoured constituent of Vegreville-Viking. He's seated in your gallery. Born in 1929 and raised in a trapper's shack in the St. Paul area, one of 14 children, great-great-grandnephew of the missionary Albert Lacombe and great-grandson of Edmonton pioneer Laurence Garneau, he served in the Canadian army from 1949 to 1973, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, peacekeeping in various trouble spots – Cyprus, Gaza, Egypt – during the 1950s and '60s. He was Alberta's Sergeant-at-Arms for 13 years, five years' overlap doing both, the first Métis ever appointed to that position anywhere in Canada. Honoured by a special resolution of the Legislature as honorary Sergeant-at-Arms for life, I would ask Mr. Oscar Lacombe to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed a pleasure to rise today and introduce to all members of this Assembly Mr. Andrew Brown, a devoted constituent of Edmonton-Castle Downs who has been an employee of the Alberta government in various departments and ministries for a number of years. Now he is redirecting his efforts in making our community a much better place to live. I would like Mr. Brown to rise and accept the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly a visiting delegation from Hardisty school in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. This delegation of students and parents is led by their teacher, Mrs. Sharon Lougheed, who is the spouse of the very distinguished hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. They are visiting the Legislative Assembly this afternoon. They are seated in the public gallery. Before I ask them to rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly, I would like to introduce the parent volunteers: Mrs. Lucie Zuidhof, Mrs. Ivonne Ortega-Gaete, Mrs. Joan Geisterfer, Bonnie Bjornson, Corinne Knop, and Mr. Craig Hutschal. Again, they're in the public gallery, and I would ask them now to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to my colleagues in the Assembly 30 grade 6 students from Garneau elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Strathcona. They are attending the School at the Legislature this week. Garneau elementary school has many achievements to its credit. I'll just give you one example. Last year all grade 6 students had either met or exceeded the provincial achievement test average. The guests from Garneau elementary are accompanied by their dedicated teacher, Jeanne Commance. They're all seated in the public gallery, and now I ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Are there others?

**Mr. Norris:** Well, I'm not sure whether this gentleman is going to welcome this introduction, but I see an old friend sitting up in the gallery, so, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you Mr. Link Byfield, one of the publishers of *Alberta*

*Report.* Mr. Byfield's father is a constituent and a good friend of mine. I'd like to recognize him and have the warm welcome of the House.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

**Rev. Abbott:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alongside Mr. Byfield there is also a great Albertan, one of the people who works for the citizens centre. His name is Craig Dockstader, and I'd ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

1:40 **Automobile Insurance**

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After the broken promises of electricity deregulation, the failures to fund public education, the failures to adequately fund public health care, there's now more evidence of another broken promise from this government, this time on auto insurance. According to a letter that was mentioned in *Thompson's World Insurance News*, a very respected industry newsletter, from Dominion Insurance CEO George Cooke, 80 per cent of Albertans won't see savings from this government's auto insurance reform package. My first question is to the Minister of Finance. Is this government setting up auto insurance consumers in this province for a colossal letdown?

**Mrs. Nelson:** Well, Mr. Speaker, if this hon. member would get current, the article that he's referring to was published over three months ago, and the letter was written well before that, and there's been an awful lot of work done on the implementation of the new automobile insurance reform within this province. Quite frankly, I have been a little surprised that he wasn't aware of some of the implementation processes that have taken place because we've certainly been public about it. We've been open about it, and the implementation team has been very, very thorough at communicating with the industry as well as consumers.

**Mr. MacDonald:** But prices haven't gone down in the last three months.

Again to the same minister: given that the hon. minister heard the Premier state that he considered his insurance package a failure if 60 per cent of Albertans didn't see savings, does the hon. minister now agree with Mr. Cooke that the insurance plan is doomed to failure because there are no savings?

**Mrs. Nelson:** Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I now go through a chronology of meetings that occurred with Mr. Cooke through not only my ministry but also with myself and other members of the implementation team.

On November 5 Mr. Cooke did in fact write to the Premier. We responded. On November 11 the Deputy Minister of Finance along with the Assistant Deputy Minister of Finance met with Mr. Cooke and the other Insurance Bureau of Canada representatives in Toronto. On November 25 there was a letter from Mr. Cooke that went to the Deputy Minister of Finance. On November 27 the Deputy Minister of Finance and the assistant deputy met with Mr. Cooke and, again, other IBC representatives in Toronto.

On December 11 and 12, Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Minister of Finance and the ADM of Finance met with Mr. Cooke again in Toronto. On December 16 the Assistant Deputy Minister of Finance

met with the IBC representatives. On December 19 I personally met with the IBC representatives. On December 12 Mr. Cooke wrote to the Premier.

On January 27 and 28 the ADM of Finance met again with the IBC representatives. On February 26 the minister responded to Mr. Cooke in writing, and on March 3 the hon. Member for Medicine Hat met with the IBC representatives.

Mr. Speaker, we've come a long way on automobile reform, and that has been because the people involved – the industry players, the legal community, and the public – have come together to realize that a reform had to take place. Status quo was not acceptable. We're moving down that path very well. We have some regulations to sort out. We told this House that we would take our time and do it right, and when they're ready, we'll bring them back. But we are committed to a reform package, and we're not going to do the ready, fire, aim scenario that that hon. member wants us to do.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: will the hon. minister agree to release Mr. Cooke's letter as well as all other documentation on insurance so that Albertans can see for themselves what's going on? Let's have an informed public debate on this matter.

**Mrs. Nelson:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has mentioned in his press release that he read this in *Thompson's World Insurance News* dated December 15, 2003, on page 5. It's already out there, so I would suggest he read the article.

**The Speaker:** Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the same letter Mr. Cooke warns that under the government's plan insurance companies will be forced to find ways to subsidize young drivers. Again to the hon. minister: does this mean that rates will go up for the rest of us? Is that the best that this government can do?

**Mrs. Nelson:** Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had been paying attention through this debate over the last year and a half, he would realize that the new structure, the made-in-Alberta structure, focuses on rewarding good drivers and penalizing bad drivers. We want bad drivers off the roads, quite frankly. We're not so focused on whether they're male or female or where they live but that good drivers drive at a reasonable price, with accessibility to insurance. Bad drivers are going to be penalized. That's what we've been saying from day one.

**Mr. MacDonald:** This debate is going on behind closed doors. Insurance rates are going up. Consumers have no choice, and they want a public debate here. Now, will the Premier confirm . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, this being Monday, the start of a new week, remember the rule that you agreed to: no preambles on the second question. Remember that? Okay; proceed. The question.

**Mrs. Nelson:** Mr. Speaker, again, if the hon. member would pay attention, we've had a freeze imposed on insurance rates in this province since October 30, and that was for 18 months. That's given us the latitude and the time frame in which to work with the industry and to put this framework in place. The industry has co-operated. Were they happy initially? Probably not. But have they come on

board? You bet they have. In fact, over 90 per cent of them have complied and put in place the refunds and the credits to their customers as we speak.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: given that the government's plan is doomed to failure, will the government now consider a plan for public auto insurance as outlined under liberalopposition.com? Why don't you go there for a policy?

**Mrs. Nelson:** I'm not going to say what to do with the liberal.com edition or whatever it is, but the doom for failure is, in fact, their own web site. If they'd pay attention to what's happening in this program, they'd see that Albertans, the consumers, the people we represent, come first, and we will put a structure in place that will serve the people of this province that's accessible, affordable, and comparably priced.

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

#### Long-term Care Accommodation Rates

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A government news release states that last summer's 42 per cent increase to long-term care fees was the result of its work with the Alberta Long Term Care Association to help its membership improve services to residents. Seniors, however, continue to express their concern over this increase. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How did the Alberta Long Term Care Association twist the arm of the minister to give them such a staggering increase? Will he now table the information they used to convince him?

**Mr. Mar:** Mr. Speaker, we looked at long-term care rates across the country, and we looked at the real costs associated with providing the type of care that is being done in our long-term care centres throughout the province. It had been some number of years since there had been a meaningful increase in the long-term care rates, the contributions by the seniors who actually use this service. Again, when we looked at our rates and compared them across Canada, we found them to still be, even after the increase, in the lower tier of costs to the individual seniors who use this very important long-term care system.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness: given the number of concerns that are still being raised by groups such as FAIRE and the Elder Advocates of Alberta, they question whether any independent audit was conducted to ensure that accommodation fees were being spent properly before this increase was brought in.

**Mr. Mar:** Mr. Speaker, long-term care operators have contracts with regional health authorities. We ask our regional health authorities to ensure that there are certain standards put in place and to monitor those. We, of course, do such monitoring ourselves, and when problems arise, we're certainly very aggressive in our attempts to look into these issues to determine whether there are legitimate concerns. Sometimes there are, but we move very, very quickly to rectify them.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that the minister said that the increase in long-term care rates would result in better food, why didn't this government make improvements to food and accommodation a requirement when this fee increase was granted? They're not tied together.

**Mr. Mar:** Mr. Speaker, I can certainly have the Minister of Seniors supplement this answer, but my understanding is that that's exactly what was done.

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister to supplement.

**Mr. Woloshyn:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important to note that before these long-term care rates went into effect, the increases, a few things were done to ensure that the people who were in these facilities would be looked after. First of all, we added a provision for folks on our seniors' benefits program where they would have the same take-home residual income after paying their fees as folks in lodges. Other ministries who have tenants there looked after their tenants.

There were some stipulations put on. For example, there would be no charges for bathing; there wouldn't be any charges for wander bracelets; there wouldn't be any charges for cable TV; there wouldn't be any charges for incontinence supplies. At the same time, individual places that may have had – and I stress: may have had – some menu concerns were addressed; for example, the one right within this city where the operators committed to putting over half of the increase into wages and the other half into meeting menu requirements as identified by the tenants.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

1:50

#### Cattle Industry

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans will be shocked to learn that millions of their hard-earned tax dollars went to the bottom line of two multinational giants, Cargill and Tyson. The minister of agriculture confirmed last week that the Alberta government provided provincial BSE money to meat packers who own cattle on their own or other people's feedlots. Tyson Foods was just fined \$1.2 billion in the United States for manipulating cattle prices in that country. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. In the dysfunctional market Alberta has had since last May, what would have prevented Tyson, Cargill, and other meat packers who own feedlot cattle from buying their own cattle at artificially low prices, thereby putting extra BSE aid in the pockets of their feedlot divisions?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Mr. Speaker, I don't know what basis that question is phrased under. I mean, he's asking me to explain what a packer who owned cattle might have done. Let me say this. It is not against the law in this province for feedlot divisions of packers to own cattle. They bought the cattle; they took the same risk as any other feedlot owner in buying those cattle. There was a discussion around this issue, and the industry determined that the fair thing to do was to protect that risk for those people who had invested in those cattle as for any other feedlot.

Mr. Speaker, the packer-owned cattle in this province range over time from 12 per cent to a high of 18 per cent, from what I've been able to find. There are at least two states that I know of in the

United States that limit packer-owned cattle to 10 per cent. That's been discussed here, but it is not against the law for them to own cattle. They bought the cattle, they took the risk, and they were compensated on the same basis as everyone else.

**Mr. Mason:** Again to the same minister: what would have prevented packers from selling their own cattle to themselves at artificially depressed prices in order to pocket more assistance from this government?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Mr. Speaker, the market function, which, obviously, during this time wasn't operating the same as it might have at other times, allowed packers to buy cattle out of their own feed yards, cattle from some 1,500-plus feedlots across this province, which they did, and process those cattle and move them.

The hon. member seems to have missed a very important point. We had an incident of one animal contracting BSE, being found with BSE in this province. That totally changed the way we market cattle and the way we move cattle. Mr. Speaker, there was no market as we understood it after May 20 because we were confined to domestic buying. Cattle were bought by packers in the east, by packers in the west. The industry in this province did a phenomenal job of working with government to move over 1 million head of fed cattle through the system. We should applaud the ability to do that rather than trying to find holes in something that was so wholly successful.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, when the minister tables her account of the expenditures made under the BSE compensation programs, will it specify exactly which recipients received exactly how much money?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Mr. Speaker, I'll say it one more time very slowly. When we conclude these programs – we're 97 per cent paid out as of Friday – I will present a list of every recipient. It will have the name of the recipient, the number of cattle, and the amount of the cheque. To date, as I indicated last week, we have distributed \$359 million to 1,534 feedlots.

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated last week, the unfortunate part of this debate is that we're losing sight of the fact that this industry still has some very critical issues in front of it. I don't know whether to thank the hon. member or not, but I can tell him that I have had a deluge of calls from producers, feedlot owners across this province over the weekend thanking this government for the programs that it put in place that were successful and their annoyance – maybe that's a mild way – at the discussions that have I think sidetracked the really important issue, which is the recovery of this industry.

### Health Care Reform

**Mr. Graydon:** Mr. Speaker, last week the Conference Board of Canada released a report detailing why health care is not fiscally sustainable in any province – I repeat: any province – in Canada. The Premier and minister of health have been commenting that Alberta will introduce health care reforms in the next couple of months that may include user fees and the delisting of services and moving Alberta out of the Canada Health Act. My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: can the minister tell Albertans how a province with an estimated budget surplus in excess of \$3 billion is unable to sustain health services at their current level?

**Mr. Mar:** Mr. Speaker, let me say, first of all, that this government supports the principles of the Canada Health Act both in spirit and in law, and this support is part of the province's Health Care

Protection Act. But we also recognize that maintaining our health care system cannot – and I say again: cannot – be about just spending more money. It's not just the province of Alberta that's saying this. All the Premiers of territories and provinces across Canada agree that the Canadian health care system is in need of urgent reform, and on March 9 of this year the Conference Board of Canada in its report echoed this sentiment.

The Conference Board projects that the total provincial/territorial public expenditures on health will more than double – more than double – by 2020 to over \$170 billion, up from \$72.5 billion in the last year, 2002-2003. This means that the province of Alberta by itself would have to spend an extra \$600 million a year just to maintain, not to improve but to maintain, the system that we now have, and at that rate, Mr. Speaker, by the year 2020 the province of Alberta will spend 53 per cent of its budget on health care alone.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Graydon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Many Albertans understood that the reforms undertaken in the Mazankowski report over the past two years would make the system sustainable. Why is the government starting another series of reforms?

**Mr. Mar:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this province has implemented an aggressive agenda for reform that's making better use of technology, delivering better services, improving access, but these by themselves are insufficient to slow down the rate of growth in health care costs. This province and other provinces across Canada are experiencing cost drivers that are largely outside of anyone's control, such as population growth, aging, and inflation.

The Conference Board of Canada's report indicates that there's a difference between cost drivers and cost escalators. Cost drivers in this case, Mr. Speaker, include a population growth in this province that's set to be at about 1.5 per cent, aging at 1 per cent, both of which are exceeding national projections. Our current health reforms attempted to address some of these concerns. For example, our focus on staying healthy has been an important part of this.

But what we now also need to do in addition to dealing with the cost drivers is deal with cost escalators. The escalators include non Canada Health Act-related things like drugs, which have been growing on average, Mr. Speaker, 17 per cent a year for each of the last five years. So what we need is flexibility in how the Canada Health Act is interpreted so that unilateral decisions by the federal government do not impact how Alberta delivers its health care system to Albertans.

