

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, March 18, 2004**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 2004/03/18

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our energies with thanks so that we may continue our work with the people in the constituencies we represent. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

Mrs. Gordon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very fortunate today. I have two school groups visiting. First, I'd like to start by introducing to you and through you to members of the Assembly 61 students from Lacombe upper elementary school. I asked them earlier whether they were glad to be here, and they said that they were very happy, that they were enthusiastic, and I know that they're very bright. With them today are teachers Miss Heather MacKay, Mr. Derek Rankin, and Ms Sasha Krivoshein and parent helpers Tim and Moira Ellen, Mr. Darren Woodford, Ms Lynda Baker, Mr. Dave Helmer, Mrs. Pat Wilson, Mr. Scott Derwanz, Mr. Darrel Johnston, Mrs. Cathy McEachem, Mr. Kelvin Rieland, Mrs. Margje Van Giersbergen, and Mrs. Barbara Webb. I would ask the 61 students to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. Thank you.

My second students are from Lakeview Christian school, and there are 13 students and nine adults here today. I would welcome these students as well to the Legislature. Joining them are teachers Miss Goossen and Miss Isaac as well as group leaders Ray Unruh and Ralph Wiebe. I would ask the Lakeview Christian school students, who I'm sure are also bright and enthusiastic, to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure today that I introduce the students from St. Mary's school on behalf of the MLA for Cardston-Taber-Warner. There are 29 great students along with their teachers, Mrs. Gay Lagler and Mr. Pat Pyne, and their student teacher, Miss Kendra Bailey. They're also with 10 other people that are either parents or helpers. At this time I'd appreciate it if they'd all stand and have the Assembly give them a great warm welcome.

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

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a couple from Linden, Alberta, Tom and Carrie Courtney. They're seated in the public gallery. If the name sounds familiar, it should be because they were the owner-operators of a very successful business, Courtney Berg enterprises, for a number of years in Linden, and the business is still successful, still growing, still expanding and being operated by their son and son-in-law to date. But their real claim to fame is that they are also the very proud

grandparents of our own researcher, Richard Westlund, who's also seated in the public gallery. I'd ask all three to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a former constituent of Edmonton-Centre. We like to hang on to them for as long as we can. Marilyn Burns is joining us today in the gallery, and she's very interested, particularly in auto insurance reform. So, Marilyn, I would ask you to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of this Assembly a constituent of Edmonton-Gold Bar, Dr. Ryan Dunch. Dr. Dunch has children in three public schools in Edmonton: in the Chinese bilingual program at Meyonohk school, at Victoria school, and at Strathearn school. Dr. Dunch is concerned about the quality of public education and the lack of adequate funding for public education in this province. I would like Dr. Dunch, who is in the public gallery, to now stand and receive the traditional warm and gracious welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly one Edmonton-Strathcona constituent, Dr. Robert Wilson. Dr. Wilson has two young children attending grades 2 and 3, I think, at McKernan elementary junior high. Dr. Robert Wilson is very active in the Education Watch initiative, a parent organization very concerned about the lack of adequate funding for public education in this province. I believe he is seated in the public gallery. I would ask him to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you a visitor to our country but more importantly a visitor to Alberta. Her name is Mika Hirano. She resides in Anpachi, Japan. Mika has just finished four years of university in Japan, and she graduated just last week as a teacher. She decided to take a couple of weeks off and come over here and visit with her friend and be our guest in our home for the next couple of weeks, but the nice thing is that Mika has just received word that she has got a job in her own school in her own town starting the 1st of April. So we wish her the best of luck. Mika is seated in the members' gallery. I ask her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, there are two people that are actually working with Mika, and we shouldn't ignore the other partner of that beautiful relationship, and I'd like Phyllis Coutts to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Automobile Insurance

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The auto insurance rate freeze is just a political tease by this government. My first question is to the Minister of Finance. Have any major players in the Alberta auto insurance market refused to date to issue a credit or rebate since this freeze was initiated by the Premier last fall?

Mrs. Nelson: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can say that from the latest report I've had, about 95 per cent or more of the industry have complied with the freeze. In fact, I've had numerous people, even in this Assembly, say that they have actually received not only a credit from their insurance company since the freeze was put in place, but they've actually received refund cheques if their insurance came up for renewal after the October 30 freeze date. So there has been a compliance by the industry.

As you know, we are in a situation of a legal action right now, so I do know of one company that has taken us to court, and that, I believe, is the extent of it, but I believe all others have complied with the freeze that was put in place on October 30.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: why is Meloche Monnex, the fourth largest player in the Alberta auto market, with over \$150 million in direct written premiums in 2002, not listed on your web site as agreeing to issue either rebates or credits? They're the fourth largest player in this market. Why are they not there?

1:40

Mrs. Nelson: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to get into individual companies. It is my understanding from the latest briefing that I've had that the companies have, not always happily, agreed to the freeze that's been put in place and have complied with the ruling that we put forward. Whether it comes through the broker or through the insurance company depends on the relationship that's there.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: will the hon. minister order those insurance companies to issue interest on the amounts of rebate or credit that consumers in this province are owed, particularly after the large profits that have been just announced?

Mrs. Nelson: Mr. Speaker, we asked the industry on very short notice to put a freeze in place and to co-operate with us to work to get a reform program going forward. We said that from October 30 forward for up to 18 months there would be a freeze in place, and under the fair practices regulations that we put in place, there are other rules there as well. We asked the industry to comply with it, and we asked them to work within a tight time frame to accomplish that. We didn't legislate that tight time frame because we learned very quickly that some were experiencing some difficulty with their computer systems and were having trouble complying if their systems weren't as modern as the others.

But I can say that even with all those difficulties the industry did come forward and has co-operated on the credits and/or refunds that we requested that they put in place. I can say that, in fact, they are today, as we speak, continuing to co-operate. We aren't always agreeing on every regulation but are continuing to co-operate to try

and put forward a new structure, as are the other proponents that were against this. The legal profession is also working with us.

So people are coming together to realize that this plan, Mr. Speaker, was clearly geared for the consumers of the province of Alberta. Once that realization was recognized by both sides, they decided to be part of the solution and not stay as the problem.

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

Rural Gas Co-ops and Electrification Associations

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Divisions in this Progressive Conservative government continue to grow larger and larger, wider and wider. Now, a recent report on rural issues states – and this is the report that was put out yesterday by the hon. Member for Wainwright and the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake – that “policies regarding gas and electricity utilities need to respect the work of Rural Gas Co-ops and Rural Electrification Associations . . . They gave rural areas quality utilities at affordable prices.” However, in the next breath this government plans a \$3 million propaganda campaign to convince rural Albertans to abandon their rural electrification associations and gas co-ops in favour of so-called competition. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why is this government trying to break up the rural gas co-ops and the rural electrification associations?

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, as has chronically been the case, we are compelled to correct the member's preamble. I would state to him that there is less division amongst these 74 than there is amongst those seven. The reason is because this government works very closely with all the members that are a part of this government.

One of those important parts, the parts created by government, are rural electrification associations, that out of 9,000 megawatts deliver some 87 megawatts of electricity efficiently, reasonably, and with good service across this great province.

Mr. Speaker, the rural gas co-ops are a model. They are such a model that I took the book on rural gas co-ops and gave it to legislators from Alaska and said: if you want to prosper, gasify your rural areas; here's how you do it. The rural gas co-ops serve as a template. Those organizations shall remain strong, will remain strong, and will withstand any malarkey that comes from that member.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to that minister: given that there is no competition in Alberta's energy market and rural electrification associations and gas co-ops have provided rural Alberta with something that really works, affordable utilities for decades, why is this government spending \$3 million on a propaganda campaign that rural members do not want?

Mr. Smith: I guess that because there's no preamble in a supplemental, I can't correct the preamble that we didn't hear, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the ability for us to continue to deliver affordable electricity and affordable gas prices in this marketplace, whether it be rural Alberta, whether it be northern Alberta, whether it be southern Alberta, is something we've worked very hard on since 1996. I don't care which jurisdiction you look at across Canada, whether it's New Brunswick, that has just spent \$750 million retrofitting an oil-fired generator to an input product that doesn't exist or they can't obtain, to the \$40 billion debt in Ontario and a decision to spend billions of dollars to go nuclear, I'll tell you what. If he wants to see trouble, all he has to do is leave Alberta.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that this government plans by 2010 to provide all customers choice with electricity, how can this minister say that this government is not planning to dismantle the rural electrification associations that Albertans rely on? It's a tradition that works.

Mr. Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, if there's any proof that when the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness was the hon. minister of education and he introduced early reading competencies into the school system it was very important – because this member is not displaying a reading competency. If he goes through the report that was put together by the Member for Wainwright and the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, he will see that there is an Alberta that thrives on the oil patch out there, there's a rural Alberta that has endless opportunities that are nowhere else in Canada. We look forward for this government to capitalize on those rural opportunities, and the oil and gas industry intends to be a part of it.

