

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 10, 2004** **8:00 p.m.**
 Date: 2004/05/10
 [Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**
Legal Drinking Age

508. Mr. McFarland moved:
 Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to raise the legal drinking age in Alberta to 19, as is the current requirement in the neighbouring provinces of British Columbia and Saskatchewan.

[Debate adjourned May 3: Mr. Maskell speaking]

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

Mr. Maskell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to say that I believe this government should take a serious look at raising the legal drinking age as part of its strategy. I believe that raising the drinking age would fit in well with other initiatives designed to prevent drinking and driving not only by youth but also as a whole. Also, I believe that having an age that is consistent with what our neighbours are doing would further reduce the number of drunk drivers on our collective roadways.

I would like to once again thank the Member for Little Bow for putting forth this interesting idea and thus allowing us the opportunity to speak to this issue.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow to close debate.

Mr. McFarland: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I just want to very briefly thank everyone who has taken part in the debate. I wanted to thank the Member for Calgary-Bow, who, I think, made a very important distinction, one that kind of counters the arguments that I've had, and that being: if you're old enough to vote and go to war and enter into a contract at 18, why shouldn't you be allowed to drink? The Member for Calgary-Bow enunciated it very well when she reminded us that things like drinking, things like driving, are not rights; they're privileges and subject to arbitrary dates and different ages.

I will refer everyone to maybe an old adage. It's a toast, Mr. Speaker, that some people after they had had a few used to say, and it went like this: I drink to you because I love you, my steadiness to improve; last night I got so steady, I couldn't even move.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that has always been meant in jest, when you're having a good time sitting around the bar, but I do really hope and I honestly want young people especially to not end up being the literal stiff. Be careful. I do accept that there are many, many of the young folks that I'm trying to appeal to here with this motion that are very responsible, but I still think this one small step would very much supplement some of the other regulations and laws that we currently have in place.

I thank you for the opportunity of being able to present this to the Assembly. I'd like to call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 508 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:03 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Hlady	Mar
Bonner	Jablonski	Marz
Cao	Jacobs	Maskell
Cardinal	Johnson	McFarland
Coutts	Jonson	Nelson
Danyluk	Klapstein	O'Neill
DeLong	Kryczka	VanderBurg
Doerksen	Lord	Yankowsky
Evans	MacDonald	

Against the motion:

Amery	Graham	Pham
Ducharme	Graydon	Snelgrove
Dunford	Griffiths	Stevens
Fritz	Knight	Tarchuk
Gordon	Lukaszk	Zwozdesky
Goudreau		

Totals: For – 26 Against – 16

[Motion Other than Government Motion 508 carried]

Complementary and Alternative Medicine

509. Ms Graham moved:
 Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to take measures to establish a dedicated fund for the purpose of conducting research to develop scientifically credible information about the safety and effectiveness of complementary and alternative medicine, CAM, that will assist health care professionals, health policy-makers, and the public in making informed decisions.

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

Ms Graham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this evening to rise and speak to Motion 509, which I am sponsoring. I am going to use the acronym CAM, standing for complementary and alternative medicine, just to shorten things.

Before I talk about the purpose and intent of this motion, I would like to describe what is included in CAM, and this will not be an exhaustive list. Generally speaking, CAM therapies are divided into five categories including alternative medical systems such as homeopathic medicine and naturopathic medicine, which I am sure we are all familiar with.

The second category is mind/body interventions of the like of meditation, prayer, mental healing, yoga, as examples.

The third category is biologically based therapies, which include substances found in nature such as herbs, foods, and vitamins. Some examples include dietary supplements, herbal products, and the use of other so-called natural but as yet unproven therapies; for example, using shark cartilage to treat cancer.

The fourth category is manipulative and body-based methods, which include chiropractic, osteopathic manipulation, and massage.

The fifth category, energy therapies, involves the use of energy fields, and they includes such things as reiki, therapeutic touch, and chi gung, which are probably areas that are familiar to members.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I would then like to answer why I have brought this motion, and it is because currently there is very little scientific evidence existing to evaluate CAM therapies. For the most part, there are very key questions that have yet to be answered through well-designed scientific studies, questions such as whether these therapies are safe and whether they actually work for the diseases or medical conditions for which they are used.

The big problem underpinning this lack of scientific evidence, Mr. Speaker, is that public funders of medical research tend not to fund this type of research, so there's no body of scientific knowledge existing.

8:20

Just by way of background, Mr. Speaker, in Canada our Canadian government does provide some funding for research into the effectiveness and safety of natural health products, a whole \$1 million for the country, but it does not specifically earmark any funds for research into the effectiveness and safety of CAM therapies, and that's primarily what I am aiming at.

Some of the reasons that might exist for this reluctance of funding organizations to give money to alternative medicine research is that there is the difficulty for CAM researchers to compete with researchers who have an established publication and funding track record in conventional medical research, and these are the kinds of researchers that the CAM researchers are up against when promoting their projects. There are also difficulties meeting the standards of conventional medical research in the CAM setting. So this is the reason for my motion, Mr. Speaker.

We need a designated research fund devoted to CAM therapies to provide a necessary kick-start or a leg up for these CAM research projects so that we can see develop a reliable body of knowledge to help ascertain the usefulness and safety of a wide range of CAM products and therapies that are already in use.

Mr. Speaker, you might ask: who will be assisted by this research? Well, it will be Albertans like you and me. There are different estimates existing as to the numbers of Canadians that actually use CAM therapies, and it is suggested as a result of some surveys that have been done in this area that approximately 21 million Canadians are using CAM therapies and that we spend, it is estimated, as Canadians some \$2.4 billion per year compared to Americans, whose population is much, much bigger than ours, spending \$2.7 billion U.S. So this means that per CAM user Canadians spend over five times more on CAM than do their American counterparts and over 12 times more than Australian users, as an example.