2:00

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Graydon:** Thank you. My second supplemental is to the same minister. The Conference Board reported and pointed to drug costs as one of the major drivers in the health care costs that we're facing right now. What is the minister doing to contain drug costs in Alberta?

**Mr. Mar:** Well, we've done much, Mr. Speaker, to try and maintain costs, but as I indicated, notwithstanding all of our efforts costs went up by roughly 17 per cent a year for each of the last five years. Efforts that we've made include the introduction of the provincial drug list, mandatory generic substitution, and the increased use of special authorizations for high-cost drugs. The Conference Board of Canada highlights a variety of techniques to manage drug costs, and

I've instructed the people of the Department of Health and Wellness to review the Conference Board's report and develop a plan of action accordingly.

### Emergency Services in Calgary Health Region

**Dr. Taft:** Mr. Speaker, Calgary's head of emergency medicine in a letter to Kathy Briant about her mother's long stay in the Foothills emergency admits that bed shortages are leading to increased risk for patients in Calgary's emergency rooms. In fact, the head of Calgary's emergency medicine has been publicly quoted as saying that the future is a little bit scary. Despite government denials the situation is worsening in Calgary thanks to this government's mismanagement of the health care system. My questions are, first of all, to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that it was four years ago that the Calgary health region termed their emergency room services to be, quote, under siege, end quote, can the minister tell us why this situation only continues to worsen?

**Mr. Mar:** Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the hon. member review *Hansard* from last week. He asked very similar questions last week. The answer remains the same, and that is that the regional health authority in Calgary has moved on a number of different actions including recommendations established in the Motta inquiry to improve access, to improve the triage system, to ensure that patients who leave the emergency room certainly notify people of their intentions to depart.

Mr. Speaker, people from around North America come to see how the emergency room system works in the city of Calgary. It's a good system. It is not perfect. In my recollection last week I indicated that the number of visits to emergency rooms in the city of Calgary was something in the range of a quarter of a million visits. The fact and the reality is that the overwhelming majority of people of those 240,000 to 250,000 visits a year get the service that they need in a timely way.

There are, of course, exceptional circumstances. We know that there are times in the year when perhaps an early flu arrives and emergency room visits go up. But, again, things like Health Link have helped to dramatically reduce the number of unnecessary visits to emergency rooms. This has been a very positive step in the right direction. During peak times in emergency rooms the regional health authority in Calgary has also put in more emergency room physicians.

So all the right steps are being taken, Mr. Speaker, and I have full confidence that the regional health authority in Calgary will continue to improve an already good system.

**Dr. Taft:** The minister mentions the Motta inquiry. Well, given that the Calgary health region told the Motta inquiry almost two years ago that changes were being made to improve the system, how does the minister explain that the number of code burgundies has quadrupled?

**Mr. Mar:** Mr. Speaker, again, the use of code burgundies is a management tool put in place by the regional health authority in an effort to try and move people around where necessary. We recognize that, again, it's not an exact science to be able to anticipate with perfect knowledge how many people will come into an emergency room on a given night or even in a given month. So it is a management tool that they use.

The regional health authority has put in place its capital requests for improvements, for example, at the emergency room at the Foothills medical centre. It has also put in place what it believes to

be its needs in a 10-year capital plan for the city of Calgary. The government has accepted those plans and is in the process of reviewing them. Will we be able to fund the almost billion dollars of capital that the regional health authority has requested? Not all at once, but over time we will address the real and legitimate needs expressed by the Calgary regional health authority because of the growth of the city of Calgary, a dramatic growth. I'm confident, again, that the regional health authority will meet the legitimate needs of Calgarians.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you. This time to the Minister of Infrastructure: given that the head of Calgary's emergency medicine also says that, quote, developing a new southern hospital will greatly alleviate the capacity issue, end quote, why is the government refusing to provide funding to build that hospital?

**Mr. Lund:** Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to recognize that the Minister of Health and Wellness and myself and the Premier have met with the Calgary regional health authority. We have heard their need for additional facilities, and of course we are working on those. I sure don't want to have the impression left that we have done nothing. In fact, if the member would visit the site in Calgary, the Children's hospital is under construction. That is a very necessary facility. Also, if the health clinic within the south part of Calgary is not open yet, it's very near open. The regional health authority has been purchasing land for the south Calgary hospital that's going to be constructed.

Mr. Speaker, we have to also remember that there are other needs around the province. As a matter of fact, over the last three years we have approved just about a billion dollars' worth of health care facilities in the province of Alberta. That's over the last three years.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Dunvegan, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

### Report on Rural Development

**Mr. Goudreau:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In July of 2002 the Deputy Premier and Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development announced the creation of a steering committee to examine rural development in Alberta. This committee, which was chaired by the members for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and Wainwright, was given the responsibility of examining why the Alberta advantage had not appeared to create much growth outside the Edmonton/Calgary corridor. My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. With many individuals, especially our representatives from municipal governments, anxiously awaiting the release of the report, when can we expect this report to be made available?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Well, Mr. Speaker, first, let me acknowledge the great work done by the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and the Member for Wainwright. These two members of this Legislature travelled the province and listened—listened—to individuals, elected officials, and anyone who chose to come to the meetings as to how they envisioned rural development in their communities and took careful note of what these individuals felt were barriers to rural development and to their communities growing.

Mr. Speaker, this report was presented to me in the fall, and because of the multifaceted issues in the report we determined that we should share it with other ministries. A lot of the information in

that report requires other ministries' responses. They talk about economics.

**Speaker's Ruling**  
**Questions regarding Unreleased Report**

**The Speaker:** Hon. minister, please. There's a bit of a dilemma here. A question is being raised about a report that has not been made public yet, and there is discussion going on in the Assembly. I think that to the privilege of all members of this Assembly, should questions be addressed on a report, it would be to their advantage to at least have access to such a report.

The hon. member.

**2:10 Report on Rural Development**  
*(continued)*

**Mr. Goudreau:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question was: when can we anticipate the release of that particular report, and how will that report help our rural communities?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Mr. Speaker, I apologize, but I was getting to the reason that the report has not been released yet, and it is because of the complexity and because of the number of ministries that would be involved in the implementation of that report. We felt that to do justice to the work that was done by these individuals and by the people that participated in these meetings – and I must say a great turnout right across this province – we would spend some time doing that. It is my anticipation that we will release this report in the next short weeks or even days because the majority of that work has been done, and I know that many, many communities are anxiously waiting for that.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

**Forest Stewardship Council Certification**

**Ms Carlson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The demand for Forest Stewardship Council-certified wood products is increasing rapidly. Earlier this year Weldwood of Hinton was dropped by IKEA because its forestry practices did not meet IKEA's wood purchasing standards. This is merely one example that shows how Alberta's forest management strategy is becoming a target for market action. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: given that the FSC certification standards were finalized last fall, when will this ministry finally work with Alberta conservation groups to identify areas for protection so that Alberta forest companies can become FSC certified?

**Mr. Cardinal:** Mr. Speaker, that's a very, very good question because forestry continues to play a very important part of our overall economic diversification plan. In fact, there are thousands of people employed in that industry. I'm sure a lot of the members' constituents also work in that industry, so this is a very, very important part of our economy and industry in Alberta.

The issue of certification is only one challenge amongst many challenges, such as the softwood lumber agreement, the endangered species legislation that the feds are proposing, the Kyoto agreement that the feds are proposing. All those areas, Mr. Speaker, are a challenge. This international certification, of course, is another process, and we are working very closely with the Alberta Forest Products Association, the industry, and the users out there in relation to working toward proper certification for industries in Alberta.

Some of the challenges we have, of course, are that a lot of the small operatives – there are about 125 in Alberta – produce less than 5 million board feet. Some of those industries, of course, may not have the capacity and the finances to be able to meet some of those certification standards, so it is a challenge and continues to be a challenge. You can be assured that we will meet those standards as required when the time is right.

**Ms Carlson:** Mr. Speaker, the minister misses the point of the question. When will the ministry stop industrial development in the most endangered areas of the boreal forest so that conservation planning can be completed?

**Mr. Cardinal:** Mr. Speaker, of course, the Liberal way would be to stop everything. Fortunately, they're not the government and probably will never be the government, so we don't need to worry about that.

Mr. Speaker, we do have a good balance in Alberta with industrial development and environmental management, and that will continue.

**Ms Carlson:** Mr. Speaker, given that the minister needs to take into consideration that their forest management strategy is affecting Alberta businesses, when is he going to show some commitment to improve forest management and to the Alberta forest industry and trash its policy of no more protected areas in Alberta?

**Mr. Cardinal:** Mr. Speaker, you know, we probably have the most efficient mills in North America in relation to harvesting our resources, but that also goes along with the forest management. A lot of our FMA holders have won international awards in relation to forest management and harvesting. Of course, the Liberals would never see that because all they see is the negative side.

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

**West Nile Virus**

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, last summer the West Nile virus arrived in Alberta, and the Palliser health region in southeastern Alberta reported 131 of the 275 West Nile infections reported province-wide. The Minister of Health and Wellness recently announced a mosquito control program for the coming summer. Medicine Hat and the surrounding municipalities will receive about \$350,000 in funding to implement or adapt municipal mosquito control programs to combat West Nile virus. My questions this afternoon are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that almost one-half of the West Nile virus cases occurred in a region that accounts for only about 3 per cent of the total population of Alberta, how can the minister be confident that this funding will be adequate to minimize the risk of further outbreaks of West Nile in this region?

**Mr. Mar:** Mr. Speaker, prior to the summer of 2003 we had no evidence of West Nile virus in this province, nor did we know with any certainty at all which of the 43 species of mosquitos which live in this province might actually carry the virus, nor did we know where they would lay their eggs. So it would have been premature to implement a broad larvicide program last year.

We did work in the past year, Mr. Speaker, with municipalities and our colleagues at the ministries of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development to determine from mosquito surveillance where these mosquitos might be, and we did that on the basis of incidences of bird and human cases province-wide. What we found

is that communities and counties like Newell, Forty Mile, and Cypress had been assessed to have the highest risk, so our program for larvicide this year will target our dollars at those areas that are at highest risk.

Now, I need to say this, Mr. Speaker. I cannot guarantee that this will entirely reduce the risk of infection to human beings. No mosquito control can kill every mosquito, but it is important to remember that this will be a very important part of supplementing the most effective means of reducing the risk to human health, and that is every individual taking the proper steps, like wearing DEET and wearing the right kind of clothing, to avoid the risk of being bitten by a mosquito.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I have only one supplemental question. To the same minister: how will the minister ensure that municipalities within the region use the funding in the most effective way?

**Mr. Mar:** Mr. Speaker, this department has worked very closely with Alberta Environment to develop the program. Alberta Environment is enforcing the guidelines around the use of pesticides in the province of Alberta. The insect and pesticide specialist responsible for this mosquito control program will be working with municipalities to ensure that their staff are properly trained to find and identify the correct species of mosquitos and certified to apply the chemical agents that are used to kill the mosquito larvae.

Municipalities participating in this funding formula are required to provide detailed plans for their mosquito control programs for approval, and any funding that is unused at the end of the season will be returned to the Department of Health and Wellness.

### Intermodal Traffic Safety

**Mr. Bonner:** Mr. Speaker, despite a shortage of approximately 5,000 qualified workers CN Rail continues to send traffic in and out of intermodal terminals. This has led to complaints by striking workers that inexperienced drivers are leaving the yards here in Alberta with containers that have not been locked down properly, compromising safety for both the workers and for Alberta drivers. To the Minister of Transportation: is the minister currently working with CN Rail to ensure that traffic safety here in Alberta isn't compromised during this time of shortage at CN Rail?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the member is referring to a matter that is totally under the jurisdiction of the federal government.

**Mr. Bonner:** Given that these trucks are travelling on Alberta highways, Mr. Speaker, and that at least three accidents involving intermodal truck traffic have occurred in Alberta in the past 21 days, what steps has the ministry taken to ensure that adequate inspections are taking place and that violations of safety standards are being appropriately punished?

**Mr. Stelmach:** When it comes to truck traffic, that is under the jurisdiction of the provincial government. In terms of load restraint the fines have been increased rather significantly, and also any violations of the current Traffic Safety Act will go on the company profile. So those are quite serious allegations.

**Mr. Bonner:** To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: what is Alberta Transportation doing to work with companies to ensure that traffic

safety standards aren't compromised when there are shortages of experienced workers?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talks about a shortage of experienced workers as a result of the strike. Actually, there is a shortage of experienced drivers right across Canada. In fact, a number of larger trucking firms are bringing people in from other provinces. Some are actually training people from Yugoslavia and other countries in Europe, because when it comes to the spring run in terms of fertilizer, anhydrous ammonia, et cetera, all companies want to do the best they can in terms of the proper training of the drivers and also to ensure that all safety standards are met. As I mentioned before, it is very crucial that all trucks on Alberta highways operate as safely as possible.

2:20

The other is that through co-operation with the Department of Learning we've actually put together a course that will be starting soon where companies can send their drivers for additional training, but this is quite in-depth. It is not only the standard driving practices on Alberta highways, but this would be load restraints, crossing borders, proper waybills. At the end of the period the driver will actually have a certificate. They can then present their certificate to other trucking companies when they're either seeking employment or to show their expertise in this particular area.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

### Mental Health Services

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. About a week ago in this House the Minister of Health and Wellness gave the government a grade of 99 per cent when it came to Alberta's mental health system. By contrast, a leaked government report on mental health gives the government a failing grade. The report states that there are significant capacity and service gaps across the entire spectrum of mental health services and that Alberta's spending on mental health is far below the average of the percentage of budget that other provinces spend on mental health. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What immediate action is the government taking to address the deplorable gaps in services, the insufficient funding, and the tragic lack of strategic vision outlined in the leaked report on this province's mental health services?

**Mr. Mar:** Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, let me say this. This was a draft report. It was not leaked to anybody. It was released to stakeholders for their input. We asked stakeholders throughout the province: where are the areas that we can improve our mental health services, what are the visions and the strategies that we should put in place in order to ensure that Albertans have access to the right kinds of services that they require, and what are the kinds of community services that are needed by people who have needs in mental health? We are taking steps to address these even now, even in advance of the plan being finalized.

As an example, Mr. Speaker, fairly recently we announced that four psychiatrists and five other mental health workers have gone into an arrangement with 44 general practitioners in the city of Calgary to better identify and help those patients of the 44 general practitioners whose patients need mental health services. So we are taking steps in the right direction.

I would also say, Mr. Speaker, that it would be false to suggest that there's a conclusion that we're not spending the right amount of money on mental health, because you need to know first what

services you need before you can tell how much you need to spend on it. So this comparison with other jurisdictions, saying that expressed as a percentage, it's lower than other parts of the country – I've yet to see any evidence that backs up that assertion. But even if it were true, I'd say: what does that tell us? It doesn't tell us anything, because until you know what it is that you need in the system, you cannot say how much it will cost.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how long will Alberta families have to wait before meaningful action is taken to not only make the plan that the minister talks about public but to meaningfully address the critical gaps in mental services and funding identified in the report?

**Mr. Mar:** Well, again, Mr. Speaker, there were a number of false assumptions in the premise of that question. We've indicated that health care, particularly mental health care in this province, is critically important. It's the reason why we've asked Albertans and asked stakeholders how we should proceed on a province-wide mental health plan. It will be done in the fullness of time, and it will be done in a way that makes sense, where there's a consensus among stakeholders as to the direction that we move forward.