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

Health Care Labour Negotiations

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The compulsory arbitration board assisting in negotiations with Alberta's nurses wrote the Minister of Human Resources and Employment on Tuesday asking him to extend the deadline for negotiations. In the letter the board requests: "It is in the public interest that we ask you to extend the Board's mandate." While nurses have said that they want to continue negotiations and avert a crisis, the provincial health authorities remain silent. My questions are to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Will the minister encourage the provincial health authorities to continue negotiations as the compulsory arbitration board requests?

Mr. Dunford: Yes, certainly we will. We've contemplated for some time that in putting the compulsory arbitration board together, they would be able to find a way to provide an agreement for the parties, and we've talked about a date on March 31.

Dr. Taft: Is the minister prepared to use his power and unilaterally extend the deadline past June 15 if the provincial health authorities do not continue negotiations?

Mr. Dunford: The question is hypothetical. We have the letter, as the member has indicated. As is my normal method of operation, we're analyzing it carefully, and we'll make a decision.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. What steps does this government have planned in the event the provincial health authorities walk away from the negotiations?

1:50

Mr. Dunford: Well, again hypothetical. Does the member not understand that as an hon. member in this House he, like me, should be encouraging this group to come to an agreement and not all of a sudden start to provide shadows and innuendo that maybe they can't come to an agreement? What he's asking is not right.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Health Care Reform

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

There once was a minister of health
Who often acted with stealth.
His plans were carefully hidden.
He had to do as he was bidden,
For the system's objective is now wealth.

To the Minister of Health and Wellness: given that the Premier has stated that he doesn't want to release the Graydon report because the media and opposition will pounce on it, is the government admitting that Albertans will find his recommendations unacceptable?

Mr. Mar: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm impressed. I can only reply by saying:

An intelligent question I will not dodge
If asked by the hon. doc named Raj.
But if the question is inane,
From answering such I will refrain.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to say this. We have made a commitment that the report the hon. member refers to will be part of the overall discussion of health care reform in this province. It's an important discussion not only in Alberta but throughout the country, and in the due course of time we will be releasing the Graydon report that he refers to.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Time marches on.

Is the government that scared of the contents of the Graydon report that it needs a communications plan before its release?

Mr. Mar: Well, Mr. Speaker, with all matters of government policy and government discussion and appropriate consultation that takes place, we always have a communication plan. We're not as haphazard as the members opposite.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: isn't it insulting to Albertans to suggest that they can't make up their own mind about health care reform without passing a report through the filter of 200 or more spin doctors in the government's Public Affairs Bureau?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, that falls in the category of inane questions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Interim Leader of the Official Opposition.

Highway Signs

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a tough act to follow, so I won't try.

My question today is to the Minister of Transportation. The Department of Transportation has recently announced a new highway signage policy which would phase out community business signs on highways over the next two years. This concerns many businesses that rely on tourism to supplement their income. To the Minister of Transportation: what impact will this new policy have on local businesses in small rural communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The impact on the small businesses in rural Alberta will be very positive. We've heard from Albertans that it's time to renew our signs in the province of Alberta, and as we head to the celebration of our centennial, we recognize

that something must be done to add a little bit more colour and newness to all our destination signs. As a result, there was a cross-ministry initiative – Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Community Development, Economic Development, and Alberta Transportation – that came together and offered a policy that was accepted by government. We are now going to be in the process of implementing that policy.

There are, of course, two stages to it. First is the logo component. Logos really are the food, the lodging, and the gas that tourists or other Albertans want to locate in the province. That will be the first component of the change.

Then it will be followed with tourist-oriented destination signs as well. I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that those signs will be international in terms of the criteria and the colour. You'll see the same colour of signs in our neighbouring provinces and also in the United States, and our intent here is to provide the best possible very pleasant experience for the thousands of tourists that visit this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second and last question to the same minister: what options are available for businesses to make the public aware of the specific services they have to offer?

Mr. Stelmach: A very good question. That's phase 2 of the policy. We will immediately, with the departments that I mentioned before and with the help of all government members, move to the next stage of open houses and discussions of how we will deal with the kind of community business signs that the hon. member is mentioning.

There are, of course, a number of schools of thought in terms of how many signs we require, should they be the same across the province, and what would be the rules in terms of who can put up a sign and when and at what location along our provincial highways. That, Mr. Speaker, is the next stage, and I welcome input from all members of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Interim Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

SuperNet

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rural development strategy released yesterday is critical of the SuperNet. Individual access, lack of technical support, and prohibitive costs are listed as barriers for rural residents. The SuperNet will remain NoNet for many rural Albertans. My questions are to the Minister of Innovation and Science. Why would the government build the network to a town but not hook up the network to the users?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Interim Leader of the Opposition referred to the jurisdiction of Heisler, and as a matter of note Heisler names its roads and its streets after the Premiers of Alberta.

But on a more serious matter – that's just a little bit of trivia for the House – I think the people responsible for the report that was released yesterday, the Member for Wainwright and the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, understand full well the importance of rural development and understand the opportunity that having the availability of high-speed broadband networks brings to rural

communities to enable them to look at opportunities for additional development in their places.

Dr. Massey: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that hooking up to SuperNet costs from \$3,000 to \$10,000 per year for every public building, how are cash-strapped communities ever going to afford to join up?

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. When the contemplation of the contract with our providers was being worked on, municipalities were not part of those discussions. As we moved along in the process, we actually engaged with the AUMA and the AAMD and C to talk about how we could help to facilitate their connection to the network. As a result, we included in the contract a provision that lets the municipalities have the same connection at the same rates as the other government of Alberta entities. That was added after those discussions.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, we also helped to facilitate an agreement which allows the municipalities for a fee – I think it's about \$4,000 – to be able to provide that connection to their buildings. But the municipalities still have to make a decision as to whether that, in fact, is something that they desire. That's a decision that they have to make.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Massey: Thank you. Again to the same minister: how many more tax dollars will be needed and should be added to the \$200 million cost of the project thus far before rural Albertans can be hooked up?

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, the contract we have for building the SuperNet, particularly as it relates to the rural communities, the extended network, is \$193 million. If there are any overruns on that bill, that is the responsibility of our major contractor, Bell West. So our commitment through the SuperNet construct is to make sure that libraries, hospitals, government buildings, and schools will all be connected to this high-speed optical network, which will allow us to do more things like distance delivery of education, a remote diagnostic and imaging that is unique in the world.

With respect to some specific issues around municipalities I would ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs to supplement.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say that the hon. members for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and Wainwright have done excellent work on rural development. What we have heard in this report, though, is quite simply this. There's no other program like it anywhere in Canada, number one. By the end of this fiscal year, March 31, every single municipality in this province will be hooked up, so that really says that we're working in partnership.

Let me just give you one other small example. There are rural communities that may not have a town hall or an administration building. In fact, they're using professional accounting firms where they enjoy that service. Do you know what? What's happening is that the rural municipality doesn't want to put that money into a private accounting firm to have that service for them. So what we're trying to work out with the ministry of innovation is a partnership that can serve very well every rural and urban municipality by the end of the fiscal year. It's going to happen. I know that the hon. member may not like it, but it's very good news for every single municipality in this province.

Electricity Generation

Mr. VanderBurg: The discussion on power has caused debate; some even say that things aren't going great. But, Mr. Speaker, during the past few years the province of Alberta has enjoyed a building frenzy in electrical generation. I understand that the industry participants in Whitecourt-St. Anne are looking to new, innovative ways to bring power production and new generation to the Whitecourt area. Many jurisdictions are now considering nuclear plants to generate power and choosing to close down coal production. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Given Ontario's power generation report released today by John Manley's review committee, it appears that there's increasing support for nuclear power in Ontario. Can a nuclear power facility be built here in Alberta?

Mr. Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a good question. The question surrounds the issue of competitive market generation. The same competitive market generation that the opposition ballyhoos as a bad principle has in fact delivered some 3,000 new megawatts, has delivered downward pressure on electricity prices to the tune of moving from 16 cents a kilowatt hour down to some 4 cents to 5 cents a kilowatt hour.

There's an extremely robust business-to-business, or wholesale, marketplace, and in fact more power generation is welcome in this province. We have in fact structured through export policy principles, market policy principles, and transmission policy principles an area that is warm and conducive to new generation. That generation is not limited to biomass, wind, natural gas. It can in fact be anything that the investor, who has the risk, chooses to put forward. What the investor, or the proponent of the plant, must do is come before the environmental process, and he must come before the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board process. It is that strong regulatory system that regulates the permitting of power generation in this province.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, given that answer, are we contemplating creating debt, as other jurisdictions have, to further expand electricity generation?

Mr. Smith: Well, to quote another famous conservative, that being Mrs. Nancy Reagan, Mr. Speaker, I think we'll just say no.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, then, could the private sector possibly put in nuclear generations maybe in the oil sands area?

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, Atomic Energy of Canada Limited, a long-time recipient of multiple aid and subsidy from the federal government, particularly in the time of the corrupt Liberal government that we see today, has put forward certain studies that would indicate that there could be substantial replacement of natural gas as an input resource to steam generation in the oil sands.

There is a process, as I outlined earlier, and then I think Albertans also have a concern. That concern would be with the fact of the horrific activities of 9/11; secondly, the extremely tragic bombing in Bali; and thirdly, followed by the incidents in Madrid 911 days after 9/11, that in fact having a nuclear facility so close to a most precious and most prized asset of the government of Alberta would be quite risky for Alberta's security, Mr. Speaker.

Private/Public Partnerships for Hospital Construction

Mr. Bonner: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier said that we Liberals like to cherry-pick when it comes to P3s, picking out the

worst examples and ignoring the good ones. Perhaps he would be more likely to listen to the concerns of a prominent group of economists including a former director with Canada's Auditor General. They state in a report that, quote, the P3 model for public hospitals is likely to lead to significantly greater costs, diminished accountability, and a deterioration of universal service, end quote.* To the minister of health: given that this report clearly states that the P3 model for public hospitals is likely to lead to a deterioration of the quality and extent of universal service, how can this minister condone the P3 experiment for hospitals?

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, the chair is having a little difficulty with the question. There's no identification of whose report, where it comes from. Is it an Alberta government report or the like? I don't know how a minister can deal with something that is not identified.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, simply by associating myself with the comments that the Premier made in this House yesterday.

Mr. Bonner: To the Minister of Infrastructure: given that this report states – and this report was tabled in the House – that “it is reasonable to expect P3 hospitals to be at least 10% more costly than their public sector equivalents,” what actual proof can the minister provide that Alberta will be the exception?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, as you clearly indicated, we know nothing of the report, if in fact it even exists, but that won't stop me from making some comments about P3s. The fact is that the hon. member across the way obviously doesn't have a clue what a P3 is. I've said it in this House more than once, the process that we go through and the fact that a P3 project has to be able to show that it is good for Albertans or it won't proceed.

To demonstrate that he doesn't understand anything about P3s, he keeps on saying that the quality of health care, for example, in a P3 hospital is going to be less than in a publicly owned one. I would like to know how on earth the bricks and mortar that happen to be owned by the private sector are going to deteriorate the health care that is provided by the regional health authorities in that building. How is the ownership of the building going to affect the quality of care in the building? That demonstrates how little he understands about the whole P3.

Mr. Bonner: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister has never been able to provide to the House one example of a P3 hospital that has been successful, why is there a process for approving P3 hospitals when the evidence shows that the entire concept of a P3 hospital is flawed?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, we haven't in this province yet had a proposal come to us for a P3 hospital, but I'm certainly not discouraging anyone from bringing one forward. First, the business case has to be presented; it has to show that, in fact, it's good for the province. That's internally within our department that we do that. Then before it can go any further, it has to go to an outside committee that has not got any government people on it, that is in the private sector, and they do a complete analysis of the project. Coming out of there, it has to show that it is going to be beneficial to Albertans to go with that kind of a project. Then it has to go before Treasury Board and cabinet before it can get approval.

Mr. Speaker, we have built in all kinds of checks and balances,

*See p. 583, left col., para. 1, line 3

and I can assure the member that if a project goes ahead, then we will be able to show that, in fact, it's good for Albertans. All he's got to do is go and look at the Confederation Bridge and then come back to this House and tell us that that's a bad P3.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

2:10 BSE Testing Program

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since last May the government of Alberta has assisted the Alberta beef industry as a whole with more than \$400 million to successfully sustain itself during this still ongoing BSE crisis. It is still not out of the woods. This week the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced changes in their BSE testing regime, expanding it to about 220,000 animals, 10 times the number tested last year, and they will also conduct random tests on about 20,000 older and healthy animals. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. How does the Alberta BSE testing program compare to the USDA's?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, we're pleased that the USDA has announced its enhanced BSE surveillance. Their planned level of surveillance certainly is taken from the recommendations of the international panel for a very aggressive North American surveillance plan, which is exactly what the government of Canada did when we received the recommendations from the international committee. The difficulty in testing a percentage of healthy older animals is minimal. It would be about .003 per cent of our herd. We could do it, I think, relatively easily. It's certainly recognized internationally that the higher value in testing is in older animals in the high-risk area.

BSE is a national priority. There's no question. Ministers of agriculture will be meeting in Ottawa, I believe it is, in early April. This will be a subject again of our discussions and deliberations because the testing protocols that are accepted would be accepted for all of Canada in order for them to be useful to the international community.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: are there any programs to ensure consumer confidence in the safety of our beef given that the probability of humans contracting mad cow disease by eating Alberta beef is so minute?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, since the first case of BSE was reported on May 20 last year, the Alberta government and the Canadian government have been completely open and transparent about what is occurring and what is being discussed here. I would also say that because of what I think has been pretty fair and comprehensive media reporting on this issue, the Canadian public have understood the minimal risk in consuming the product, and of course that was demonstrated, I think, first in our province, led by our province but certainly across Canada, in the increased consumption of beef, unparalleled by any country experiencing BSE.

Mr. Speaker, there is something that I think we all have to keep in mind. Testing of animals is not about human health. It is a practice for disease surveillance in a herd. Human health is protected in this area by the removal of the specified risk materials, which takes the risk to about 99.96 per cent. I believe that Canadians understand that, I believe they support it, and I believe they would want our resources put in ensuring that SRMs are removed from all animals

from that group, and that should be audited. That's what I believe Canadians would want.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what are the Alberta government's current efforts in working with other nations to open their borders to our beef?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have been very aggressive in working with other countries through a number of ministries: the Ministry of Economic Development certainly in marketing, our ministry in explaining what we do in our province as we are the major beef-producing province in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I think what has maybe been lost in some of this is the importance of the work that Minister Speller has done with other countries with the minister's office and CFIA. Japan has agreed to work with us on equivalency of testing animals. So rather than us testing every animal, which, when you've had a feed ban in place since 1997 – since the majority of animals that we slaughter for consumption are under 18 months, certainly under 24 months, they have agreed to have our scientists work together to look at what protocols we have in place, what precautionary measures we have in place that would meet the equivalency, in their mind, of testing every animal. That's a very important point that has to be recalled.

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

Granting of Liquor Licences

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over the past number of years Cathedral Close seniors' residence in downtown Edmonton has had to contend with loud late-night noise from a rock and roll club across the back alley. The old club closed, but the new owners are trying to open a club in the same location. Recognizing the historic problems, the city of Edmonton would only grant a private club licence to minimize noise and activity in the surrounding area. My questions today are to the Minister of Gaming. Why is the AGLC granting the club a class A public liquor licence, totally undermining the efforts of the city and the nearby residents?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, with respect to liquor licences the first step necessarily is to obtain zoning and a business licence from the municipality in question before the application can be made. While I'm not familiar with the particulars of this matter, I can say that the city of Edmonton will have granted a business licence which allows for the applicant to proceed for a class A licence. If that is the case, then the rules that have already been established by the AGLC regarding such applications will be followed.

But if a municipality wishes to curtail such licences in their community, they have the power to do that. For example, we have jurisdictions within Alberta that are completely dry. That is perhaps an extreme example but a very good example of where a municipality has the control to say: we don't want that in our community.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: is it the policy of the AGLC to have staff aggressively lobby the managers of the seniors' complex and the nearby hotel, who are opposed to the granting of a licence?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear the beginning of the question, so I'm not sure which particular group the hon. member was referring to, but I can say this. Business members in the community will proceed to do what is in their interests in talking to adjacent facilities to have them buy into applications. That is something that is within their purview.

Certainly, the AGLC takes a neutral role relative to all of this and receives the applications. If parties from the public wish to contact the AGLC with respect to information on liquor licensing, they may. In certain situations members of city councils in Calgary, in Red Deer, in Edmonton, indeed, have contacted AGLC to say: we would like you to come out and participate in a public fashion to discuss the rules of liquor licensing so that we as a community can be informed as to what our options are. That is something that the AGLC does when asked, and it's something that the communities value.

2:20

Ms Blakeman: Given that the residents of the Cathedral Close Apartments have been denied access to the information for this new club, will this minister now make these applications public?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, I have no particular familiarity with this application that the hon. member is referring to. I would suggest that if there are members of the public who wish information regarding the process for licensing, they contact the AGLC, be specific about what they are talking about, and I am sure that the AGLC will provide them with good information so that they will understand what options are available to them.

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

Health Care Labour Negotiations (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. All three members of the mediation panel in the negotiation between Alberta's nurses and health authorities have written to the minister of human resources asking for his intervention. They have asked the minister to use his good offices to encourage the parties to extend the time deadline so that a settlement can be reached. My question is for the minister. Will he do so? Yes or no?

The Speaker: We've had that exact same question earlier in the question period.

Minister, go ahead.

Mr. Dunford: Well, it's not quite that simple, yes or no. We have to analyze the situation and make a decision.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier recently threatened to put nurses in jail if they broke this government's unjust laws, won't the minister accept his responsibility and allow the mediation process to have the time that it needs to work effectively?