But, again, Mr. Speaker, to reiterate what I said in my response to his first question, I wouldn't want the hon. member to think that there is nothing happening in the meantime. We are taking appropriate steps to close gaps. We have increased our funding for mental health. I spoke about the dollars involved last week in this Assembly. I invite the hon. member to refer to *Hansard*. We do spend some \$240 million or \$250 million with the Mental Health Board. That's over and above the hundred million dollars that regional health authorities estimate that they spend. We know that many visits to a doctor's office, general practitioners, involve matters of things like depression. We cover the cost of that. We cover the costs of drugs in this province, including psychiatric drugs.

So, Mr. Speaker, we do devote enormous resources to this area, and I wouldn't want the hon. member to leave Albertans with the impression that we don't do anything with this area of mental health, because it is very important.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary to the same minister: given that the minister is proposing to act only in the fullness of time, how can he justify pushing Albertans with mental illness into the community without providing the community supports necessary for successful treatment?

**Mr. Mar:** Again, Mr. Speaker, there are so many false premises to the question asked by the hon. member. I want to emphasize that we do provide community supports for those suffering from mental illness in the community. We are asking our stakeholders: are there other things that we can do to improve this? They indicate to us that the answer is yes, so let us wait for this report to be responded to by stakeholders in the province, and we will move forward with our plan from there.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

### Film Development Program

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is for the Minister of Community Development. Constituents in my riding

were very excited when Wetaskiwin was recently the production location for a new movie, *Santa's Slay*. Usually it's the major cities and the mountain areas that attract the film industry. Can the minister tell us what impact the Alberta film development program is having on our province?

**Mr. Zwodzesky:** Mr. Speaker, the impact of the Alberta film development program throughout this province has been and continues to be absolutely enormous. I can tell you that within the last four years and since the introduction of this program the number of persons involved in the film industry has grown by 220 per cent. The number of actors alone has increased by about 195 per cent, and as a result of those couple of increases, the dollar value of production in this province has increased about fivefold. So we know that the program is working and working well.

From an artistic, creative, and technical point of view it is having an enormous impact on the personnel involved in that industry. It also fuels local economies in places such as Wetaskiwin, Bruderheim, and Edmonton, which is where *Santa's Slay* is currently being filmed. It is a production with which a local producer has a coproduction arrangement and, obviously, one with which we have a record of association.

Two other quick points, Mr. Speaker. The taxation coffers of the province of Alberta are directly impacted also because these individuals involved in this industry pay corporate, private, personal taxes, so that's helpful there. I think, finally, the impact is being seen in the promotion of Alberta as a go-to or a come-to location with incredible scenery, tremendous support crews, and staff who can help out with these films. So we see a great deal of benefit to the tourism industry, and we know that this is a multimillion dollar industry, and we hope that within a few years it will become a billion dollar economic generator in this province.

**Mr. Johnson:** My first supplemental is to the Minister of Economic Development. What role did Economic Development play in attracting the *Santa's Slay* production to Wetaskiwin?

2:30

**Mr. Norris:** Well, thank you very much to the hon. member for the question. At the outset I don't think I can add much more to what the hon. Minister of Community Development said about the impact on this industry. But I do think certain thanks should be given to our colleague for Airdrie-Rocky View, who has been the chairman of this film commission for so long and has fought passionately for it.

Mr. Speaker, the answer to the hon. member's question is yes. We took a mission to Los Angeles, we met with the producers of *Santa's Slay*, and we, I believe, convinced them to come to Alberta to do so. We have some 17 other films that are going to be produced here in the next year, we believe. One of them, entitled *My One, My All, My Everything*, I'm told is a love story, which should lend itself very well to the beautiful Alberta west that we have here.

Mr. Speaker, I would also echo the comments that the hon. Minister of Community Development said. We have targeted this industry in particular for what it does for tourism. If one looks at what happened with New Zealand and *Lord of the Rings*, they've generated some 3 and a half billion dollars in new tourism opportunities because of that remarkable film sequence. So in Alberta we've targeted that as well.

Again, my thanks to the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View for all her hard work in continuing to promote this remarkable industry.

**Mr. Johnson:** My last question is to the same minister. What role is your ministry playing to specifically attract more film production opportunities to the rural area?



**Mr. Norris:** Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the absolute delights of this job is that rural Alberta is already built. It has everything that people are looking for. So our job in our two missions to Los Angeles that we undertook with producers was to let them know that if they're looking for badlands, we have it, that if they're looking for an old western town such as Lacombe, we have it. We have everything. The sets are already built; they're here. God made them for us. We just have to utilize them. As a result, we want to let them know what's going on also in northern Alberta, as my colleague says, in Medicine Hat. A beautiful province, a remarkable province.

The other thing we're doing, Mr. Speaker, is working with our regional economic alliances, of which we have 12 in the province, to let them know how to promote this remarkable industry and how to get the message out that production can take place not only in Edmonton and Calgary but also in rural Alberta, which is very important.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, prior to calling on a number of hon. members to participate today, I'd just like to make a follow-up comment to something I said in the House the other day. On Thursday last I indicated that last Thursday could have probably have been a remarkable day in the history of the Legislature of Alberta. That was day 15 of the session, and Her Honour came in and gave royal assent to 15 bills. That was a productivity of 15 bills in 15 days.

Well, weekend research shows the following. In 1944 on day 14 of the Ninth Legislature 20 bills received royal assent, and in 1941 on day 16 of the Ninth Session 21 bills received royal assent. However, the record is in 1913. In the Second Legislature 87 bills received royal assent on day 29 of the session.

Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

**Mr. Lougheed:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce people from Special Olympics. We have the group leaders visiting today in the gallery accompanied by athletes. Group leaders include Louise Suru, Corey Coldwell, Gary Lefleur, Michael Daly, Sarah Lavin, and Michelle Deering. Several athletes are accompanying them, among them Ambyr Lindon, Adam Faulkner, Robin Friesen, Andrew Rys, Steve Rabeeh, Joe Knorr, Calvin Webster, Warren Pattison, Randal Thurston, Najden Ciric, Geoff Yuzyk, Jack Ringdahl, Tammy Royan, Shilo Sutton, Steven Weigelt, Randy Royer, Wayne Poloyko, Edward Busch, Kevin Shoenberger, Jim Combs, and Chris Stoikopoulos. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Recognitions**  
**Alex Girvan, Aidon Girvan, Willie King**

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, on the third of May 2003 one-year-old Cameron Girvan was playing with his brother, two-year-old Aidon Girvan, and his cousin, three-year-old Willie King, at his grandparents' farm. The boys were playing around the slough when Cameron decided to chase a beaver wandering on that slough. Cameron broke through the thin ice and fell into the water. He was not able to get up or breathe as he had fallen through the ice into mud and water that was approximately three feet deep.

At the tender ages of two and three both Aidon and Willie had enough sense to immediately run the 70 metres back to the house to get help instead of trying to help Cameron on their own. In response Alex, the father of Cameron and Aidon, ran out of the house to the slough. He found Cameron lying on his back, his head stuck in the mud with the water washing over his face, kicking his feet trying to get up. Alex was able to grab Cameron out of the water to safety. Cameron was conscious and crying, but his lips were blue in colour. Alex immediately carried Cameron back to the house and administered first aid.

Aidon Girvan and Willie King responded wisely to the situation. It is for this reason that the Lifesaving Society awarded Aidon Girvan, Willie King, and Alex Girvan with the rescue commendation award.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

### Spain

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 11, 2004, the world was horrified once again by the terrorist bombing in Madrid, Spain. This cowardly act extinguished the lives of 200 innocents while injuring more than 1,000 other citizens who were merely going from one place to another, unsuspecting parents, children, and elderly.

I have had the opportunity to spend time in Spain, and she is very dear to me. One of the most splendid features of this unique country, Mr. Speaker, is her people, who are some of the most friendly, hospitable, and peace loving I have ever encountered.

March 11, 2004, will be a day that I will not forget soon. Although it will be remembered as a day of grief and tears, I hope that it will also be the start of a new unity in Spain and in the global community in our collective resolve to rid ourselves of terrorism.

To all our Spanish-Canadian citizens and especially to those of Spain, my deepest condolences on your tremendous loss. May God bless and keep Spain in her great time of sorrow.

Thank you.

### Special Olympics Canada Winter Games

**Mr. Lougheed:** Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today in this Legislature to acknowledge the 72 athletes and 28 support team members from Alberta who attended the 2004 Special Olympics Canada Winter Games recently in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. These athletes braved the near-record snowfall in Prince Edward Island to compete in events such as alpine and cross-country skiing, figure skating, floor hockey, curling, snowshoeing, and speed skating. The Alberta contingent did quite well this year, placing third overall, receiving 28 gold medals, 29 silver medals, and 24 bronze medals. In fact, the Strathcona Strikers, a floor hockey team from my constituency, won a bronze medal in their division.

But the Special Olympics is more than winning medals. The athletes' oath for the Special Olympics is "Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt." I have heard, Mr. Speaker, that all the athletes from Alberta were brave in their attempt and were fine ambassadors for our province.

I'd ask all members of the Assembly to join me in recognizing the athletes and coaches who represented Alberta this year at the Special Olympics.

### Beef Consumers

**Mr. MacDonald:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Alberta beef consumer. After the single case of a BSE-infected cow was

detected in this province, hundreds of community groups, industry groups, producers, the government, and the Official Opposition hosted different events in support of Alberta's beef producers. The response to the crisis by Albertans has been tremendous. Across this province at community halls, parking lots, the Saddledome in Calgary, and in many, many other places Albertans lined up to show their support. It is not a rare occurrence, by any means, to be driving down the road and see a bumper sticker that states, "I love Alberta beef" or "I still love Alberta beef."

I want to thank those who have purchased Alberta beef and have helped keep the industry afloat. Let's keep it up and work hard to open the borders to our world-famous product, Alberta beef. Alberta prime rib belongs on all fine restaurant menus around the world.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

#### 2:40 Clear Vista School

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to recognize the Clear Vista school in Wetaskiwin, which held the official opening of its new school last week. It was the pleasure of the Minister of Infrastructure and myself to participate on behalf of the government of Alberta.

Clear Vista dates back to the late '40s and '50s in Wetaskiwin. It was originally established as a school for the children who lived outside the city in neighbouring municipalities. The school remains an important part of meeting the needs of county students as well as being open to students within the city of Wetaskiwin.

With the growth of the community around Wetaskiwin a new school building was desperately needed to house the students at Clear Vista. What began as a small school over 50 years ago has grown to a student population of 517, offering a wide range of learning opportunities for both city and county students from kindergarten through grade 9 in the Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency.

The students, teachers, and staff are extremely excited and proud to move into their beautiful new facilities, that will continue to serve the educational needs of the Wetaskiwin area for years to come. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

#### Toni Ingram Constable Jeff Fox

**Mr. Magnus:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All of us at times take emergency workers – police, firefighters, and EMS – for granted because we know that they'll be there when we need them. Last Sunday on highway 2 near Leduc was one of those times for me. After hitting a patch of ice, my vehicle lost control at highway speed and rolled off the road. I called for assistance and was met on the phone by dispatcher Toni Ingram, whose calm and presence of mind kept me calm and under control until Constable Jeff Fox arrived on scene moments later.

Constable Fox spent two hours helping me pick up my belongings and generally kept me safe in this traumatic time. The most danger I felt was not during the accident but afterwards on the side of highway 2 with vehicles passing at highway speeds only feet away despite the flashing emergency lights.

My thanks go out to Jeff and Toni for their professionalism and kindness, but the best thanks of all would be to help make Alberta roads a little bit slower and safer for them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### Yellow Ribbon Gala

**Mr. Bonner:** Mr. Speaker, last Saturday evening the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and I attended an exciting and special evening hosted by the Military Family Resource Centre. Many months of hard work and planning went into the yellow ribbon gala benefit dinner and silent auction. This very successful event is a major annual fundraiser for this nonprofit charitable organization.

Padre Laurelle Callaghan, Global's woman of vision for April 2003, was the featured speaker. Major Callaghan recounted her experiences as senior Canadian chaplain during Operation Apollo in Kandahar. Her presentation was a highlight of the evening as she skillfully wove humour and wise advice into her presentation on her experiences.

The proceeds for the benefit dinner and silent auction are reinvested into the Military Family Resource Centre to assist in providing programs and services designed especially for military families. Their mandate is clear: supporting the heroes behind the heroes.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask all the members of this Assembly to join me in recognizing the outstanding work and contributions the Military Family Resource Centre makes in the lives of military families. Thank you.

#### head: Presenting Petitions

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by 176 Albertans petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government "to invest a portion of the multi-Billion dollar budget surplus to properly fund education, thereby avoiding layoffs of teachers and staff, ballooning class sizes, program cuts, and closure of schools."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### head: Notices of Motions

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am giving notice that I will be rising later this afternoon at the conclusion of the daily Routine to move a Standing Order 40 application.

Thank you.

#### head: Introduction of Bills

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

#### Bill 21 Child Welfare Amendment Act, 2004

**Mr. Cernaiko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce Bill 21, the Child Welfare Amendment Act, 2004.

These minor amendments will clarify wording and ensure that the Child Welfare Amendment Act, 2003, which received royal assent last spring, is aligned with the Family Law Act and the Vital Statistics Act. These amendments will also allow for a smooth transition from the existing legislation.

I'd like to move first reading of the bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a first time]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 21 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

**Bill 22  
Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2004**

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 22, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2004, for first reading.

This bill makes numerous amendments to four acts: the Election Act, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, and the Alberta Corporate Tax Act. These changes are primarily the result of recommendations made by Alberta's Chief Electoral Officer to ensure that our legislation is up to date prior to the next provincial election. Changes range from minor housekeeping to important changes that ensure the accuracy of elector information, help protect elector privacy, and improve flexibility in the use of special ballots in advance polls.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a first time]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Revenue.

**Bill 23  
Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2004**

**Mr. Melchin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 23, the Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2004, for first reading.

This bill amends the existing act to align it with the government's recent decision to eliminate the 1 and a half cent per litre aviation fuel tax on eligible international passenger and cargo flights effective March 1, 2004. Eligible flights include those to the United States. This will enhance Alberta's aviation industry's ability to attract additional international passenger and cargo air service to Alberta. Other amendments to the bill strengthen controls and address administrative concerns.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Environment.

**Dr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to table the appropriate number of copies of *Albertans & Climate Change: Key Actions to Date*. This is a nice little booklet that shows what Albertans and Alberta have done to take action on climate change. We have taken more action than any other government in the country. It talks about our green power for government operation, our municipal energy efficiency loans, technology and innovation to maximize energy efficiency, as well as the royalty credit from the Department of Energy for sequestration of CO<sub>2</sub>. It's an excellent little report, and I encourage all members to get a copy of it and read it.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance.

**Mrs. Nelson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development I'm very pleased to file today with the Assembly copies of a letter received from the Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors with their reaction to the Review of Pricing in the Beef Industry report. The letter acknowledged that beef pricing is a complex issue. There's one sentence in this letter that I think is very important for all members to hear. It says, "What is most important is that prices went down, tonnage went up and consumers benefited from very aggressive feature pricing right across the country."

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am today tabling from 22 firefighters in the Grande Cache fire department support for private member's Bill 207, the Traffic Safety (Emergency Vehicle) Amendment Act, 2004, sponsored by the Member for Calgary-North Hill. Also, the Hinton fire department, with 20 firefighters plus one firefighter/EMS worker, are supporting this bill.

Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

**Mr. Lord:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table in the Assembly today the requisite number of copies of a request signed by a number of my constituents that asks for the Minister of Learning to undertake a cost-benefit analysis to examine the merits of a new Calgary inner-city public school board pursuant to the School Act and also asks for a moratorium on school closures until such a study has been done.

2:50

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling five copies each of 135 letters that state that cancer is now the leading cause of death in Alberta, that 30 per cent of these deaths are caused by the use of tobacco products, and that at least 300 nonsmokers die each year from lung cancer due to exposure to second-hand smoke. These letters all request support for a provincial law to make all public places and workplaces smoke free.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling this afternoon. It's an article from the December 15, 2003, edition of *Thompson's World Insurance News*, and it quotes from the letter from Mr. Cooke we talked about in question period today.

Thank you.

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

**Dr. Massey:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I table the required number of copies of a letter that I sent today to Mr. Randy Ferbey and his curling colleagues congratulating them on their fourth appearance at the Brier. The letter reads in part: "I wish to thank you for the outstanding skill you displayed on the curling rink, for the sportsmanlike behaviour you modeled for all who watched, and for being such excellent ambassadors for Alberta and Canada."

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, I wish to table the appropriate copies of a new pamphlet called *Seniors' View: Your Guide to Alberta's*

Legislature. It's outlining a new educational research program that we've developed tailored to seniors. In the next number of days this documentation will be sent to all senior citizen organizations, community residences, and affinity groups throughout the province.

head:

### Tablings to the Clerk

**The Clerk:** I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the Minister of Learning. Pursuant to the Advanced Education Foundations Act the Arctic Institute of North America audited financial statements for the year ended March 31, 2003; public postsecondary institutions' audited financial statements – public colleges and technical institutes for the year ended June 30, 2002, and the universities and Banff Centre for Continuing Education for the year ended March 31, 2003; school jurisdictions' audited financial statements for the year ended August 31, 2002, sections 1, 2, and 3; pursuant to the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board 2002-2003 annual report; pursuant to the Government Accountability Act the Alberta Learning 2003-2006 business plan; and pursuant to the Teaching Profession Act the Alberta Teachers' Association 2002 annual report.

head:

### Motions under Standing Order 40

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on a Standing Order 40 application.

#### Automobile Insurance

Mr. MacDonald:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish a series of public debates surrounding automobile insurance which would include the disclosure of future government plans to implement the new automobile insurance system, industry comments and all objections, any reports which would assist the public to fully understand the changes to automobile insurance in Alberta, the KPMG report on automobile insurance, the letter to the Deputy Minister of Finance from George Cooke, and all polls dealing with automobile insurance conducted by the government since January 1, 2002.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you and all hon. members of this Assembly are well aware, Standing Order 40 applications are made in cases of urgent and pressing necessity. Over the past year or so Albertans have been calling for some form of relief from skyrocketing automobile insurance premiums. Albertans who hadn't been involved in any at-fault collisions were being asked to pay higher-than-usual premiums, and others were unable to find a company to insure them at all, and this is a mandatory financial services product.

The response from this government was no response as the issue grew. Finally, when they could ignore it no more, this government responded with an automobile insurance reform process that they have yet to reveal in its entirety. Both Alberta insurers and drivers are wondering how these reforms will help control rates while allowing insurance companies to make a profit, and they are wondering how this government arrived at the reforms it is committed to implementing. It is time for this government to make the process of developing and implementing changes to automobile insurance clear and transparent and give all affected parties the opportunity to make their opinions heard.

I urge all hon. members of this House to grant unanimous consent

for the motion and to establish these public debates today so that any necessary adjustments to insurance reforms can be made quickly and without major disruption to insurers and the insured.

Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, a Standing Order 40 application requires unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head:

### Orders of the Day

head:

### Written Questions

**The Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, March 11, it's my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, and 32.

[Motion carried]

#### Coal Bed Methane Consultation

Q2. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

What public consultation on coal bed methane development in Alberta is currently underway?

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would be very grateful for that information. In my travels across the province I have been amazed to find that some landowners are not aware of any plans whatsoever by this government to develop this potentially very valuable resource. Certainly, there have been public meetings held, and I understand that there are going to be some more public meetings in the future.

Whenever we consider the potential amount of water that can be produced from these wells and what can be in those water samples, that could, hopefully, and should be tested – like what's the content of arsenic, beryllium, mercury, other elements? – I think this question is certainly in order, and I do hope that we receive the information from the government.

Thank you.

**Mr. Smith:** Mr. Speaker, the member actually knows that there's an extensive amount of public consultation in process in the parts of Alberta where coal bed methane is in its most prevalent state. The member also knows through answers in this House that coal bed methane in this province actually happens to be very dry and that mid-level coal – the Edmonton coals, the coals that are in and around the 600-metre level – simply produce under depressurization when the well is drilled. Those coals in the 900-metre or deeper zones, the Mannville coals, in fact have salt water, and they are reinjected. But I want to certainly disabuse the member of any perhaps what he would consider secret public consultation to be going on, as he has said earlier that we've issued secret orders from public documents.

In our usual brand of openness, total transparency, and accountability, Mr. Speaker, we'll be accepting the question.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Well, I would just like to thank the hon. minister, and I look forward to the information.

[Written Question 2 carried]

### 3:00 Orphaned Wells in Parks and Protected Areas

Q3. Mr. MacDonald moved on behalf of Ms Carlson that the following question be accepted.

What is the total number of orphaned wells, pipelines, and facilities in provincial parks and protected areas broken down by category as abandoned, decontaminated, and reclaimed?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie instructed me to express gratitude to the hon. Minister of Community Development for providing the Official Opposition with an amended version of this written question. She is grateful for that in advance and is fine with it. She certainly can work with this.

Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to respond that I'm going to be accepting Written Question 3 with amendments. In a moment I'd like to provide some rationale around the changes proposed by those amendments, and then I will move Written Question 3 be accepted with the amendments.

As has been indicated by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I did share the amendment with my opposition colleague prior to 11 a.m. today, as per procedural requirements, and I note that the amendment has now been circulated to all members for their review.

Mr. Speaker, in coming to the conclusions that I'm about to, I want to indicate my thanks to the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for posing the question and also for understanding that in order to respond to this question accurately, I have to propose some amendments that are basically nomenclature-type in nature. With the amendments, then, the new Written Question 3 would read: "What is the total number of active, capped, abandoned, and orphaned wells and the number of linear kilometres of pipelines in provincial parks and protected areas?"

I want to explain that just briefly, Mr. Speaker, if I could. First of all, active, capped, and abandoned are the categories used by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board for identifying the status of well sites. Secondly, orphaned well is a category used by Alberta Sustainable Resource Development that relates to the surface land disposition issued for a well site and refers to a well site whose licensed operator has ceased to exist either voluntarily or through bankruptcy and where there is no company that has assumed responsibility for the well site.

Pipelines are identified by length of pipeline in kilometres. These data would include all commercial pipelines that currently exist and also those that no longer exist but were part of the pipeline network at one time. The Alberta Energy and Utilities Board does not break down the data into more specific categories such as type or status.

Now, with reference to the term "facilities," as was proposed in the original motion, by facilities I assume that this probably refers to infrastructure on a well site. However, this is not separately identified. The number of well sites should cover the intent of this reference in any case.

The word "decontaminated" is not a category unto itself that is used in relation to well sites or pipelines, but the process of abandonment requires decommissioning. Decommissioning, just for

everyone's quick elucidation, means including capping and cementing of the well and removal of all infrastructure, so in that regard abandonment also requires the reclamation of the well site.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the word "reclaimed" of course relates to the land disposition for a well that is abandoned for which a reclamation certificate has been issued. However, the information is not separately maintained on an historical basis. In fact, a reclamation certificate is issued five or more years after an abandoned well site has been reclaimed and represents the final land inspection to assess effectiveness of the reclamation work completed after infrastructure has been removed. An ongoing historical record of abandoned well sites is maintained, which would correspond to the number of reclaimed well sites plus well sites that are at some stage in the reclamation process.

Mr. Speaker, I do hope that these further explanations will clarify the proposed rewording of the question as it applies to provincial parks and protected areas within my jurisdiction, and I hope that this requested information will meet with the requirements or at least the intent of the original question.

So I would like to move that Written Question 3 be accepted as amended. Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close the debate on this question as amended.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Minister of Community Development. I believe that the hon. minister's definition of "decontaminated" and "reclaimed" were self-explanatory. I believe that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie was concerned about soil reclamation as well from some of those leases in the area immediately surrounding the wellhead or the gas well. So that would apply in the "reclaimed" definition hopefully, but again thank you.

[Written Question 3 as amended carried]

### Property Theft in Energy Department

Q6. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

What is the total dollar amount of public property lost due to theft in the Department of Energy for the 2002-2003 fiscal year?

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully, the amount is zero, but in the interest of accountability and openness that the hon. minister described earlier, I am anxious to see exactly how much money, if any, has been lost.

Thank you.

**Mr. Smith:** Sure.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much. I assume that that "sure" was that we're going to get the information straightaway, and we look forward to getting it. Again I would express gratitude to the minister.

[Written Question 6 carried]

### Property Theft in Government Services Department

Q7. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

What is the total dollar amount of public property lost due to theft in the Department of Government Services for the 2002-2003 fiscal year?

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I hope the amount is zero. Certainly, the Minister of Energy has shown some leadership here and has agreed to be open and transparent, and I would urge the hon. Minister of Government Services to do the same.

Thank you.

**Mr. Coutts:** We accept Written Question 7, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and again we look forward to receiving that information.

Thank you.

[Written Question 7 carried]

### Property Theft in Human Resources and Employment Department

Q8. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

What is the total dollar amount of public property lost due to theft in the Department of Human Resources and Employment for the 2002-2003 fiscal year?

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of written questions 6 and 7 certainly I hope that the answer is zero, and we will wait and hear the response from the hon. minister.

**Mr. Dunford:** Accept.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to conclude the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Just for clarification, Mr. Speaker, that was an affirmative from the hon. minister?

**The Speaker:** It was affirmative.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you, and we will look forward to receiving that information in a timely fashion.

[Written Question 8 carried]

### 3:10 Royalty Tax Deductions

Q9. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

What is the projected amount of royalty tax deductions for the 2003-2004 fiscal year?

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is again to the Minister of Energy. This is a very important matter. It comes up in discussions across this province. There seems to be some concern with the taxpayers that many of these royalty tax deductions are just netted in the provincial budget. They are not described in any detail. Written Question 9 would provide not only the opposition with some answers in regard to the royalty tax deductions that are being projected but the taxpayers as well.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Energy.

**Mr. Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hate to interrupt a roll, but the member in fact is not accurate when he says that there are many discussions around Alberta with respect to royalty tax deductions, because there's actually no such thing. It's a great Liberal problem, and it has been since 1974.

**Mr. Lund:** Lack of understanding?

**Mr. Smith:** The lack of understanding that both the provincial Liberals and, of course, the federal Liberals have with what in fact a royalty is. A royalty is a measure of economic rent. A tax is something a government imposes as a fee or a levy or a revenue collection on the broad base of the population.

So because of the extremely inept wording and because of the fact that this does not exist, the government is compelled, although it would wish to answer all questions in the affirmative, to therefore reject this one.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Briefly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my disappointment in that response, and hopefully if there is, as the minister has indicated, no such thing, taxpayers will be delighted to read about his gracious response in *Hansard*.

Thank you.

[Written Question 9 lost]

### Royalty Tax Deductions

Q10. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

What was the total amount of royalty tax deductions for the 2002-2003 fiscal year?

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is the same as Written Question 9 in the eyes and the ears of taxpayers who have asked about this, and if we can't ask in the Legislative Assembly to the minister directly, I don't know where else would be appropriate.

Thank you.

**Mr. Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I would have thought that in keeping with the spirit of the fact that if, in fact, the item on which the question is centred doesn't exist, then how can one break with the logic of rejecting one and not the other? Therefore, we are compelled by both logic and inaccurate wording to reject this Written Question 10.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this time I would like to ask the hon. Minister of Energy why he wouldn't have amended this written question and followed the leadership of the distinguished Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, who was quite anxious to provide an amendment to Written Question 3. Follow the leadership of this hon. minister.

Thank you.

[Written Question 10 lost]

#### **Carbon Dioxide Projects Royalty Credit Program**

Q11. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

What is the total dollar amount of royalty credits that has been dispensed under the carbon dioxide projects royalty credit program for the period May 16, 2003, to February 17, 2004?

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly there must be a lot of information from this time period in regard to the carbon dioxide project royalty credit program. There was also reference made to this program in the recent throne speech. So, again, that information would provide valuable insight to the citizens of this province in regard to that project.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Energy.

**Mr. Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do accept the question.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to conclude the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much. I would like to thank the hon. minister for that, and we look forward to getting the information.

[Written Question 11 carried]

#### **Carbon Dioxide Projects Royalty Credit Program**

Q12. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

What are the names and the number of oil and gas companies that have applied for royalty credits under the carbon dioxide projects royalty credit program for the period May 16, 2003, to February 17, 2004?

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This follows along the lines of Written Question 11 and, again, this information would be appreciated. It would shed some light on this entire program.

Thank you.

**Mr. Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there is a great deal of light already existing around this program. Of course, it is all so very, very difficult, even as an elected member of this Assembly, to predict the

future, so not knowing the final outcome of companies that will receive approval in this program, it is very difficult to publish those names at this juncture, although as the program unfolds in its entirety, we will make the appropriate revelations, if I may say, or the appropriate tablings known to everybody.

So, again because of timing, Mr. Speaker, I'm compelled to reject the question.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to conclude the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In light of that, I will look forward to the hon. minister tabling those lists in the Assembly here at the appropriate time, hopefully in the fall session.

Thank you.

[Written Question 12 lost]

#### **Enhanced Recovery of Oil Royalty Reduction**

Q13. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

What is the total dollar amount of royalty reductions under the enhanced recovery of oil royalty reduction regulation from April 1, 2002, to March 31, 2003?

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, that information would be appreciated. There is significant interest in the general public, as I said before, in regard to our total royalty reduction programs and our regulations. There is a perception that we are not getting enough royalty. If the minister could provide that information at this time, myself and taxpayers would be grateful.

Thank you.

**Mr. Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's presumptuous to speak for the taxpayers out there, so in fact I'll simply address the question that he has read into the record. The enhanced oil recovery program is critical to Alberta. I would encourage anybody here to read the Alberta Energy Research Institute's paper Spudding Innovation, which really talks about another Alberta waiting for technology to discover more oil and gas that is cached or secreted in reserves throughout this province that we have not done a complete job of recovering. So in order to ensure that the House is better off – and certainly I find that this member is particularly better off when he is better prepared – we will be accepting this question.

3:20

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** At this time I would just like to thank the hon. minister.

[Written Question 13 carried]

#### **Enhanced Recovery of Oil Royalty Reduction**

Q14. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

What is the number of oil and gas companies that were eligible for royalty reductions under the enhanced recovery of oil royalty reduction regulation between April 1, 2002, and March 31, 2003?

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, that follows along the same path as Written Question 13, and hopefully we will receive the same gracious response as we had previously from the Minister of Energy.