Mr. Dunford: Again, there's a process. We're analyzing the request.

Mr. Mason: Can the minister tell us when he will have gone through his careful process of analysis and have made a decision? When will he inform the House, and will it be before it's too late?

Mr. Dunford: Well, a colleague mentioned here a number of days ago that it was better to be right than right away.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

School Auditory/Verbal Therapy Program

Mr. Lord: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a great deal of concern about the future of a very important and innovative program in Calgary involving a P3-type partnership between the Calgary board of education, the Alberta Children's hospital, and parents. This one-of-a-kind program in Canada deserves national recognition as a model for others to copy, but instead it is being threatened because it is located in the Knob Hill school, which is being threatened with closure and is vitally tied into the professional staff from the Alberta Children's hospital, located right next door, which is also slated for closure. This amazing program effectively cures deafness in children. It involves cochlear implants and auditory/verbal therapy training. It allows deaf children to be able to hear and communicate normally but if and only if they get this training at an early age. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What will happen to this program?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, let me say first of all that I can't speak to the issues as they might relate to the Calgary board of education's decision on whether or not this facility will be closed. I have been advised by the Minister of Learning that Knob Hill school is one of two facilities being considered for closure.

But I will say this, Mr. Speaker. Cochlear implants and their associated therapy, an intensive speech therapy which is required, are fully funded by Alberta Health and Wellness. The students who are at Knob Hill school who are in the midst of their therapy will continue to receive their therapy. What I am advised about this program is that intensive speech therapy is an integral part of receiving a cochlear implant, and my Department of Health and Wellness has been in touch with the health region to ensure that the needs of these students continue to be met. I don't know where though.

Mr. Lord: My second question, to the same minister: does the newly planned Children's hospital incorporate an auditory/verbal training classroom within their new premises?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, the details of the new Children's hospital are still in development, so it is too early to be able to say with certainty what facilities and programs it might house. Again, I will simply reiterate that the important needs of these students will continue to be met, but I cannot say with certainty at what facility they will be delivered.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lord: That's my final question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Woodland Caribou

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Woodland caribou populations have been threatened in Alberta since 1985, and there is still not adequate protection in the province. The government's own scientists state that if industrial activities continue, Alberta's

woodland caribou population will be threatened with extinction. While the Ministry of SRD initiated a woodland caribou recovery team, that is scheduled to deliver a recovery plan this year, industrial activity in caribou habitat continues unabated. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: does this ministry not see the contradiction in working towards the recovery of a species while it allows a core part of the woodland caribou's range to be significantly altered by forestry activities?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. Of course, like I always say, what the Liberals would do if they were the government is they'd close everything down, but we don't. In this area we have more responsibility than that.

We have to ensure that the economic development that happens in Alberta continues, because that's what makes Alberta strong. We have one of the best forest industries in North America, with thousands of people involved in that industry and the other industries, the oil and gas industry and the agriculture industry. We have a strong economy in Alberta. We have strong environment policies in place and wildlife management also. So we do maintain a balance, and you can be assured that this ministry will not neglect the responsibility of ensuring that the animals are protected while we develop and harvest the resources we need to develop.

Ms Carlson: Mr. Speaker, will the minister then call a stop to new industrial development in caribou habitat until caribou populations have been restored to historic levels?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, only the Liberals would stop everything in a situation like this. We don't do that. That's why we are the government. That is why we have a strong economy, a good environment, and good wildlife management, and we'll continue doing that.

Ms Carlson: Mr. Speaker, well, then, will the minister at least conduct an assessment on how much industrial development can continue while still maintaining a healthy caribou population?

Mr. Cardinal: Of course, Mr. Speaker, it's always a challenge to keep the balance, and you can be assured that we can do that. I am a resident of northern Alberta. I have been out there all my life, and that's a long time, and I know for a fact that we have a good balance at this time. I invite the member – and the member has probably never been in northern Alberta – to experience first-hand what is out there. I challenge her to come out there.

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

Natural Resource Revenues

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the enormous profits that oil and gas companies are making in this province have been widely reported. My constituents continue to ask if we're getting the value for their natural resources. My questions are for the Minister of Energy. What is the rate that Albertans get for their oil and gas from these companies, and are we giving away our natural resources to others?

Mr. Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, the question: is Alberta giving away its natural resources? The answer to that question is no. The answer to the question is absolutely not. Furthermore, the royalty system ensures that the people of Alberta, who do own this resource, receive a fair financial return.

Let me say, Mr. Speaker, just in terms of numbers, that between 2001 and 2003 for conventional oil, the oil that is now produced at a lesser rate than what comes from the oil sands, that rate averages at 16.75 to about 17 and three-quarters per cent. That continues to encourage conventional drilling, and it continues to encourage optimum development. For natural gas it's in the neighbourhood of 19.6 per cent to 20 per cent to a low of about 17 per cent. What we have found is that as we approach the end of this fiscal year, it looks very closely like the royalties of the last four years will equal the previous 10 years combined.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Are we getting the return for our natural resources compared to other producers of oil and gas such as Alaska or neighbouring provinces, and should we be reviewing our royalty structure?

The Speaker: Two questions. Take the first one please, minister.

Mr. Smith: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is an extremely good question. There is an international forum headed by Dr. Pedro Van Meurs and Daniel Johnston. They've rated Alberta as one of the toughest fiscal regimes in the world in terms of the high share of nonrenewable resource revenue received by government, and that's, I think, absolutely critical. I mean, if you take a look across the world at how organizations, countries, collect their royalties, we have a great deal of oil and gas, but it's in very small areas and in very diverse areas stretched over some 660,000 square miles. We have probably done the best job in the free world of developing an important resource for the benefit of Albertans.

Mrs. Ady: My last question is: is there benefit for us to be doing refining and upgrading in this province of those natural resources?

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, one of the great things that Edmonton depends on – Edmonton – is its refinery infrastructure. With the oil sands that refinery infrastructure will be around for the next 50 to 75 years.

If we can just take a second and talk about the forecasted production from the oil sands, yesterday the posting at the Edmonton Hardisty oil terminal was about \$52 Canadian per barrel – \$52 Canadian per barrel of oil. Today that posting is just under \$50, at \$49.83. Mr. Speaker, by 2017 it's estimated that we'll produce about 3 million barrels a day from the oil sands. Now, at \$50 a barrel and a \$10 lifting cost that delivers a 25 per cent royalty when the projects are paid out. That means that we get about \$30 million per day out of the oil sands. If you project that forward, that's very close to a billion dollars a month, and a billion dollars a month over 12 months puts \$12 billion a year in the hands of future Albertans. Are we giving away our resources? I don't think so.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there is a policy in the question period, if a member of Executive Council chooses to clarify an answer given earlier, to allow the member who raised the question to ask a supplementary question. I've received a request now from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry to rise on a point of clarification with respect to something that was said when he addressed a question. So if I do permit that, then it would only be right, not knowing what this clarification is going to be, to permit a member of Executive Council to make a comment as well.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Private/Public Partnerships for Hospital Construction

(continued)

Mr. Bonner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for this opportunity. I did neglect to mention the name of the report earlier in my questions. The name of the report was *Funding Hospital Infrastructure: Why P3s Don't Work, and What Will*. It was prepared by some very well-known people: Lewis Auerbach, Arthur Donner, Douglas D. Peters, Monica Townson, and Armine Yalnizyan. This was tabled in the House on November 26, 2003.* Thank you very much.

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, from the contents that the member used, it would almost sound like this came out of the Parkland Institute, and I'm just wondering if all of those people that he mentioned are part of the Parkland Institute. I guess it's not fair for me to ask the question, but . . .

The Speaker: No, it isn't fair, hon. minister. In this case you don't get to ask a question under that.

Hon. members, before we move on to the next item that the Clerk will call, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mr. Tannas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 23 bright and enthusiastic students from Edison school, which is located in my constituency of Highwood. They are accompanied today by teacher Mrs. Lonnie Antal; parents Ms Cindy Clark, Mrs. Barb Cameron, Mrs. Barb Murray, Mrs. Pearl Figol, Mr. Rick Festa, Mrs. Marcie Hamilton, Mrs. Elly Singer. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly 19 of Alberta's brightest and best students. They are from Saint John's School of Alberta in my constituency. The school is located near Genesee, Alberta. It's an all-boys school, and it's been visited quite often by Her Honour the Honourable Lieutenant Governor as she's had a relative that went to that school, and there have been some other famous people go through there. They are accompanied today by their headmaster, Keith McKay, and also their social studies teacher, Larry Sherwood. So I'd ask all 21 of them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**
Qui Tam Legislation

Mr. Lord: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about how Canadians and Albertans might take some proactive steps to avoid any of the scandals we now see unfolding within the federal government these past few months and how we could help ensure that nothing like that ever happens in Alberta. An ounce of prevention is always worth a pound of cure, and one of the best ideas that I have seen to prevent

such problems for government is called *qui tam* legislation.

Qui tam legislation is also known as whistle-blower reward legislation, and it is an innovative new approach to prevent fraud against the government. It has the great benefit of not costing the government any net dollars, it requires no new bureaucracies, nor does it suffer from some of the drawbacks associated with whistle-blower protection legislation, which can be problematic. I expect some people may be familiar with *qui tam* because it is now sweeping the United States and is an astounding success there.

Qui tam legislation was first initiated by the U.S. federal government in order to catch unethical suppliers selling shoddy goods at inflated prices to the government or to catch outright fraud through phoney invoicing, for example. It promptly recovered over \$5 billion that had been paid out to fraudulent suppliers, found money for the government that they didn't know they had, therefore providing windfall budget increases for government departments and helping keep taxes and deficits down. Since then 13 states have enacted *qui tam* legislation, and eight more are pending.

Initially opponents to this legislation state that there is no need for it. It was thought that there was little or no fraud occurring that the government accountants weren't already catching, and in the first year there were actually only 33 cases in the entire U.S. brought forward. Now, however, as word has spread, there have been 483 cases of major fraud reported. In California each case netted the state \$100 million in recovered funds. In fact, one case currently before California right now is actually looking at a potential \$2 billion recovery for fraud against the government. These are not small cases. In Florida the largest successful case to date, involving health care fraud, recovered for the state \$875 million, and that's in U.S. dollars.

Mr. Speaker, clearly it is time for *qui tam* legislation in Canada. The solution is before us. I urge this Assembly to start the process in Alberta and once again lead the way in Canada. Thank you.

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

Neglect of Infrastructure

Mr. Bonner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier stated yesterday that retiring the last of the province's \$3.7 billion debt in 2005, Alberta's centennial year, would be a wonderful legacy. However, the Premier will also leave another legacy, an appalling legacy of deteriorating roads, run-down schools, and neglected hospitals.

In the government's 10-year obsession to be debt free for its burn-the-mortgage party in 2005, it has racked up an immense infrastructure debt. The government would need to spend \$7 billion just to catch up on badly needed infrastructure projects it has ignored over the years. This backlog includes outstanding requests for infrastructure from health regions, school boards, postsecondary institutions, and government facilities.

The government's neglect of infrastructure affects the lives of all Albertans. A good government provides stable, predictable, and reliable funding for schools, roads, and hospitals, ensuring that infrastructure needs are met now and in the future. It is simply bad financial management to double up on the mortgage payments when the roof over our children's heads is leaking.

So while the government congratulates itself on making the last payment of the \$3.7 billion on the province's debt, I hope they remember that it was at a cost of withholding \$7 billion from schools, hospitals, and roads.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

*See p. 579, right col., para. 1, line 4

2:40

Great Kids Awards

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to stand and acknowledge the Great Kids awards program and the two recipients who live in West Yellowhead. Since 1999 the government has worked hard to recognize outstanding children throughout Alberta who day in and day out exemplify the best qualities of our province. To be eligible, a nominee must reside in Alberta, be five to 18 years of age, demonstrate considerable effort in school, contribute to their community through volunteer services, and contribute to the quality of home life by willingly assuming responsibilities within their family.

I am proud to say that the constituency of West Yellowhead has two young Albertans recognized this year. Mikyla Sherlow, age 8, of Jasper saved up her own allowance to buy books for children in the local hospital. Not only that; Mikyla helped organize a successful fundraising campaign to buy a new \$7,000 wheelchair for a local boy. Jayden Madsen, age 17, of Hinton is a musically talented honours student whose dedication to others is truly remarkable. Jayden worked all summer to pay for one year of education for an exchange student from Belarus whom his family had hosted previously and who could not afford to pay her own expenses.

This is just two examples, Mr. Speaker, of remarkable Albertans who even at such a young age exemplify the spirit of this province. I would like to congratulate Mikyla and Jayden on their awards and wish them all the very best in their future endeavours.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seniors' Programs

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I received a series of phone calls from seniors who complained about being badly treated in their meetings with Tory MLAs. At recent visits to seniors' residences in my constituency I heard the frustration felt by seniors whose pocketbooks are being picked by health care premiums, health user fees, and reductions in home care services.

Seniors are terrified that they will lose their homes because of unaffordable utility costs and lose their vehicles because of sky-high insurance premiums. This government robbed seniors of universal optical and dental care and reneged on a promise to not increase health care premiums. Perhaps worse, with almost no advance notice the government increased fees for long-term care facilities. The majority of the residents in such facilities are seniors, and even seniors who do not currently require such care are very conscious of the fact that they might have such a need in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge the Premier and the health minister to scrap health care premiums for seniors in next week's budget. This would be an important first step in scrapping premiums for all Albertans. Indeed, the government needs to go further and restore universal optical and dental benefits for seniors.

Ensuring dignity, respect, and good quality of life for Alberta seniors should be a priority for this government, but it's not. Instead, seniors are left feeling betrayed. They feel as if their hard work and lifetime of paying taxes and of building this province has been left by the wayside.

The unconscionable stress these financial burdens put on seniors and their families is tantamount to elder abuse, so it is no surprise that groups such as the Coalition of Seniors Advocates and Seniors United Now have begun challenging the government. I'm truly proud of their work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one petition here. I'm presenting this petition signed by 102 Alberta seniors petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to recognize and value the contributions and sacrifices the seniors have made in building the Province of Alberta, and treat them with due respect and dignity by reversing those policies that cause unnecessary financial hardship for them and undermine their quality of life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 3, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 100, 101, 102, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 159, 160, 162, 164, 165, 166, 167, and 168. Mr. Speaker, I can count higher, but I won't for today.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Bill 24**Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2004**

Mrs. Nelson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 24, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2004. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a first time]

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

Bill Pr. 1**St. Mary's College Amendment Act, 2004**

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to beg leave today to introduce for first reading Bill Pr. 1, the St. Mary's College Amendment Act, 2004.

This bill will be asking for natural powers to grant degrees, diplomas, and certificates for St. Mary's College as well as to change the name.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a first time]

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

Bill Pr. 2**Sisters of Charity of St. Louis of Medicine Hat Statutes Repeal Act**

Mr. Bonner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce

a bill being the Sisters of Charity of St. Louis of Medicine Hat Statutes Repeal Act.

The following act is repealed: An Act to Incorporate the Sisters of Charity of St. Louis of Medicine Hat.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a first time]

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

**Bill Pr. 3
Living Faith Bible College Act**

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill Pr. 3, Living Faith Bible College Act.

This bill will incorporate a private bible college that will be located near Caroline, Alberta. There's an entity currently operating as Living Faith Bible College, which has operated since 1971 by the Living Faith Evangelistic Association. Bill Pr. 3 will create an entity that is distinct from the Living Faith Evangelistic Association.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a letter dated March 16, 2004, from Andrew Sims, chair of the Compulsory Arbitration Board, to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment requesting that the deadline for the health authorities' and Alberta nurses' mediation negotiations be extended to June 15, 2004.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

2:50

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table for the information of all members of the Assembly a letter that I wrote today to the Information and Privacy Commissioner requesting some information or an update on Bill 22, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2004.

Thank you.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 7(5) I would ask that the Government House Leader share the projected government business for the week of March 22 to 25.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, March 22, 2004, at 9 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading Bill 24, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2004. For third reading Bill 17, Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2004; Bill 18, Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2004; Bill 19, the Public Trustee Act; and as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, March 23, 2004, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders it is anticipated that we may have the introduction

of two bills. They would be bills 25 and 26. The first would be with respect to the Teaching Profession Act, and the second would be with respect to the School Act. Both of those will go on notice this afternoon, and they may be introduced on Tuesday. In Committee of the Whole Bill 24, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2004; Bill 22, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2004. And third reading of bills 17, 18, 19, and 21, the Child Welfare Amendment Act, 2004; and as per the Order Paper. At 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for third reading bills 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, and 23, the Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2004.

On Wednesday in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for third reading Bill 24, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2004, the hon. Mrs. Nelson. Recognizing that it's the normal practice of the House to adjourn after question period for preparation of the House for the delivery of the budget at 3:30, we may ask the House to briefly consider Bill 24 before adjourning or, indeed, deal with it at 8 p.m. In any event, we would ask to adjourn at 3:15 for the delivery of the budget under Government Motion 13, to approve the fiscal policies of the government. At 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders we'll deal with Government Motion 14, the main estimates referral to the Committee of Supply; third reading of the appropriation act, if not dealt with in the afternoon; second reading of bills 25 and 26, if available; and third readings as per the Order Paper.

Thursday, March 25, 2004, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders consideration of Government Motion 14, the main estimates motion, if not done on Wednesday evening, and then consideration of Government Motion 13, approval of the fiscal policies of the government. We would anticipate that at that time the Interim Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the third party would respond to the Budget Address. Thereafter, third readings as per the Order Paper.

head: **Orders of the Day**

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

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

[Adjourned debate March 16: Dr. Pannu]

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 22, Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2004. It is time that we started some form of reform in this Assembly about how elections are run and organized, and I'm happy to see this bill coming forward at this time. Certainly, there are some parts of the bill that I like quite a bit and some that I'm not quite so fond of, although, generally speaking, I think that it does make some progress in some areas that we will support, and subsequently we'll likely support the entire bill.