**Mr. Smith:** Graciously accepted.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** I would just like to acknowledge my gratitude to the minister.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Ho ho. A love-in today, hon. members.

[Written Question 14 carried]

#### Utilities Consumer Advocate Budget

Q16. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

What is the total budget for the Utilities Consumer Advocate for the 2003-2004 fiscal year?

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you. There has been a lot of information provided already in regard to the Utilities Consumer Advocate. We see a special committee of advisors from all over the province for that office. It would be very interesting to know what the total staff is, the staff requirements for 2003-04, what these individuals are going to be doing in regard to the electricity market. The utilities office will be obviously divided between questions on electricity and questions on natural gas delivery. In light of the fact that this budget is being provided by industry, I think that a very important question at this time is to know exactly what the total budget is.

Thank you.

**Mr. Coutts:** Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of openness and accountability of this government we accept Written Question 16.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member of Edmonton-Gold Bar to close the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. This is a new spirit of openness and accountability, and I appreciate it. I look forward to getting the information and thank the minister.

[Written Question 16 carried]

#### Advisory Council on Electricity Report

Q17. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

What is the total cost of the 2003 report from the Advisory Council on Electricity?

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There have been a lot of reports issued or sanctioned by this provincial govern-

ment in regard to electricity deregulation, and no one knows the cost of all these reports. I can imagine that if we had a list and the total cost of these reports going back to, say, the year 2000 . . . The minister is shaking his head over there. He must be amazed at the total cost. I'm sure that at some point he has asked his department to look into the total cost of all these reports, but we're only asking at this time for the total cost of the 2003 report from the Advisory Council on Electricity. Electricity ratepayers would also be interested to know that information, I'm sure.

Thank you.

**Mr. Smith:** Mr. Speaker, when the member speaks – and his preambles, similar to what they are in question period, are such nose stretchers that I feel compelled to correct the information prior to moving on to the business at hand. There has not been an endless group of reports published by this department with respect to the subject of electricity deregulation. There have been some. They are posted on the web site. They're all transparent. They all involve consultation. They, in fact, are not all that expensive, as the member will see when the cost for the Advisory Council on Electricity comes forward, because we are graciously accepting the question.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to at this time on behalf of all Albertans thank the minister, and I look forward to getting the information.

[Written Question 17 carried]

#### Advisory Council on Electricity Report

Q18. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

What is the total cost of the 2002 report from the Advisory Council on Electricity?

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am quite confident that the minister is going to provide that information also in a timely fashion.

Thank you.

**Mr. Smith:** Sure.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Again, I would like to thank the hon. minister.

[Written Question 18 carried]

#### Department of Health and Wellness Conditional Grants

Q19. Dr. Nicol moved on behalf of Dr. Taft that the following question be accepted.

What measures has the government taken to implement the Auditor General's recommendation that the Department of Health and Wellness improve its control processes for ensuring accountability for conditional grants?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.



**Dr. Nicol:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The purpose behind this is to see whether or not the government is actually carrying through on the recommendations that are made by the Auditor General. If the Auditor General is going to truly serve his function by making recommendations, we need to know what the departments are doing when these recommendations are made, so we're asking the minister to let us know what he's doing to implement that.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

**Ms Evans:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness we are prepared to accept Written Question 19.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to close the debate.

**Dr. Nicol:** Thank you.

[Written Question 19 carried]

#### **Property Theft in Sustainable Resource Development Department**

Q20. Dr. Nicol moved on behalf of Ms Carlson that the following question be accepted.  
What is the total dollar amount of public property lost due to theft in the Department of Sustainable Resource Development for the 2002-2003 fiscal year?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Dr. Nicol:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's just imperative that we find out what's going on and how these are reported and whether or not we're keeping track of them, so we'd ask the minister to provide us with that.

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Cardinal:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government is prepared to accept Written Question 20.

**Dr. Nicol:** Thanks to the minister.

[Written Question 20 carried]

#### **Property Theft in Revenue Department**

Q21. Dr. Nicol moved on behalf of Ms Carlson that the following question be accepted.  
What is the total dollar amount of public property lost due to theft in the Department of Revenue for the 2002-2003 fiscal year?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Dr. Nicol:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the same reasons I did on the previous question, if they could.

3:30

**Mr. Melchin:** Mr. Speaker, the government's prepared to accept Written Question 21.

**Dr. Nicol:** I thank the minister.

[Written Question 21 carried]

#### **Property Theft in International and Intergovernmental Relations Department**

Q22. Dr. Nicol moved on behalf of Ms Carlson that the following question be accepted.

What is the total dollar amount of public property lost due to theft in the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations for the 2002-2003 fiscal year?

**Mr. Jonson:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to indicate that I am prepared to accept Written Question 22.

**Dr. Nicol:** I would like to thank the minister for providing us with that information.

[Written Question 22 carried]

#### **Property Theft in Finance Department**

Q23. Dr. Nicol moved on behalf of Ms Carlson that the following question be accepted.

What is the total dollar amount of public property lost due to theft in the Department of Finance for the 2002-2003 fiscal year?

**Mrs. Nelson:** Mr. Speaker, we accept.

[Written Question 23 carried]

#### **Property Theft in Environment Department**

Q24. Dr. Nicol moved on behalf of Ms Carlson that the following question be accepted.

What is the total dollar amount of public property lost due to theft in the Department of Environment for the 2002-2003 fiscal year?

**Dr. Nicol:** Again, same rationale we had: we need to know how this is being tracked.

**Dr. Taylor:** We are accepting the same rationale as the previous question. We're glad to accept that.

**Dr. Nicol:** Thanks to the minister for helping us with that.

[Written Question 24 carried]

**The Speaker:** Just a note, hon. members, before we go on to Written Question 25. As Speaker I asked the administration of the Legislative Assembly Office of Alberta if we had any thefts, and the only one brought to my attention was that a chair belonging to the deputy clerk had left her office mysteriously, and that was in room 315. So if anybody is aware of where this chair might have been relocated, it would help us in dealing with this type of question as well. It was just probably inadvertently mislocated.

#### **Health Care Premium Accounts**

Q25. Dr. Pannu moved that the following question be accepted.  
As of April 1, 2003, what was the total number of employer health care premium accounts and the total number of individual/family health care premium accounts, and of the individual/family accounts what percentage were seniors' accounts?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness we are prepared to accept question 25.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to conclude the debate.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the minister for offering the good news.

Thank you.

[Written Question 25 carried]

#### Health Care Premium Arrears

Q26. Dr. Pannu moved that the following question be accepted. For each of the fiscal years 2001-02, 2002-03, and April 1, 2003, to February 17, 2004, what is the total number of health care premium accounts that were in arrears that were forwarded to collections agencies, and what was the total value of these accounts for each of these years?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness we are prepared to accept Written Question 26.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the minister for conveying the information.

Thank you.

[Written Question 26 carried]

#### Health Care Premium Arrears

Q27. Dr. Pannu moved that the following question be accepted. For each of the fiscal years 2001-02, 2002-03, and April 1, 2003, to February 17, 2004, what is the average length of time between a collection agency receiving a health care premium account that is in arrears and the payment of those arrears in full?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness we are prepared to accept Written Question 27.

[Written Question 27 carried]

#### Fatality Inquiry Recommendations

Q32. Dr. Nicol moved on behalf of Ms Blakeman that the following question be accepted.

In which correctional facilities has the Department of the Solicitor General implemented the recommendations listed in the fatality inquiry of Reginald Grant McLeod for the prevention of drug-related deaths in all of Alberta's correctional facilities?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Dr. Nicol:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We need to know whether or not the government has been following up on the recommendations that have been made out of these reports and to what extent they're actually doing this. So we'd appreciate this kind of information from the minister.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Solicitor General.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is prepared to accept Written Question 32.

**Dr. Nicol:** I thank the minister. This will help Albertans keep informed on the progress.

[Written Question 32 carried]

head:

#### Motions for Returns

**The Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, proper notice having been given on Thursday, March 11, it's my pleasure to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 20, 22, 32, and 33.

[Motion carried]

#### Access to Crown Lands

M1. Dr. Nicol moved on behalf of Dr. Taft that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all reports and documentation issued by the Aboriginal Affairs facilitator, John McCarthy, to the government between January 1, 2003, and February 17, 2004, inclusive pertaining to the discussions between First Nations bands and oil field contractors regarding access to Crown lands.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

**Ms Calahasen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hate to break the roll that they are on; however, due to the fact that there was no additional information or paperwork pertaining to the drafting of this document and only receiving the final copy of the paper, we are not recommending that we accept this. Further to that, the McCarthy document is only for cabinet and Treasury Board confidences and, therefore, is a mandatory exception, thus not releaseable. So, no.

**Dr. Nicol:** Mr. Speaker, with the public debate that went on surrounding this, I think it's imperative that Albertans be informed of the degree to which both the First Nations communities and the contractors were in discussion, both between themselves and with government. So I find that basically not helpful to this whole situation by not having those documents released. Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 1 lost]

#### 3:40 Automobile Insurance Consultation

M2. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of individuals and organizations that were consulted and provided input on automobile insurance to the Automobile Insurance Reform Implementation Team.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it would be in the best interests of the public and, certainly, of certain insurance executives if this information were made available. We heard that this was an open and transparent process earlier in debate this afternoon in this Assembly, and this gives the government an ideal opportunity to back that up.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance.

**Mrs. Nelson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am prepared to accept Motion for a Return 2 with an amendment. Numerous companies, organizations, and citizens of Alberta have provided significant and valuable input to the Automobile Insurance Reform Implementation Team. I am prepared to list the names of the companies and organizations that have been consulted and provided input to this team.

However, I should note, Mr. Speaker, that half of our freedom of information legislation is the protection of privacy, so I'm not prepared to release the names of individuals providing comments. I am willing to provide the aggregated number of individuals that have provided input to the team.

Therefore, I move that Motion for a Return 2 be amended as follows, and it would read that

an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of companies and organizations and the number of individuals that were consulted and provided input on automobile insurance to the Automobile Insurance Reform Implementation Team.

Mr. Speaker, this amendment and this notification have been provided to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar prior to 11 a.m. this morning as per our procedure. I would ask that the amendment be circulated to all members. I believe that's the case.

So, Mr. Speaker, I move Motion for a Return 2 be accepted as amended.

**The Speaker:** On the debate on the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes, on the amendment. Just for the record I would like to express my gratitude also to the Minister of Finance for providing this information in advance. As the Rolling Stones would say, you can't always get what you want. But this is a good start, and I look forward to the list as provided and described by the hon. minister.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to conclude the debate on the question as amended.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, on the question that has been amended. I look forward to getting the information.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 2 as amended carried]

#### Participation in RTO West

M4. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing all documents, including but not limited to letters, faxes, e-mails, meeting materials, memos, reports, and notes, pertaining to Alberta's participation in the Regional Transmission Organization, RTO, West from December 1, 2000, to February 17, 2004.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you very much again, Mr. Speaker. These documents, it would be my view, would be very instrumental in getting more information on how this government plans to link our electricity grid with the electricity grids of the Pacific northwest, California, and Nevada.

Now, as we can see, there has been a consultation process for

some time. We look at the Bolger commission. There was an indication in there that we could see price increases domestically if there were exports of electricity from this province. It is apparent to this member that the government is going ahead with a policy of electricity exports from this province without an adequate public consultation process with the consumers of this province. This Motion for a Return 4 would help everyone understand the role that the Alberta government is playing not only currently in the Regional Transmission Organization West but what the future plans for the province's electricity grid in relationship to the Regional Transmission Organization West are.

This motion for a return is very important, and I certainly hope the hon. minister agrees with me because many consumers of electricity in this province are very concerned that we are planning to link ourselves very closely with the electricity grids of the Pacific Northwest.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Energy.

**Mr. Smith:** Well, thank you. I guess, Mr. Speaker, this motion would be best entitled Looking for Mr. Gold Bar.

It's important, Mr. Speaker, that we again look at what the member said after he talked about the motion. The policy for electricity export from Alberta into other jurisdictions has been a clear, publicly documented record for two years. There are nine tenets to the export policy. They're very clear, they're very obvious, and they're very public.

In fact, we have corresponded with this member on the subject. He knows that there is third party confidentiality involved, and he knows that he is also entitled to pursue this under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act as well.

So, accordingly, Mr. Speaker, we'll be compelled by rule to reject this motion.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to conclude the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Well, I'm disappointed that this Motion for a Return 4 is going to be rejected. Certainly, as I said earlier, all this information would be vital to the consumers of this province when they make their decision on whether their economic interests are being served or not in regard to increasing our exports of electricity. And I'm disappointed.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 4 lost]

#### Participation in RTO West

M5. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a breakdown of all expenses, including but not limited to travel, accommodation, food, and registration fees, associated with Alberta delegates attending Regional Transmission Organization, RTO, West conferences from December 1, 2000, to February 17, 2004.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, again what is all this costing Albertans? Who is paying for it? Is it the Department of Energy? Is it some other government department?

Certainly, there have been conferences. I know that there are routine conferences held in Portland, Oregon, that government

officials attend along with AESO officials. It would be very, very important to electricity consumers to know the breakdown of all the expenses that have occurred between these time periods in regard to plugging into, shall I say, the Regional Transmission Organization West.

This motion for a return is in my view self-explanatory, and I can't see why the minister would reject this motion. I just can't understand why he would reject it.

Thank you.

3:50

**Mr. Smith:** Mr. Speaker, there continues to be an aroma of conspiracy wafting from the member at every turn with respect to RTO West. So I would ask the House for some direction, guidance on this. I have two choices. I can either reject the motion, or I can accept the motion.

Now, if I reject the motion, Mr. Speaker, it will be because Alberta delegates have not attended any RTO West conferences because RTO West is not an operating entity. It exists only on paper. As such, there have been no RTO West conferences.

Mr. Speaker, on the other hand, I could also accept the motion, and then reply that I'm accepting the motion because there is no conspiracy; there is no conference.

So may I ask the House, or is there a way that I could follow this through on a more appropriate basis?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to conclude the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly there is information available, and if the Minister of Energy is too busy to have a look, perhaps some of his staff could do it for him. There are web sites where there are delegations, as I said earlier, from this province listed. Of the four people from the Alberta delegation there would be at least two from the Department of Energy.

Now, precisely how all this works I don't know, but this is the place again where these questions should be raised, on the floor of this Legislative Assembly. There are two individuals from the Department of Energy who routinely go to these meetings, and I think this question is quite appropriate.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Well, hon. members, this matter is very, very clear. Once a question is on the Order Paper, it becomes the property of the Assembly. It is no longer the property of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar or any other member. Regardless of what any member says about it, it's the decision of the Assembly that will determine the procedure with respect to this question.

[Motion for a Return 5 lost]

#### **Workers' Compensation Board Appeals Commission**

M6. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the voting record for each member of the Workers' Compensation Board Appeals Commission for the calendar years 1997 through 2002.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We hear all the time from injured workers and we hear all the time from the industry about the Appeals Commission, and it would be of a great deal of interest if one could have the voting record. I understand that

in the last year and a half that record has been made public on the Appeals Commission's web site. When the commission hears a case and determines whether they're going to rule in favour of the injured worker or they're going to rule in favour of the employer or whatever happens in those cases, that information is public for those who want to go to the Appeals Commission web site and have a look.