Some of the parts that I like about the act are in section 3, where the Chief Electoral Officer is required to take an oath of office and to be impartial and not disclose any information. I'm surprised that this wasn't something already in the act. It seems to me just good common sense that that person does that, as all of us have and all of our staff have in our offices, because of course in dealing with elections, there are always some confidential pieces of information that come before them that need to be treated as such. So I think that that's a good part to have in there.

Section 17 talks about clarifying the right of access for enumerators. It deals particularly with apartments and condos and other

multiple-residence buildings. It just means that the enumerators will have access to these buildings to enumerate. We all know that access to these buildings during a writ period, pre writ, or for the enumerators – we have a very difficult time getting into some of the buildings. Even when you take a photocopy of the piece of legislation that entitles you by law to enter, we particularly find ourselves blocked time and time again from that kind of access. The same goes for the enumerators.

I find that it isn't as hard to get into the high-rises as it is to get into the walk-up apartments. Often the residential managers have jobs, so they are not always available, and then they are not at all interested in whatever piece of paper you put under their nose. They'll arbitrarily decide whether you can have access or not. So whatever we can do to share that information and to ensure that anyone who needs access to those buildings can in fact get it is a good thing because it is a big problem now.

At least in buildings where you can get in the front door, you can often leave some piece of information in the lobby, if you can't gain access to the apartment manager, via their mailbox or the collecting point they have for unaddressed mail. But in many areas of the city, including my own riding, there are a number of walk-up apartments that have the buzzer system on the outside of the doors and the mailboxes on the inside of the first set of security doors. You just literally have to repeatedly come back and try and find a time when those people are in residence and answer their buzzers. So it's an ongoing problem and certainly a problem for enumerators as much as it is for politicians and their teams.

Section 43 allows each of the candidates to have scrutineers at the registration officer's station while the electors are being sworn in. From our perspective this will allow candidates to raise objections to people who are being enrolled. Now, traditionally that hasn't been a really big problem for me in elections, although we certainly did at one time find someone who had voted more than once, but it is an issue. We need to tighten up the rules in that regard, and I'm glad that this particular piece has been put in here.

Section 63 deals with access for individual candidates who are campaigning in multidwelling units. This is the same argument that I had in section 17. We see this always as an issue. It's going to be an issue again even with this piece of legislation in there, but hopefully we can try and see if this doesn't speed up the process. So I'm glad to see this in here.

Section 94 talks about the candidate not being able to be appointed as a chief financial officer during a campaign period. I have no idea why any candidate would want to also be their own chief financial officer. It seems a completely insane parameter to work within. But I definitely believe that they should not be, and I'm certainly supportive of this piece of the legislation that's come in.

One of the parts of the act that I don't like quite as much, Mr. Speaker, would be section 34, that talks about increasing the amount that a candidate has to pay in order to become a registered candidate. It goes from \$200 to \$500. Well, to most of us that is not a large sum of money. There are certainly some people and some parties who would find that to be onerous, particularly when they have no expectation of getting their money back at the end of the election.

In our first past the post system, which I find not to be a very democratic system, we have to encourage as many people and as many parties as we can to be involved in the electoral process. So even those with little access to funds should be entitled to put their name on the ballot and to be heard and to have their views heard and to have their supporters have someone on the ballot to vote for.

3:00

This is part of this section that I don't like, and it doesn't wash for

me when you make the argument that we have to look at some form of cost recovery. We all know that \$500 is a drop in the bucket when it comes to the amount of dollars involved in organizing elections and that the costs of adding one name to ballots and to information pieces is really neither here nor there when it comes to registrations.

I have heard the argument that people want the dollars increased so that you just have serious candidates at the table, but I say: what's wrong with having candidates who aren't so serious? They are the ones that often bring up the most interesting issues during a campaign and stimulate good debate, and that's really what we're looking for in campaigns, I believe. So I certainly encourage people from parties like the Rhinoceros Party and some individuals . . .

Mr. Bonner: The Green Party.

Ms Carlson: Well, I like a lot of the Green Party policies, so I don't see them as a fringe party. I support what they're doing even though I know their funds are limited. They have something to say, Mr. Speaker, and they have as much right as any of the rest of us to say it. So I don't like that part.

Section 56 talks about allowing a returning officer to appoint "additional electors to assist in counting the votes from the advance poll." Now, I think I understand why they're doing this. In recent years we've seen larger numbers of people vote at the advance poll, so it takes some time to count them, and often that's the last poll that's reported on election night. But I don't like the idea at all of them being able to appoint people. I think that is a decision that needs to be made prior to the writ being dropped because once again it's an area where there could at least be perceived abuses in the process, so I don't like it.

I wish that this piece was not in here worded like this. If they need additional staff, then that has to be dealt with in another way, not just give them the arbitrary ability to appoint additional electors to assist them. So I'm hoping that we see some amendment to that at some point in time in this Assembly.

Section 89 talks about the transfer of election money held in trust for a party or candidate, and it talks there about if there is no registered party, no registered constituency association, or registered candidate, the Crown can annex the funds. Well, I haven't heard a satisfactory reason for that happening, and I certainly hope that I do, Mr. Speaker, because as it stands, it doesn't sound to me like a very good idea. I particularly wonder how this affects independent candidates who may be running. So I'm hoping that at some point we get an explanation for that.

Section 90 talks about increasing the donation limits to a registered constituency association by \$250, in aggregate totals to registered constituency associations by \$1,250, \$500 for individual candidates, and \$2,500 for aggregate amounts to registered candidates. Our policy on democratic renewal objects to the increasing of donation powers for corporations and unions.

On a personal note I have to say that that actually increases my ability to raise money because, being in opposition, many companies and many individuals don't want to hit the list, Mr. Speaker. So they'll ask me specifically what the limit is where they're listed, and they'll give me \$1 or \$5 less than that. I think it's the wrong way to run elections, but it's the way that it happens out there. While I don't like that particular section, it actually helps people who are not in government to raise funds. So by doing that, it makes the process more democratic.

Section 91 I think is unusual because it considers the price paid at a fundraising event in excess of the market value to be considered a contribution. This is falling in line with some of the changes we've

seen at the federal level for how much you can contribute. I don't mind seeing this at all. However, it does make it a little harder for corporations to make contributions in a year, particularly an election year. I don't think that's a bad thing. I think that that's probably a good thing, and I guess we're going to see how this plays out. I wouldn't mind hearing the minister talk about that and respond as to why this has been put in there.

I think the last question I really have is the part in section 8 that talks about establishing the new permanent identifier numbers. On the one hand, that has a bit of a Big Brother concept to me. You know, we've got a social insurance card number, we've got a driver's licence card number, and now we're going to have a voter number. So I'm wondering if that's a very good idea.

It looks to me like this is a set-up for the government to move to some sort of electronic form of voting. I wish that before they would go there, we would have a more open debate on how we should handle elections in the future with the people of this province.

There is no doubt that people are busier and busier. We find this on election days. It's harder to access people by telephone or at the doors. It's harder to get them out to vote, because while in theory people are supposed to have time off from work to vote, it doesn't happen in practice.

We see people trying to squeeze in their voting between taking the kids to school, getting to work, buying the groceries, organizing the soccer and hockey and other recreational activities of their kids, and running in to mark their ballot one minute before 8 o'clock. Some of them are not getting there at all, or some of them, walking in and seeing the long lineups, say, "I really don't have time for this," and they just leave, and they don't vote.

As we see over time, the voting percentage is dropping across the country, particularly in the younger crowd. [interjection] Well, no. In fact, we're seeing the numbers in many cases increase for Liberals, in opposition to what the Minister of Economic Development has just said. So that's not my biggest concern. I have a greater concern with how we ensure that everyone who wishes to enjoy their franchise can do so. I think that's part of a larger debate that we should be having before we start to see legislation being changed.

It may be that electronic voting or some other form of participation in the democratic process is the way to go in the future, but I don't think that it's up to any government to arbitrarily decide that. In the absence of having had that discussion, I am quite opposed to being assigned a particular voting number.

I want to know what that information is being used for. Now it's secret. When you're assigned a number, then people know whether or not you've voted, and I want to know how that information will be handled, how you can protect the confidentiality of it, and what the expectations are for the future. It's far too early, I think, for us to have been considering that kind of participation for voters.

So I think with that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and see what kind of responses we get from the government. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) provides for a five-minute question and comment period should any hon. member choose to exercise this option. The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On the Standing Order 29?

Mr. Renner: Yes. I'd like to ask the member to comment on a situation that I think we've all experienced. She made comment about the importance of candidates having access to apartment

buildings and trailer parks and such, and I couldn't agree more. The concern that I think I have and others have is not so much: do candidates have access, but are the residents aware that candidates have access? It doesn't do you much good to have access and you're unwelcome at the door because no one realized that you're supposed to have access. How would the member suggest that that might be rectified?