So, in light of that, I think it would be very important if all members of this Assembly and the public could have a look at the voting record for each member of the Workers' Compensation Board Appeals Commission for the period going back to 1997. I'm very interested to hear the hon. minister of human resources and enjoyment in regard to this matter. If it's good enough for the period after the WCB reforms, let's go back to the period to 1997.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** I believe the hon. member meant the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment?

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes.

**Mr. Dunford:** Well, I do forgive his comment. I do enjoy this portfolio. I wasn't sure, though, whether it was a slip of the tongue or whether he was being playful, because he's certainly being mischievous with this motion for a return. He knows full well that the Appeals Commission operates as a quasi-judicial body.

So we will be rejecting this motion for a return on the basis that the concept of a voting record of course does not apply to the Appeals Commission. There's no distinct subject matter on which a voting record could be based. Maintaining actual and perceived independence is critical to the operation of the Appeals Commission. Given that the concept of a voting record is artificial, it would be not appropriate to respond further.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to conclude the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm disappointed in that – I certainly am – in light of the fact that one can go on the web site and check out all the hearings and what happened at those hearings before the Appeals Commission. I guess we're just going to have to now look at the period between the implementation of the Workers' Compensation Board reforms that were initiated by the hon. minister and the current time. I thought that it would be important to go back to 1997, but in this case I will just have to express my disappointment.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 6 lost]

#### **Department of Energy Performance Measure**

M7. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the data survey referred to in the Ministry of Energy's 2002-2003 annual report under the performance measure Albertans' Understanding of Alberta's Energy and Mineral Resources and their Economic Significance.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This data, I think, would be of a great deal of interest to all Albertans, and hopefully the minister will agree through this Assembly and through this motion to provide that data.

Thank you.

**Mr. Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it's precisely in the interests of all Albertans that we used this as a performance measure, and any data and any survey and any information that I can give to this member to help make him a better Member of the Legislative Assembly, I will most willingly do.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to conclude the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** There are all kinds of surprises in this world, Mr. Speaker, and the minister's response certainly would be in that category. With that, we will wait and we will look forward to the response.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 7 carried]

### Electricity Deregulation

M8. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing all documents, business plans, performance measures, and statistical data regarding the government's deregulation of electricity from January 1, 2001, to February 17, 2004.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, this information, again, is vital. Consumers certainly are confused. Consumers don't think that electricity deregulation has reduced prices, and this information would be very interesting for them.

Certainly, the government has promoted the idea that deregulation of electricity increased choice and would reduce prices. The more choice we have in our options for the purchase of electricity, the better off we would become. But we all know that that hasn't happened.

This information would shed a lot of light on what data the government is using to continue to cling to the policy of electricity deregulation when we know that instead of reducing prices as was promised, we have gone to some of the highest prices in North America. Thank you.

4:00

**Mr. Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, again I feel compelled to speak on the member's argument simply to correct the inaccuracies put forth in that argument. He knows full well that since the year 2000 electricity prices have gone down in this province. He knows full well that in the last three months electricity prices have gone down even further. Of course, we continue to seek guidance and clarity from the member by offering freely and openly to examine his own bill in this Legislative Assembly.

With respect to the motion itself, Mr. Speaker, I would agree with the member that this information is vital. In fact, it is so vital that it has been made public since 2001 and continues to become public throughout the process. So this information is all in the public domain. We know that they have ample resources for research and for crafting questions and looking for correct information, so I would direct the member accordingly into that vast array of information that exists in the public domain.

Therefore, because of the abundance of public information already available on this topic, we'll accordingly be compelled to reject the motion, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to conclude the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. minister knows full well that power bills in this province have not gone down as a result of electricity deregulation. Certainly, there are many, many Albertans who after question period daily phone this side of the House and question the government in their responses because their power bills have not gone down either.

When one looks at what we had before electricity deregulation on a power bill, Mr. Speaker, there would be two line items: one for energy cost, and there would also be one for distribution. Now all that has changed, and we see prices that go up, up, and up. Regardless of whether it's for energy charges or it's add-ons to the bills or it's distribution or transmission charges, nothing has gone down, and I'm disappointed.

If the minister feels so strongly that prices have gone down, why doesn't he accept this motion and back it up with the facts that his government obviously has? If the facts indicate that electricity prices have gone down, well, show us the proof by accepting this motion for a return. Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 8 lost]

### Department of Energy Performance Measures

M9. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the Environics West surveys commissioned by the government referred to in the Ministry of Energy 2002-2003 annual report under the performance measures Industry Satisfaction and Information Management.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, this survey, again, would shed a lot of light, so to speak, on this department, and I would urge the government and particularly the hon. Minister of Energy to accept this Motion for a Return 9.

Thank you.

**Mr. Smith:** Well, Mr. Speaker, when a member refers to a business plan, I think that's certainly a sign in the right direction. As the minister for this important department we take our business plan very seriously and the components of that business plan, not only in terms of who does something, why you do it, and how you measure it. The how you measure it is an important piece.

We would be most pleased to, again, continue to help make the member a better MLA. Accordingly, in that spirit we will be accepting this motion. Interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, if I could just add, because he does feel so concerned about the cost of some items, that the cost of this survey is not included in the question. I'd just add that maybe when he crafts the next question, he could add the cost too.

So we'll be accepting Motion for a Return 9.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to conclude the debate.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to say that the Minister of Energy is now a better Minister of Energy for accepting this motion for a return, and I look forward to getting the information.

[Motion for a Return 9 carried]

**Kneehill Animal Control and Rehabilitation Centre Ltd.**

M20. Dr. Nicol moved on behalf of Ms Carlson that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the zoo plan for the Kneehill Animal Control and Rehabilitation Centre Ltd., GuZoo.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Dr. Nicol:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. This motion is so that we can look at the operational plan of that zoo and see what it's actually doing and whether or not it's following the guidelines. So I'd ask the government to release that business plan.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Environment.

**Dr. Taylor:** Yes. On behalf of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development I'm pleased to reply. Unfortunately, I have to reply that it will be rejected.

The reason for this, Mr. Speaker, is that this information requested is not publicly available in the Wildlife Act. As a result, it's governed by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. When something is governed by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, then we must release it under the conditions of the FOIP Act. So we would ask that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie please make this request through the FOIP process. That way, we can be sure that it's appropriately handled and that third party information will be protected.

Thank you.

**Dr. Nicol:** Mr. Speaker, I guess the question that we'd raise is that if this is a business plan – it's a zoo plan – they should be public documents as they submit them. This is not disclosing information that would necessarily be reflective of their competitive position, so I don't see how it can be passed off to the FOIP Act. It should be just a normal business plan under the government and should be released.

[Motion for a Return 20 lost]

**Provincial Police Force**

M22. Dr. Nicol moved on behalf of Ms Blakeman that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the cost-benefit analysis, any literature reviews, comparative reports and studies, and timetable for the implementation of Alberta's provincial police force.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Dr. Nicol:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This helps us and members of the public to understand where they're at, what the positioning is, and the rationale for or against the formation of this police force, so we'd like to see the member release that information.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Solicitor General.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are rejecting this motion for a return.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, there's no real plan for implementation of the Alberta provincial police force. We do intend to review provincial policing alternatives in the next few years as we approach the end of the current RCMP provincial police service agreement in 2012. Our review, in keeping with the recommendations of the

MLA policing review committee, will look at a variety of policing alternatives from the perspective of cost and service benefits to Albertans.

I might add, Mr. Speaker, that the MLA Committee on Strengthening Alberta's Role in Confederation, chaired by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, is looking into this issue as part of their mandate. I look forward to hearing the results of their committee's consultation.

4:10

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Dr. Nicol:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Centre I'd just say that it's too bad that they're not releasing the other parts of the information just because they don't have a timetable available. This is the only reason that was given for rejecting this. It would be helpful to Albertans to fully understand the ongoing status and position of the discussions if they could get any kind of cost-benefit analysis or the literature reviews, the comparative reports and studies that would be available, that the government is using currently to make their decision. It's inappropriate that it gets rejected just because there's no implementation plan at this point.

[Motion for a Return 22 lost]

**Alberta Career Computer Centre Inc.**

M32. Dr. Pannu moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the report prepared by Don Logan of the audit and special investigations unit of Alberta Learning completed in 2002 on complaints by students and former students of the Alberta Career Computer Centre Inc.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

**Ms Evans:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Dr. Oberg relative to the motion I would like to propose the following amendments: (a) striking out "copy of the report prepared" and substituting "summary of student concerns gathered" and (b) striking out "completed in 2002 on complaints by" and substituting "after meeting with." The amended motion for a return will read as follows:

That an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a summary of student concerns gathered by Don Logan of the audit and special investigations unit of Alberta Learning after meeting with students and former students of the Alberta Career Computer Centre Inc.

I understand that the wording has been circulated to the hon. member opposite and due notice provided by 11 a.m.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the amendment.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Minister of Children's Services for presenting the amendment on behalf of the Minister of Learning and want to thank the Minister of Learning, who provided this information on the amendment this morning to my office. I thank the minister for this courtesy. In addition, the minister shared with me the briefing that he received from his department for the reasons for the amendment that he's proposing.

I do accept the amendment, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to conclude the debate.

**Dr. Pannu:** Mr. Speaker, I just want to thank the Minister of Learning for sharing the information with me and extending the courtesy of sharing his reasons for the amendment. I accept the reasons, and I look forward to receiving with the rest of the members of the Assembly the information requested in the amended motion for a return.

[Motion for a Return 32 as amended carried]

### **Report of Task Force on Health Care Funding and Revenue Generation**

M33. Dr. Pannu moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the report of the government MLA Task Force on Health Care Funding and Revenue Generation, Graydon report, submitted to the Minister of Health and Wellness in 2003.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To speak briefly to the motion, with your permission, it is exceedingly important for the citizens of this province to have access to the report, the response which was given by the Minister of Health and Wellness towards the last part of January 2004, which indicated that the government was not going to proceed with the implementation of the recommendations of the report. Then within a week after that announcement the Premier reversed the decision and indicated to Albertans that he was going to move right ahead with the implementation of this report.

This whole matter caused a great deal of confusion, Mr. Speaker, for Albertans and, it seems, the government ranks as well. So the sooner this report is tabled here in the House and shared with the members of the House, the better it is, because Albertans then will know what is awaiting them. The Premier has of course gone beyond the report and indicated and threatened that he's ready to withdraw from the Canada Health Act, which is quite an ominous statement from the point of view of Albertans who are concerned about the future of public health care in this province and this country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

**Ms Evans:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, on behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness this government has agreed to release the Graydon report shortly and, therefore, would not wish to pre-empt that release by agreeing to Motion for a Return 33. Therefore, on behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness I respectfully reject this motion.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to conclude the debate.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm obviously disappointed by the decision of the Minister of Health and Wellness to reject this motion for a return. The use of the word "shortly" begs the question, you know: how soon? The report has been around for a long time. The report deals with some of the recommendations made by the Mazankowski committee. That report is now more than a year and a half old. So the question is: how much more time does the Minister of Health and Wellness really need?

So the reason for my disappointment lies in the very use of the term "shortly." Months and months have gone by, yet Albertans don't have access to the recommendations of the report, which they know are going to immensely put them in a very difficult situation if those recommendations are accepted. To continue to keep this report secret, to keep it away from the gaze of Albertans I think is denying the principle of transparency that this government so strongly claims it is committed to. So I'm very disappointed that this right of Albertans to transparency and access to information that rightly affects their concerns is being denied to them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 33 lost]

**The Speaker:** Might I express appreciation to the Deputy Government House Leaders for ensuring that all members of Executive Council abided by Standing Order 34(1), (2), and (2.1) today. This, I think, allowed us to be more effective in Motions for Returns and Written Questions than normal. So that's good. Thank you.

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than  
Government Bills and Orders  
Third Reading  
Bill 201  
Safety Codes (Barrier-free Design and Access)  
Amendment Act, 2004**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

**Mr. Lougheed:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure I rise in the Assembly this afternoon to move third reading of Bill 201, the Safety Codes (Barrier-free Design and Access) Amendment Act, 2004.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

As has been mentioned by so many speakers during both second reading and while in committee, by enhancing existing legislation and regulations, Bill 201 will enable a vast number of disabled Albertans to either remain or become more self-reliant than they are at present. This, I believe, is how most Albertans like living their lives: independently and without needing to rely on others, either family members or friends or the government, for their everyday needs.

4:20

Furthermore, this is in keeping with a variety of government goals. For instance, Bill 201 fully reflects government goal 3, "Alberta's children will be supported in reaching their potential." Data from the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities shows that disabled Albertans continually lag behind Albertans without disabilities in a wide range of areas, such as education, social status, and other opportunities.

Among the most interesting and desirable opportunities that Bill 201 brings about is perhaps the notion that by enhancing existing legislation and regulations in terms of barrier-free design and accessibility, Bill 201 will enable a greater number of disabled Albertans to be self-reliant. By ensuring access and by paying more attention to issues of design, many Albertans will become less dependent on others, including government.

Bill 201 is also fully consistent with the goals of several government ministries. For example, core business 2 of Alberta Community Development states that the ministry's mandate includes

protecting human rights, promoting fairness and access, and supporting the protection, inclusion, and participation of all Albertans.

Similarly, among the goals of Alberta Children's Services we find a commitment that our children and youth will have a healthy start in life and the supports they need to reach their potential. Bill 201 is consistent with the ministry's strategy to develop legislation and policy to refocus resources for children with disabilities on their abilities rather than their disabilities. In doing this, the ministry advocates taking a proactive rather than a reactive approach to issues of mobility and disability.

Bill 201, therefore, has dual motives. On one hand, it aims to give Alberta's disabled community a greater voice in matters of access and design of buildings in our province. By taking advantage of the expertise of the disabled, expertise, I might add, that they have gained the hard way each and every day, we'll be in a better position to design and build buildings that will be able to accommodate all Albertans without regard to whether they are able bodied or not and without regard to whether they are young or not.

This, Mr. Speaker, leads me to the second purpose of the bill. It allows us to prepare ourselves for what some have labelled the seniors boom, the first wave of which we can expect to arrive in five or six years. As the first of the baby boomers reach retirement, every demographic forecast indicates that we are facing a dramatic increase in the number of seniors in our province. We all know that as we age, our bodies have a tendency to become less co-operative than we once took for granted, when we could do things without any difficulty at all. Now, instead, we require sometimes the utmost of effort and perhaps a great deal of pain to do what came easily previously. It's, therefore, in our own best interest that we now start taking steps to prepare ourselves for what inevitably and unforgivingly is coming our way, and that's old age.

If the forecasts are correct – and there's no reason to believe that they aren't – the segment of Albertans who can call themselves seniors will grow rapidly in the course of the next two decades. Currently 10 per cent of us are 65 or older, but by 2016 that number is expected to reach 14 per cent. By 2026 it's expected that more than 700,000 Albertans will be 65 years of age or older, and that's roughly, at that time, 1 in 5 Albertans.

With this in mind, Bill 201 is a pragmatic initiative to help set the pace for what is coming. By starting to take action now rather than later, we'll be considerably better able to face the challenges that having an aging or maturing population is going to bring. That maturing population will make it necessary for government to take a lead role in preparing workplaces, the labour force, and communities, both large and small, for the increasing number of seniors. Initiatives and programs that recognize the diversity of the elderly population must be developed in a wide range of areas, including but not limited to health and wellness, independence and vulnerability, financial security, and education. Bill 201 will of course not be the only manner in which we prepare ourselves for the impending seniors boom, but making our buildings accessible is an important aspect of this preparation.

Equality is another significant component of Bill 201. To summarize the matter, having and creating access are issues of basic fairness in our society. To purposely or systematically, albeit most probably also unintentionally, deny a particular group of people in our society access to buildings is wholly inconsistent with our values. Bill 201 thus places a great deal of emphasis on the high priority the Ministry of Community Development has given to fostering equality, strengthening community, inclusion for persons with disabilities, and supporting the reduction of discrimination and barriers to full participation in society. As well, Bill 201 would go

a long way toward realizing the ministry's goal to ensure that Albertans with disabilities have the opportunity to be fully included in the social, economic, and cultural life of the province.

This isn't just a matter of making sure the disabled community gets to participate with those of us who are fortunate enough to be able bodied. No, Mr. Speaker. This is very much a two-way street. By removing barriers and increasing access, those of us who are able bodied will have the opportunity and the privilege to increase our interaction with the disabled, many of whom will be our family members in the future.

Here I'd like to take the opportunity to stress once again that Bill 201 will not change the manner in which the Alberta building code applies to existing buildings and/or renovations, nor will the bill change the Alberta building code and how it is applied to private homes.

To summarize, Bill 201 amends the Safety Codes Act to clarify the applicability of the act to matters of barrier-free design and access. As well, the bill provides a proper voice for persons with disabilities by specifically enabling representation of persons with disabilities on the Safety Codes Council.

Lastly, Bill 201 specifically enables the drafting of regulations with regard to barrier-free design and accessibility. As we have heard, the bill calls for the addition of a 10th technical council, tentatively called the barrier-free council, to the Safety Codes Council to work alongside and together with the nine councils that are already in existence. Through this newly created entity, access and design concerns relating to barrier-free issues would have an opportunity to inform and be informed about issues regarding elevators, fire, plumbing, gas, boilers, among others. By establishing a barrier-free council, Alberta would really take the lead in advancing many of the issues that will be part of the next building code cycle, which is expected to begin around 2009.

What's more, by taking this step forward for the disabled Albertans, Alberta will continue to do what we have done for so long, and that's leading the way in building safety and accessibility provisions that enable persons with disabilities to achieve independence by both contributing and sharing in the opportunities and responsibilities of our society. This is something we take a great deal of pride in, I think, and passing Bill 201 will serve only to re-emphasize our commitment to the principles of universal access for all Albertans. With this in mind, I'll end my comments until such time as other members have concluded their comments and I have opportunity for some closing comments.

I would encourage all my colleagues to vote in favour of this third reading of Bill 201, the Safety Codes (Barrier-free Design and Access) Amendment Act, 2004. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure to rise and speak on Bill 201, Safety Codes (Barrier-free Design and Access) Amendment Act, 2004, in its third reading. I'm pleased to support this bill, and I'm also pleased to have this opportunity to congratulate the hon. member for bringing this bill forward.

Mr. Speaker, as the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan has just stated, this bill, though very brief, makes some important changes in the existing legislation. One of those changes has to do with the representation of persons with disabilities to be represented on the barrier-free council. I think it's a very good addition or change to the existing legislation.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, I have spent lots of time at the University of Alberta both as a student in the '60s and then starting in the late '60s as a



faculty member. The University of Alberta and other public institutions like the University of Alberta have already done a great deal of work to facilitate changes in the design of buildings and to in fact bring in changes in existing buildings to improve access for persons with disabilities. I know that many hospitals have done the same.

I think it's important that this legislation be passed and implemented in all buildings and public facilities or residential places which are used by, frequented by persons with disabilities or begin to make adaptations in conformity with the intentions expressed in this bill, and those intentions are being legislated as we speak.

Mr. Speaker, I have a fair number of disabled persons who are my constituents and who live in buildings, and when I visit those buildings, I notice that those buildings could probably benefit from some improvements in their design so that the use of those buildings and access to those buildings becomes easier for my constituents who use them.

I also want to mention that the city of Edmonton, as we know, has changed its sidewalks and street crossings to facilitate movement by Edmontonians and other Albertans who need to use wheelchairs to get across various intersections and move from one place to another using public access and facilities.

So it's a good bill. It deserves the support of the House, and the New Democrat opposition is pleased to extend its support to Bill 201.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

**Mr. Jacobs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a pleasure to rise today to support Bill 201 in third reading. It is a bill that I believe will be of great service to disabled Albertans and one that will provide a new vision for how we look at the construction and renovation of publicly accessible structures in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I can see many areas where this bill will have a positive effect on Alberta's disabled individuals as well as for all Albertans. As members have stated and as is noted in the bill, this bill is not a heavy-handed one. What the bill does is provide room on the Safety Codes Council for a representative of disabled Albertans.

If Bill 201 is passed, this representative for the disabled will have the mandate of increasing the safety and accessibility of publicly accessible buildings in our province to ensure that all Albertans can use the services provided within these buildings with safety and ease. Just as important, as disability representatives make continued recommendations to the Safety Codes Council, the wealth of knowledge of all contractors and experts in the field will grow, ensuring that newer buildings are constructed in innovative and safe ways that increase accessibility for everyone.

Further, we see built into the bill qualifications that are designed to make public structures more inclusive for disabled individuals. We also see a balance in that a review and appeals process has been put into place to ensure that nobody is unduly affected by the new changes this bill seeks to effect.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 201 is truly a bill built with the best intentions of all concerned parties and, indeed, all Albertans, and we would do well to support it here in third reading.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a rural perspective and talk about the way this bill fits into and affects smaller rural communities in our provinces. I understand that when this bill was first contemplated by the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, a lot of my rural colleagues were apprehensive about the effects this bill might have. For those of us who come from smaller communities, our focus lately has been on the rejuvenation of our rural economies.

The effects of drought, BSE, and migration to larger communities mean that many communities are facing economic problems at rates unseen in their history. The fear was that on top of the problems we already face, this bill may be one more financial hurdle for our small businesses to jump over.

For years migration to larger centres has been a concern. Our young people often go to Edmonton, Calgary, or Lethbridge for university or to other regional centres for college or trade school. Our hope, of course, is that they will return with the expertise they gain and use it in their hometowns. While this does happen, often the reality is that these students stay in the city in which they go to university or migrate to other cities as a means of finding profitable employment, and not a single one of us here faults our young people for doing that. They, like young adults from all over the world, have to make a life for themselves, and oftentimes the opportunities just aren't there in our smaller communities.

Our goal as rural MLAs is to take steps to ensure that the Alberta advantage doesn't just occur in larger communities but in rural Alberta as well. So, of course, there was apprehension when this bill came forward.

Many local businesses are built in older buildings, and many of them are barely surviving. As many members know, renovating older structures can cause a great deal of difficulty, especially considering that some of the structures are made with older materials and were built with older methods. Providing the appropriate planning for renovations or placing an addition beside the original structure could prove to be quite a daunting and expensive task and could increase the costs of renovation beyond what they may be already.

The questions were many. Would all of these businesses be forced to install wheelchair and disabled-friendly measures tomorrow? Would any of these businesses looking to expand be unable to expand due to the increased costs of barrier-free access? What are the cost differences between ordinary access and barrier-free access? Are the costs truly more significantly onerous? In short, in our efforts to provide for the needs of disabled individuals would we be taking steps which expand the need for restimulation of Alberta's rural economy?

Mr. Speaker, to many this question may be somewhat impolitic, but that doesn't make it illegitimate. The concerns of our rural communities are real, and they do need to be considered in this type of legislation. After all, to pass a bill that would significantly damage the prospect of economic recovery in the rural Alberta business sector is nothing that this government would care to do.

Mr. Speaker, during debate many of the above questions have been answered, and the bill has received the favour of the House. Fortunately, Bill 201 is structured in such a way that it will not harm the prospects of economic recovery in rural Alberta. The bill is crafted in such a way that both appeals processes and reasonable requirements exist. The most reasonable part about this legislation is that it applies only to new structures and new renovations. I can think of other more intrusive ways that this legislation could be put in place, but again this sponsor has struck a balance, showing genuine concern and consideration for the practical challenges this bill could pose.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we need to be clear on another aspect of Bill 201, and that is the inclusiveness it fosters for disabled individuals. This inclusiveness does not just concern those who have become disabled at a young age but those whose disabilities are the result of the aging process as well. As a result, we're not talking about a small subset of the province's population but a group of large numbers. We're also talking about a group of individuals who are part and parcel of the community fabric in rural Alberta.

As this relates to my discussion on rural economies, it is safe to say that strong economies are those that allow everyone the opportunity to get hold of or purchase the things they need. If business structures are designed in such a way that people are not able to patronize the business, well, that's just one more customer lost.

I mentioned at the outset of my speech, Mr. Speaker, that as our young people move away, rural communities are on average becoming home to populations that are older. These older Albertans often find themselves with disabilities which force them to either use a wheelchair or walker or cane or some other assisting device. Our community businesses must be able to accommodate these Albertans. It will not do for them to not be able to do this, because in the end their businesses will suffer if certain customers are unable to access the services within. So we must stress to business that accessibility is an important issue, not only for the purpose of economies but for the needs and participation of disabled individuals as well.

Mr. Speaker, I support the bill wholeheartedly, and I am anxious to see it implemented so that we may quickly provide disabled Albertans with a voice on the Safety Codes Council. Therefore, I urge all members to support this bill. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

4:40

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Dr. Nicol:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure this afternoon to stand and speak in favour of Bill 201, the Safety Codes (Barrier-free Design and Access) Amendment Act, 2004. One of the things that we have to look at is the approach that we take to making sure that every Albertan, every Canadian has access, that basically are given a sense that when we do things, we're doing it in an inclusive way.

Bill 201 points out that we have to recognize the need of all Albertans, all Canadians to in effect be considered when we're dealing with safety issues, be considered when we're dealing with building codes, be considered when we look at how they can participate in our society. That's important. That sends a real message out to Albertans and to individuals who have disabilities that we are considering their needs and we're considering what they need to participate.

I want to also recognize that the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan has not only said that these are important things that we need to do; he's taken an initiative here to make sure that individuals with those disabilities are involved in the process by creating a council to allow them to be part of any discussions that would affect new regulations, would affect changes in the direction that we go.

I support the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner when he talked about the fact that there's a beneficial part of this bill in the sense that it's talking about new construction or renovations to existing constructions so that it doesn't become a burden when we look at struggling businesses in many parts of Alberta. The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner referred to rural Alberta, but I know that in my constituency in Lethbridge there are a number of businesses that couldn't undertake a significant capital project at this time.

We need to be looking at these projects and this accessibility over the long run, and the fact that we're building this into redesign, reconstruction, remodeling, renovation, and new buildings is really an important part of it. I think that if we look at it from the point of view of "Is construction of an accessible building any more costly than construction of a conventional building?" that is really something where we're going to recognize in the future that, no, it doesn't

cost a lot more to in effect build in accessibility and consideration for individuals with disabilities.

You know, Mr. Speaker, on a number of occasions you've been going through hotels or other buildings, and you come to the sign in front of an elevator that says: in case of a fire don't use this elevator. How is an individual in a wheelchair to get out of the building if they can't use the elevator? You know, these kinds of things. This is a new process of thought that we have to enter into when we start designing not only buildings but also safety codes, in the sense that if there is somebody with a disability there, are there provisions within the evacuation procedures and within the fire safety procedures to in effect make sure that that individual can get out from their place in the building if an emergency happens?

To the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan: thanks; this is a great bill. I think all Albertans should respect the intent of it and look forward to the future when all of our buildings are fully functional and fully accessible for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to rise and speak at third reading of Bill 201, the Safety Codes (Barrier-free Design and Access) Amendment Act, 2004. I would like to begin my remarks in the time allotted to me this afternoon by congratulating the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan for sponsoring Bill 201.

Introducing an initiative like this shows two things to me. First of all, it shows a great sensitivity to the needs of a group of Albertans whose particular needs in many instances have been addressed as an afterthought rather than anything else. So through the introduction of Bill 201 Albertans with disabilities have not only found a strong advocate in the government, but their collective voice has also been heard loud and clear by those of us who have the great privilege and responsibility of representing our fellow men and women in this esteemed Assembly.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, given the impending seniors boom that will occur not just in Alberta but around much of the world in a few short years, it is imperative that we begin to address many issues that we'll have to confront on a daily basis. The median age of the province rises, and more and more people will be in a position to call themselves or, at the very least, be considered by others as seniors, with their abilities becoming more and more limited. So for most of us as we age, our body gradually becomes somewhat less cooperative. Although we may be loath to admit it, each and every one of us will eventually have a series of realizations that will cause us to say something like this: "Whoops, this requires more effort than it used to," or "I don't remember taking quite so long to walk up those stairs."

So planning ahead will therefore be tremendously important as our population ages. Whatever effort we put in today will have many-fold benefits in the course of the coming years and decades. It seems fairly obvious that to best realize such an effort, we must have a co-ordinated approach. Mr. Speaker, it's in everyone's best interests that there be a few overarching guidelines that help us as we prepare ourselves and our society for the needs we will face in the years ahead.

When it comes to buildings and construction, the Alberta building code will quite obviously remain the standard it has been over the last 30 years. As we all know, the safety and the technical specifications to which builders and contractors in our province must adhere are set forth in great detail in the Alberta building code. By using

this document, which is really about a three-inch thick binder, a benchmark against which the quality and safety of Alberta's many buildings are judged, we can be assured that there is some consistency in the construction industry, that buildings in our province, regardless of where they are built, are subject to the same standard.

Having a co-ordinated approach like that can be very helpful in ensuring adherence to the accepted standard. No building is treated differently from others. What's more, home builders and contractors in any part of Alberta are subject to the same regulations. We don't cut slack for some and none for others. There is no slack for safety consideration – no slack, period. Everyone is subject to the requirements and the specifications of the Alberta building code.

One of the things that has been the source of some concern is the so-called relaxation clause found in section 3.8 of the Alberta building code. Section 3.8 governs barrier-free design issues, common-sense exemptions already specified in the building code for such things as private homes, relocatable industrial buildings, and other industrial operations where the risk to the person with sensory and/or physical disability would preclude their working or being present in the building anyway.

#### 4:50

In addition to this common-sense exemption, builders and contractors have additional options for a situation where they think that compliance with a barrier-free requirement might prove cumbersome, costly, or otherwise not necessary. They can still apply for a relaxation of this requirement. Bill 201 does not affect the relaxation clause. It is still an option for those who think that they would have something to gain from filing the appropriate application with the director of the building code for a relaxation of the barrier-free requirement.

What is of considerably greater significance here, however, is that Bill 201 does not abolish the relaxation clause. It does strengthen its importance and its usefulness. First of all, by having a centralized process for assessing the merits of each and every application for relaxation, we can be assured that the manner in which the applications are processed is even-handed and fair. All applications receive the same level and kind of attention, and all are subject to the same interpretation and application criteria. While there is no reason to fear that such would not be the case in the centralization process, the variations and the differences, however subtle they may be, the assessment would increase for the purposes of our discussion here and during the preceding weeks.