Ms Carlson: Mr. Speaker, yeah, that's a very good question. I've often thought about what would help that process in terms of educating voters on what the rights are. I think that it would be something important for the government to take a look at in terms of a pre-election advertising campaign at all levels – federal, provincial, and municipal – so that people are aware of what their roles, their responsibilities are and what the undertakings are for all of us to be a part of the democratic process.

I'm certainly thinking that that's an interesting question for debate in this House and that between all of us we could come up with some very great solutions.

3:10

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I assume that when the hon. member said that it would be a good idea for the government to undertake an advertising campaign, she actually meant the Chief Electoral Officer given that we're talking about an election campaign.

But my question to the hon. member is: if she were to be assured that there have been no discussions that I'm aware of as the promoter of the bill with respect to going to electronic voting and that the concept of the unique identifier number was put forward by the Chief Electoral Officer solely as a method of ensuring the accuracy of the lists so that you could differentiate between Mike Smith Sr., for example, and Mike Smith Jr. – I'm making those names up – at a given residence and know which one was moving where and could track those people so that you were always able to be sure you had the right people and that that unique identifier number was for the sole use of the Chief Electoral Officer in doing so and I believe even in the act not to be made public but to be a private identifier number and also to use interchangeably, for example, with other sources of data relative to the name . . . [interjections] It's a question and comment period I believe, and they can take it as a comment if they want.

If she were assured that that was the indicator, would she have some more comfort with the concept of a unique identifier number?

Ms Carlson: Mr. Speaker, I just love it when I get to answer a question. The answer would be, yes, that does help. I was looking for some qualifiers, but I would also like to point out that it's a very slippery slope, and it's something that we have to keep an eye on because today it's to track those people in that fashion, and tomorrow we have to wonder what it could be.

I really appreciate the answer, and that helps with my concerns.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. We're still in the question and comment section, hon. member.

Dr. Massey: Oh. I'm sorry.

The Speaker: No additional members wishing to participate? Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity

to make a few observations about Bill 22, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2004. There has been some concern expressed about section 63, the right of access for campaigning. I, like all other candidates in the House, have experienced that difficulty of getting into some units even if you do have the appropriate documentation. But I think this maybe needs a harder look.

We have a senior citizens home in our constituency. One of the candidates last election appeared at the residence with the documentation and a couple of workers with him and proceeded to thunder through the residence, knocking on doors and in general disturbing and frightening those residents. Many of them are in those homes because they are dependent on others, and it was a major disturbance in the residence.

I know it's difficult to deal with, but I wonder if there isn't a need for some provision for residences like that where there could be a central meeting place set up and people informed. It just seems that allowing free access to that building was really not in the best interests of the voters.

So as sympathetic as I am to section 63 and the need for candidates to get into multiple-family dwellings, I really think there has to be some caveat and some sensitivity to residences where there are seniors who have gone into those residences because they want privacy. They don't want to be disturbed and find themselves upset by some overenthusiastic candidate and campaign workers. As much as I support and think that section 63 is important, I think it needs to be applied with some good common sense and some sensitivity on the part of the candidates.

Section 90, the section that deals with finance, Mr. Speaker, I think is important. The increases that are being proposed are modest increases. One of the things that I think we've been extremely fortunate with is that you can run for political office, you can run for this Legislature and be successful without requiring huge, huge fundraising efforts. You can run a campaign for \$18,000, \$20,000 and be successful.

I think that it's important that that be able to happen, that we don't go down the road that our counterparts to the south have gone where fundraising becomes sort of the major activity of the candidate before and during the election. The cost of running for public office in some cases has become so high that people are discouraged from seeking office.

As I said, I think that we've been fortunate here in keeping the lid on costs and making sure that those who want to run for the Legislature or for municipal office can do so without having to spend an inordinate amount of time trying to raise money or trying to raise sums that just seem inappropriate for someone seeking public office.

I'm pleased that they're there, and I thank the minister for pointing out to me that the limits for candidates and for constituency associations have been raised, but the amount that may be donated to a party, \$15,000, remains the same. That hasn't been changed in this particular section of the bill.

The other section that I wanted to mention, Mr. Speaker, was section 34, where they struck out \$200 and replaced that with \$500, the amount that registered candidates have to put up before they can run. I can't help but think that this is a backward movement. I think that we have to make it as easy as possible for people to run for public office. Many candidates run knowing that they don't have much chance for success. I'm not sure that we should be putting this kind of a barrier in front of those individuals, who I think, as the previous speaker indicated, sometimes bring a different perspective to campaigns, in my view a welcome perspective. It seemed to me that \$200 was an appropriate sum for candidates to put up.

There are a number of other issues in the act. I think most of us agree, Mr. Speaker, that it improves the electoral process in the

province, and for that I think the government deserves credit. There are some sections, and I think I've indicated a couple of them, that I have some questions about, but we're pleased to support the bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:20

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

Then we'll proceed to the next speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Mr. Bonner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to speak to Bill 22, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, 2004, this afternoon. Certainly, for the most part I think this is a good bill. It makes required housekeeping changes to the act and certainly will make the whole process of elections run smoother and clarify some areas.

Now, one of the areas that this particular bill deals with is access to multi-unit dwellings. As other speakers today have already said, this is a difficult situation. In Edmonton-Glengarry we have a number of walk-up apartments where you don't have access. You have to ring for access, and on many occasions when you go by, it's very difficult to get in there, first of all, when nobody is home and the caretaker isn't in, and secondly, if they are in and they deny you access. Then certainly you don't get the opportunity to show them any identification that you are a candidate and, as well, speak with them on how we are allowed access to those buildings. So this is one area that I think is addressed in this particular bill, and it is a good change and, hopefully, will make access to those multi-unit dwellings much easier.

It also addresses some very important issues such as better scrutiny of elections. After my experiences in the last election I certainly welcome these changes. During the last election when we were phoning some constituents, they were indicating that they thought they'd already voted, yet they didn't really think they had. We asked them why, and it was because somebody had come by with a special ballot that they had signed, but they couldn't remember whether or not they had written in the name of a person or a party or what had happened from that point of view.

We certainly brought this to the attention of the returning officer. It was quite interesting when our scrutineer was there and that particular ballot box was opened. The deputy returning officer that was in charge of that box certainly indicated right off the bat that there were somewhere in the neighbourhood of 12 ballots that were all filled in with the same handwriting. As well, he continued to empty that box and again found another pack of ballots all filled in with the same handwriting.

Even after the election was complete – and because it was a very close race, we did have an official count – there were some concerns brought to the Chief Electoral Officer by sons of a constituent whose father had experienced the same type of thing and had really not ever indicated which candidate he was voting for, yet his ballot had been taken. When we are looking at special ballots, I think that this bill will help address some of the concerns that I had in this particular case.

As well, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar today tabled a letter that he was forwarding to the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and again this was dealing particularly with section 8(c) and (d), which allows the Chief Electoral Officer to assign unique and permanent identification numbers to electors. Again, I do have some concerns, along with other members in our caucus, regarding this particular practice. It would appear to me that this certainly is a precursor to electronic voting and that we are preparing the way.

I have some concerns when it comes to electronic voting, as we all do. I think just the recent increases in the number of thefts from people that have bank cards and are having their PIN number swiped and then the thief using those PIN numbers to withdraw money from their account. Again, if we are looking at this whole idea of electronic voting down the line, I think that we have to have some very, very stringent controls on how these numbers are issued so that they don't fall into the wrong hands and people are having votes registered when they're in Hawaii and have no idea that they are voting.

As well, I think what we also have to do, Mr. Speaker, if we are going to electronic voting is think of that segment of our population that today will not use an automatic teller or banking machine, for example, just because it's too confusing for them. These are the same people that if they go, for example, for a test on their competency as a driver – some insurance companies are requesting this now, and there is a company that does that type of service here in Edmonton – these seniors get very confused when they have to have their reflexes tested on a machine, and they find the whole process very confusing.

So I would hope that in this whole process, if we do go to electronic voting, there will also be some opportunity where seniors who certainly have no desire to work with computers or to use them would have a very accessible, easy type of situation where they can vote as they always have.

As well, many Albertans have deep concerns when it comes to their protection of confidentiality in regard to electronic information and how we've had too many examples of where this information has fallen into the hands of the public, whether it be by hard drives that were not properly erased or break-ins at companies or establishments that have this type of information on-line, and with a theft certainly all this confidential personal information can fall into the wrong hands.

So those are some of my concerns with Bill 22, Mr. Speaker. Overall, as I say, I think it's a very good bill, and it will certainly improve the voting process that we do have in the province. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, should hon. members choose to participate.

Then back to the debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
 Third Reading
 Bill 17
 Agricultural Operation Practices
 Amendment Act, 2004

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc.

Mr. Klapstein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to stand today and move third reading of Bill 17, the Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2004.

Last spring the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, responsible for the act, requested that a government steering committee conduct a review of AOPA. It was my pleasure to chair the steering committee that conducted the review of AOPA with key stakeholders between May and November of 2003. These amendments will provide further clarity for technical and policy changes to the way the Natural Resources Conservation Board regulates confined feeding operations in Alberta. This includes further

clarification of regulating manure management standards for all operations and compliance monitoring and enforcement of province-wide standards.

3:30

The changes proposed in this bill make it easier for operators to make changes to their operations as long as the changes are environmentally responsible. At the same time, the roles and responsibilities of the Natural Resources Conservation Board and the municipalities with regard to confined feeding operations are more clearly defined.

I encourage all members of the Assembly to support Bill 17 in third reading.

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

Ms Carlson: Thank you. I'm happy to have one last opportunity to speak to this bill. We did a fairly intensive review of it yesterday in Committee of the Whole, and I have to say that I was quite disappointed that none of our amendments were accepted by the government. We didn't make those amendments up, Mr. Speaker. They came from stakeholders across the province who were very interested in seeing this particular piece of legislation strengthened and very much looked to having greater protection for people who live in surrounding areas. That was the intent of the amendments that we had brought in and that were subsequently defeated.

There are many people who, while they support intensive livestock operations, or confined feeding operations, in this province, are very concerned about the health impact and the environmental impact in the regions and to those directly affected. The greatest debate we had here over the amendments was who, in fact, was directly affected. The government and the sponsor of the bill say that only those parties within half a mile of the operation can be so considered.

We're putting forward a case that people up to two miles away should be considered to be directly affected. I stand by that position, Mr. Speaker, as a result of having visited many of the operations and as a result of having talked to many people who live in those communities. So we are hoping that at some point in the future that particular position will be revisited.

So we're torn in terms of whether or not we should support this particular bill. There are many members of my caucus who don't like it and who will be voting against it. Thank you.

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

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make a few concluding remarks as well on the bill. For some of the people I heard from, I think some of their complaints were as much regarding what wasn't in the bill as what was in the bill. Some of the things that they told me related to the grandfathering of existing operations and that there's no mechanism to bring those bad operations into compliance in the future or even phase them in, that there should be, or look at this in the future, some type of mechanism of bringing all operations up to a reasonable standard, especially those that are causing environmental concerns and unnecessary nuisances.

One of the things I'd like to also say is about what's not in there, comparable administrative penalties similar to what's found in the Public Lands Act and the Forest Reserves Act that could be applied by field people to bring enforcement up to par and give properly trained personnel in the field the authority to eliminate some problems by having the power to enforce. Giving the NRCB more power or more discretion if it's in the field of enforcement I would support, but at the present time they haven't totally earned the trust

of Albertans across the province in the way they have enforced the act to date. Whether it's due to improper training or not having the will to do it, I'm not sure. But this is something that I would encourage the member and the minister to look at in the future and do whatever we can in regulations to achieve that.

So with that, I'll take my seat.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for five minutes. Comments or questions to the last speaker?

The hon. Member for Leduc to close the debate.

Mr. Klapstein: No. I'd just ask that the question be put.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a third time]

Bill 18

Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2004

The Speaker: We need someone to move this bill. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move Bill 18, the Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2004, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice at third reading.

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

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 18. It's a good bill. I think that many of us, most of us, I'd even dare say that all of us deal in our constituency office day after day with people who are having difficulty with securing the maintenance payments that they rightly deserve, and usually the people who suffer from that are children.

So a number of proposed changes, and I think that at third reading it's useful to look back at just some of the broad strokes, the kinds of things that the bill does. It specifies what's going to happen with lottery winnings over a thousand dollars. They're to go to support the family of a debtor who has maintenance arrears. That, I suspect, is not going to happen very often, Mr. Speaker, but again the message is clear that maintenance payments are to be seriously addressed and not to be taken lightly.

There's a section now that will restrict the fishing and hunting licences. There's already a provision for restricting drivers' licences, but this will broaden the sanctions that can be brought to bear to encourage debtors to live up to their obligations.

There's some provision for protecting individuals from liability, and the bill now protects the maintenance enforcement program from being found liable for decisions made in good faith or for delays in processing documents. That seems to be a logical move, Mr. Speaker, that there should be protection for the maintenance enforcement program from that kind of action, and the new bill provides that they won't be liable for action to be taken against them.

There are provisions with respect to reciprocal agreements. This is often a difficulty as people, individuals move from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. This, again, will not allow people to escape from their obligations simply by moving.

There are provisions with respect to releasing information and who the information can be shared with. This bill will allow the maintenance enforcement program to co-operate with police to promote public and client safety, and that's an important concern, Mr. Speaker, for many of the people that are involved in these programs. The situations that arose for them to be in the position of receiving payments are often ones where there's been great animos-

ity and conflict, and I think this is a good provision with respect to police and allowing more information to be shared in the interests of those who are seeking payments.

3:40

The provisions with respect to garnishees have been broadened and made more efficient by having a central information place for Treasury Branches and credit unions so that it's clear where those payments are to be made or, if there's a garnishee, where it may be served.

There are provisions, Mr. Speaker, that affect deterrent fees. The maintenance program can but doesn't at the present time charge service fees and charge chronic debtors for costs of enforcement. It's a change in that provision that I think is a good change. The MLA review committee recommended that debtors bear the costs that arise from their default, and those fees will encourage debtors to keep payments. Of course, that's the thrust of many of the provisions of the act, that everything is being done, that every kind of pressure and force is being exerted to make sure that individuals who have obligations under this legislation live up to those obligations.

There are other provisions with respect to making inquiries, voluntary support deductions, the jurisdictions of the courts, and promoting financial disclosure, again, Mr. Speaker, all of those provisions designed to make sure that the maintenance enforcement program works and that the families that depend upon that support and really suffer if they don't get it are more likely to be paid.

So we're pleased to support the bill, Mr. Speaker, at third reading. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a third time]

Bill 23

Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2004

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to third reading of Bill 23, the Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2004, and also to move it at third reading stage of this particular process.

As has previously been mentioned in the House, the proposed amendments in this bill will align legislation with the government's recent decision to eliminate Alberta's aviation fuel tax on eligible international passenger and cargo flights. Bill 23 also includes a number of significant administrative changes. I think we're all well aware of the impact of these decisions and the need for a bill like this to round out all of those previous decisions in a very formal way, so to speak.

Mr. Speaker, amendments in this bill were a collaborative effort, in fact, between the ministries of Revenue, Finance, Economic Development, and Transportation. I wish to thank all of those ministers and their staff and all members in their departments for their contributions. Given that there were no further points raised during the discussion when this came up during Committee of the Whole, I'm hoping that this particular stage of debate will see equal support for this bill.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bonner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to add a few comments on Bill 23, the Fuel Tax Amendment Act, 2004. It certainly was a welcome announcement for many different reasons when the government decided to eliminate the 1.5 cents per litre aviation fuel tax on international passenger and cargo flights, including flights to the United States.

This abolishment came into effect on March 1 of this year, and certainly the initiative is going to help attract more flights to Alberta from outside the country. This has many spinoffs not only for people travelling here for tourism, but I think it's also something that will be welcome considering the increase of the Canadian dollar in comparison to the U.S. dollar. That was also giving us other spinoffs as well, such as the Oilers have just announced or are thinking of announcing that they will drop ticket prices next year, and that would be a first in pro sports.

Eliminating this tax, Mr. Speaker, allows Alberta's two international airports to compete on a more level playing field with other jurisdictions. While Alberta's aviation fuel tax is competitive within Canada, it does not compare favourably to tax levels in the U.S., Europe, or Asia Pacific markets. So the elimination of the aviation fuel tax will result in an annual loss of \$3 million in provincial revenue. At the time of the announcement the Revenue minister said that the province is also considering reducing the domestic fuel tax on aviation fuel, worth another \$9 million annually. Certainly, I hope that these will increase air traffic in Canada.

With Bill 23, Mr. Speaker, there certainly isn't anything contentious, and I can only see that there will be many benefits as a result of this bill, such things as I mentioned earlier: creating beneficial economic activity and, certainly, the jobs that are created around it.

This legislation also, Mr. Speaker, will bring us into line with other jurisdictions that do not charge aviation fuel taxes on international flights. In most U.S. states air carriers providing international

services are either exempt or eligible for a full refund on fuel taxes. B.C. offers cargo shippers a refund on fuel taxes for international flights, and the U.S., Quebec, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland have exempted taxes on all international flights.

This is a change that is welcome. It is a change that has been lobbied hard for by the Calgary Airport Authority. I certainly welcome the legislation, and I would urge all members of the Assembly to support it. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a third time]

3:50

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a very productive week, and we've gotten through the agenda as much as we had hoped to get through, and I understand that there may be another snowstorm coming. That's what the forecast is. That being the case, I know that all hon. members will be anxious to get out to their own constituencies to do the important work that we do on behalf of all Albertans, and therefore I would move that we now call it 5:30 and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday next.

[Motion carried; at 3:51 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