The most important point with regard to the relaxation clause is this. By retaining the option of applying for relaxation rather than removing it, Bill 201 provides for the creation of a regulation to govern the relaxation process which could specify the participation of persons with disabilities in the application process. Thus far an application for relaxation has tended to be a matter between the director of the Alberta building code and the petitioner. With few, if any, exceptions the petitioner has always been a builder or a contractor or a building owner. In other words, when it comes to having had input to the process, the disabled community has had almost none.

With Bill 201, however, this will change. Just like the bill makes it possible for the addition of a 10th entity in the Safety Codes Council, so it makes possible enhancing the application process for a relaxation. From now on applications for relaxation will benefit from the input of the disabled community. At first glance this may not seem particularly appealing to either contractors, builders, or operators, on the one hand, or the disabled community, on the other hand. I think that there are certain different views from the two camps. While I am not suggesting that all members of either side

feel the same this way or that way, I think that there is a perception that all contractors, builders, and operators want to have as few barrier-free designs and access requirements to contend with as possible. Conversely, there is a view held by some that the disabled community wants everything to be accessible without regard for the usefulness or utility of doing so, not to mention regard for the cost of removing every single barrier in society.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I know from experience that the two sides are not quite as far apart as people perceive. While there are always those who in a dispute will assume the most extreme positions imaginable, the vast majority of those involved tend to congregate in the middle. As a result, they are quite close to one another. This is, of course, something that bodes well for compromise.

For this reason I support the bill, and I encourage all the members to support the bill. Thank you.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the debate this afternoon on Bill 201, the Safety Codes (Barrier-free Design and Access) Amendment Act. We've heard that this act proposes to promote barrier-free design and access for persons with physical and sensory disabilities to all buildings and facilities. It certainly is something that I think we should support. I think that with some of the barrier-free designs and access for people with disabilities this province is leading the way. One can venture to other jurisdictions, and you can see just exactly how we compare. Now, that's not to say that improvements cannot be made or that this is not an improvement, because it is my view that it is.

Now, this amendment, as has been described, I believe applies to fire protection and to the design, manufacture, construction, installation, operation, and maintenance of buildings and their electrical systems, elevating devices, their gas distribution systems, plumbing systems, sewage disposal, and pressure equipment. As I said before, this will be an improvement, but people with disabilities should be able to access any building that an able-bodied person can. However, I would like to caution or state that this legislation seems only to encourage barrier-free design.

I know that there have been remarks made earlier in reference to how great the Safety Codes Act is, but certainly I think that there can be improvements made to the Safety Codes Act. I'm not sure that this was such a good idea now that we've almost had a decade of the Safety Codes Act. There was certainly a common belief among government members that all government regulation was bad. We got downsized; we got to remove regulations. As a result, one of those initiatives created the Safety Codes Act, or the safety codes system.

Has it worked? Well, I don't think so. I don't think it has improved conditions for consumers. When one looks at the condos that are being built, some of the issues around condominiums, we have had spectacular fires. We have had fires while construction was occurring. We've had spectacular fires after condo owners had purchased the units and moved in.

There's a great deal of dissatisfaction in regard to this bill, Mr. Speaker. This would be a very good time, after this legislation has passed, for this government to consider a complete review of the Safety Codes Act and the system of inspection that is the result of that, to look at this entire system and see if it's working in the interests of consumers. I don't think it is, but this amendment certainly is a good idea. Whenever one endorses this amendment, it's not an endorsement of this entire process. I was talking about fires in the condominium complex. As well there was a serious fire in 2001 in Fulton Court, which is a 70-unit, three-storey structure in Edmonton-Gold Bar.

5:00

In the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar there was an over \$5 million fire in the spring of 2001. There are still, unfortunately, issues to be resolved in regard to this fire and how all this is going to work. There are alleged reconstruction deficiencies. Mould and the discovery that the building needed upgrading to comply with the building code have led to a number of lawsuits and counter claims, and that's why I think we should consider again looking at our entire safety codes system. If the hon. member is looking for a job after he finishes doing such a good job on this one, well, we could maybe, Mr. Speaker, put him to work.

When you consider, whether it's Calgary or Edmonton, that whenever you have a situation such as the fire that I have described, that puts a strain on the entire condominium community. It also reduces the confidence consumers have when purchasing a new condo. You don't have to go by any road in this city or in Calgary or in a lot of other communities to see how many condominiums are being built. Unless we want more problems, I would urge this House and its members to have a good, close look at our entire safety codes system.

Mr. Speaker, with that I will cede the floor to another member of this Assembly. When I say that I'm supporting this bill, it does not mean that I have a ringing endorsement of the entire safety codes process, the permitting process, nor the inspection process, because I think there are too many deficiencies in it, and there is not enough protection for consumers, nor is there protection for individuals who are considering or have purchased a condominium recently.

Thank you.

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

**Ms Kryczka:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take great pleasure in rising to share my thoughts on Bill 201, the Safety Codes (Barrier-free Design and Access) Amendment Act, 2004. If passed, the bill, sponsored by the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, will serve to amend the Safety Codes Act. In its current form this act concerns itself with protecting the safety and well-being of Albertans by setting and enforcing building standards. The Alberta building code, as we know, concerns itself with the structural integrity of buildings, along with ensuring that certain safety precautions and building standards are met.

Unless you are directly involved in the construction industry, this topic might not be something that is thought about on a daily basis. However, this topic is one that concerns all Albertans because it affects everyone in our province. In order to construct a new building or make structural changes to an existing one, it's necessary to obtain a building permit. There are several reasons for this, but the one that most concerns us is that this places controls on who is constructing our homes, shopping centres, office complexes, and apartment buildings. It also notifies the proper authorities so that the proper system of checks and balances can be put into motion.

Our province requires that every aspect of structures built here is inspected by qualified professionals to ensure that it meets the standards set out in the Alberta building code. These standards apply to a range of items, including the types of building materials used, the thickness of the foundation, fire escapes, and electrical breaker panels. Safety code officers physically visit and inspect buildings, and it is this function that is most important. By having the resources to send experts to the construction site, it is possible to ensure that the contractors are adhering to the Alberta building code.

A lack of inspectors on the ground can lead to tragic consequences. For example, the standards laid out by the building codes in Turkey are very high in part because of the frequency with which

the region is affected by earthquakes. However, these codes are not well enforced, and this can lead to tragedy such as the one that struck in mid-February. An 11-storey apartment block collapsed, resulting in the deaths of 92 people.

The reasons behind this accident centre around the failure of the contractor to adhere to the standards that are laid out in Turkey's building codes. In this situation the contractors used substandard building materials coupled with poor workmanship and made alterations to the original blueprints. These factors combined to seriously compromise the structural integrity of the building.

The fault for this tragedy lies directly at the feet of the contractors. However, they felt that they could cut corners and make more money because there is a lack of enforcement of their building codes. While this is an extreme example for sure, it illustrates the importance of the work that is done by the Safety Codes Council and the inspections officers that ensure that the standards set out in the building code are adhered to.

Mr. Speaker, as we have heard in the previous stages of debate, Bill 201 aims to expand the role of the Safety Codes Council. The council is primarily concerned with one task: the structural integrity of buildings to ensure that they are safe for those that inhabit them. Currently the council is composed of members considered to be experts in their chosen fields. These areas of expertise include fire protection, buildings, electrical systems, elevating devices, gas systems, plumbing systems, private sewage disposal systems, and pressure equipment. Bill 201 would serve to expand this council to include a member who is an expert in barrier-free design and access.

The building codes governing universal accessibility are already in place, and contractors must adhere to them. Public buildings must be laid out in such a manner that they're navigable by any person, whether they live with limited mobility or not. Why is it important to expand the council to include a member that has practical experience in dealing with barrier-free design and access issues? The answer to the question is simple: the current members of the Safety Codes Council are not experts in the field of universal accessibility.

The other major facets of construction are represented on the council except for an expert in this field. The exclusion of a representative with the expertise in the field of universal accessibility represents a significant omission, an omission that will be corrected by passing Bill 201. The inclusion of an expert in the field of universal accessibility will improve the council's ability to apply the Alberta building code in this area.

In many cases persons who do not live with reduced mobility do not fully understand the implications that come with using a wheelchair or a walker or a cane. The example of the ramp at the east end of the Legislature Building has been discussed previously and with good reason. Those of us who are not confined to a wheelchair are unaware of the mechanics involved in travelling in one. The distances that are necessary to turn the chair and the types of corners that are not easily navigated are not familiar unless you have actually used a wheelchair. The addition of a member from the disabled community will expand the council's expertise to encompass this area. This expert would be able to offer advice that's grounded in real-world experience that other members of the council may not have had.

While the Alberta building code does stipulate that universal accessibility is a necessity, the details of applying these provisions are not specified. By giving suggestions on the details of how to implement the requirements set out in the code, the expanded council would become more effective. The design of components that make a building universally accessible would over time become less of a secondary concern, and these components could become more user friendly.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to remember that passing Bill 201 will not change the existing requirements that must be met by contractors regarding barrier-free design and access, nor will it expand the types of buildings that would be required to meet the current standards. I realize that both of these points have been made numerous times previously, but I feel that it is important to mention them once again.

Another argument that I feel cannot be stressed enough is the steadily growing population over 65 years of age. Before long all those present in this Chamber will become seniors. The reality of this situation is that for a significant number of older persons, reduced mobility becomes a fact of life. This can be due to a number of reasons ranging from a bad back to a hip that needs to be replaced. It is important for this Assembly to act now to start the process that will build the infrastructure that will become increasingly more important as we look into the future.

5:10

By acting now, there will be significant financial gains to be made in the long run. If a building is made universally accessible at the time of construction, there will be an added cost of roughly 4 per cent to the base building price. If a building is constructed without accounting for universal accessibility, the cost of retrofitting the building to meet these standards is roughly 10 to 15 times more.

I know that using percentages such as these makes the costs seem vague; however, I agree with using percentages, so I would like to illustrate this using a hypothetical situation. The cost of making a \$500,000 building universally accessible at the time of construction would be roughly \$20,000. The cost of retrofitting this building at a later date to make it universally accessible would be estimated to cost anywhere from \$200,000 to \$300,000. Mr. Speaker, the math of this situation speaks for itself. By acting now, we will be preventing large costs from haunting building owners in the future.

Passing Bill 201 will show other jurisdictions the steps that can be taken to ensure that their communities remain open and accessible to every member of the community. Hopefully, this will prompt other areas to follow where this province will have led and choose to utilize the expertise that resides in their communities on the subject of barrier-free access and design.

Bill 201 is a sensible and well-thought-out piece of legislation that will act to ensure that those of us who live with limited mobility will not have their options for work or recreation limited by disability. I fully support the Safety Codes (Barrier-free Design and Access) Amendment Act, 2004, and I would ask that all of my colleagues today support it as well.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Marz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to join the debate in third reading on Bill 201, the Safety Codes (Barrier-free Design and Access) Amendment Act, 2004, sponsored by the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. I have no doubt that the disabled will benefit if this Assembly passes this bill.

Through Bill 201 this Assembly has an opportunity to ensure that the basic needs of the disabled related to daily living are met. This legislation can remove physical barriers from public buildings and allow disabled Albertans to become full participants in community and employment opportunities.

I like this bill because there's no direct involvement from the Alberta government other than establishing a position on the Safety Codes Council for the disabled and enshrining the need for barrier-free access. Improvements to barrier-free designs will come from the experts on the Safety Codes Council. Disabled Albertans are the

best people to improve accessibility by offering practical ideas for consideration by the Safety Codes Council. It's likely that further changes may be added to the safety codes as a result of the input and experience from the disabled representation on the Safety Codes Council.

I'm confident that the changes proposed to the Safety Codes Act in Bill 201 will have a negligible impact on the construction industry. The money earmarked for barrier-free designs already exists.

Mr. Speaker, it could be argued that a great deal of progress has already been made toward the goal of barrier-free access without Bill 201. Many examples of physical barriers to accessibility could be remedied through minor adjustments to current provisions. For instance, some speakers mentioned wheelchair ramps that were not placed in the most convenient location. These could be moved or easily rebuilt to accommodate the disabled. The private sector would be in the best position to make these changes, not the Alberta government.

I realize that improvements to barrier-free access will not occur overnight. This bill is not retroactive and will only apply to future renovation and construction projects. The changes proposed in Bill 201 will only apply to certain buildings, and the exemption clause will remain in place. That being said, if the previous work of the Safety Codes Council is any indication, then changes to barrier-free designs will happen as fast as possible, and they will be consistent and even-handed.

The new representation for the disabled will ensure that resources are used correctly the first time. Again, as previous speakers have mentioned, these changes would add to the value of the building. The need for innovative and improved barrier-free designs will increase. These changes will allow the growing population of disabled Albertans to use public buildings more freely and with less difficulty.

I'm supportive of this bill because it will bring about effective changes to better help disabled Albertans rather than creating another commission or funding some sort of review. This bill addresses the issue of accessibility up front and proposes a realistic, common-sense solution for improving accessibility.

I, too, would encourage all members to vote in favour of Bill 201. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I conclude my remarks.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Under Standing Order 8(5)(a)(iii), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I would now invite the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan to close debate on third reading of Bill 201.

**Mr. Lougheed:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would first of all like to thank all those members who have spoken so well in favour of Bill 201, stating the examples that they were aware of and were advised from their constituents about.

Many people worked on this bill. Certainly, the research department started off working in many different areas in looking at issues and how to work through that, led by one of our researchers, Frank Ostlinger. I'd like to thank him for that. Legislative Counsel was involved in helping to draft it, and that was after Municipal Affairs had had a great deal of input. Under the leadership and support of the minister they advised which directions to go with this that would work out the best for the Safety Codes Council.

Many organizations were involved. The Canadian Paraplegic Association, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, and the Multiple Sclerosis Society were also in there giving advice and talking about situations that they felt needed to be remedied.

There were other people; David Pinney, for example, who was involved in barrier-free design and access architecture. People like that were very beneficial in giving me advice about what was important.

But, Mr. Speaker, most important and the reason that this bill came forward was because of many people passing along information to me in my role as chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. They talked about challenges they faced and how design improvements could be made.

I'd like to read a couple of short sentences from a letter I received from a lady who perhaps is the best example of the challenges that can occur when one becomes paralyzed. Her name is Barb Gulka. She lives in Lloydminster. She advised me that I could use her name and read a little bit from her letter. She was a businessperson, a successful businessperson, had a business in Lloydminster. One day, shortly after the noon rush she had a little bit of pain in her hip, and 40 minutes later due to a blood clot of some sort she was paralyzed and in a wheelchair.

The circumstances for her were such that her store wasn't accessible to her as a person who had just finished building it and had been advised that it was, according to code, barrier free. She was unable to get into the building, into her business because the incline on the ramp was a little too steep. The bathroom, which she was told was accessible and built to code, wasn't useful for her as a person in a wheelchair. She makes several comments with respect

to this that the code was there. She was told that it was built to code. But perhaps there could be some small changes in the code requirements, because it was her intention to build it completely barrier free, but in fact it wasn't in the end.

These kinds of comments were important in bringing this forward so that we can address those kinds of issues in the future. So I thank the members that spoke in favour and those other members who I hope will support this bill. I would ask for the question, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a third time]

5:20

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted with the passage of Bill 201, and I, too, just wanted to say thank you to the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan for what he's done for the disabled community. I thank all members in the House for their rather unanimous support today.

Mr. Speaker, in view of that excellent progress, I would move that we now call it 5:30 and reconvene at 8 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:21 p.m.]