While Canada has the largest proportion of CAM users and spends more per capita than any other western nation, CAM in Canada has developed largely without official government support or sanction. Mr. Speaker, I think this is quite remarkable considering how technologically and scientifically oriented our society is now, that we as Canadians in the absence of hard scientific evidence do go ahead and use these therapies, but maybe that's because they really do work and we receive messages from our friends and relatives on an anecdotal basis, or maybe we just intuitively know that they work. But the evidence does not exist in significant amounts to really support our decisions. I think it's also remarkable that policy-makers, of which we are a part, aren't apparently concerned about this when we are faced with the knowledge that so many people are using these therapies.

So I can only think, Mr. Speaker, that with the creation of a fund such as I am suggesting, resulting in good scientific evidence to support the effectiveness and efficiency of these therapies, this can only support the health and well-being of Albertans in a very positive way.

Obviously, another group that will benefit from this research will be policy-makers like ourselves in health care, either elected or those that work in the bureaucracy, and this is particularly important in view of the tremendous pressures on our health care system in Alberta and elsewhere to be more effective and efficient. We've heard many times from our minister of health that costs are rising in the health care system 8 to 10 per cent per year while revenues are averaging 4 per cent, and even with the increases that we provide in the health care budget, we're still not keeping pace with the costs.

I do believe, Mr. Speaker, that there's a great potential for cost savings to our health system if we incorporate these CAM therapies to in some cases replace traditional medicine therapies or to support them. I think it does behoove government to start paying attention to the high usage and the fact that people are gravitating to these therapies, and we must investigate them by funding research. So it's in the public interest that we do this both from a health perspective and from a cost-savings perspective.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that ultimately what makes sense is integrative medicine, integrating conventional medicine with CAM therapies. We shouldn't use either one to the exclusion of the other, but we should use what makes sense in the particular situation for the particular patient.

I will conclude my remarks later.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's a pleasure at this time to participate in the debate on Motion 509, and certainly it is an interesting proposal. The hon. member talked about the changes that are occurring in health care, and we have to always be mindful of the public interest, the public safety, and certainly consumer protection when we're talking about alternative medicines and different health practices.

There are cases where this has not happened, and with some of the remedies that one can find on the Internet, I think this is a very good idea. Some of the remedies and some of the snake oil salespeople who are peddling these remedies on the Internet have to be controlled. I'm not saying that this is the way to do it, but it is reason enough to support this motion.

There seems to be a need for more scientifically credible information on complementary and alternative medicines, CAM, as the hon. member has said, but the friends that we have south of the border put this idea through Congress six years ago. The Americans have the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, that is charged with exploring complementary and alternative healing practices within the scope of science. There does not appear to be an equivalent centre or institute in Canada, and perhaps there is need for one.

Now, a great deal of discussion is currently occurring on the issue of health care and health care reform. It's going on in this province, perhaps not on the floor of this Legislative Assembly as it should be, but it's certainly going on in the province. It is the number one issue of debate, and it should be. For reasons unknown to this member the notion of public health care is under siege.

8:30

Now, it would be an important part of the debate if we could better explore the safety and the effectiveness of complementary and alternative medicine to determine what it can add to our present public health care system. Perhaps there's a potential, as the hon. member across stated, to lower costs and improve patients' health if we can scientifically prove the benefits of some complementary and alternative medicines. However, Mr. Speaker, we must be careful

not to treat complementary and alternative medicines as a panacea. Complementary and alternative medicines have the potential to play a positive role in our public health care system, but it is far from the solution for some of the challenges facing our public health care system today.

It is important and, I would remind all hon. members across the way, perhaps more effective if the Alberta government explored options of working more closely with the federal government in setting up a fund similar to the one that is being proposed in this motion. In the United States the centre exploring complementary and alternative medicine is a national one. The research coming out of the fund proposed under this motion would be a benefit to all Canadians. Perhaps we should look at pooling our resources with other provinces and the federal government to create an institute similar to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine in the United States.

There is already a great deal of existing research going on. There are bodies and institutes set up both provincially and federally that may be interested in funding research on these topics. In fact, many of these groups may already have, and perhaps some hon. member can explain not only to this member but to the entire House what role the following organizations could play in this proposed research: the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and the Alberta Science and Research Authority. I wonder how they would feel about this.

Is there a need for a whole new fund at the provincial level to explore complementary and alternative medicine? I think it is difficult at this time to say, but there is definitely a need to explore the safety and effectiveness of complementary and alternative medicine. Whether that is done through existing institutions or in co-operation with other provinces and the federal government is the question at this time that needs to be addressed.

Overall, I think this motion is a sound one, and it is certainly one that I would support for those reasons. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity. It's a pleasure to speak to and in support of Motion 509. What are now often called complementary and alternative therapies here in North America are in fact practices, methods, and therapies that have been used for hundreds and even thousands of years in other parts of the world. They include acupuncture, reflexology, aromatherapy, reiki, chi gong, to mention only a few. Today many people rely on these therapies for relief from chronic and debilitating health problems. Following such treatment many individuals around the world have reported significant improvements of their health.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, what is not entirely clear is what exactly is the range of benefits offered by these therapies, nor do we always know about any potential hazards. By establishing a mechanism to fund research in this field, I believe that we would be in a position to better assess the usefulness and safety of these alternative therapies. As the chairman of the Alberta Research Council I see no reason why the Alberta government would not want to delve further into researching complementary and alternative therapies. After all, the possibility does exist that doing so may very well ease the strain on our health care system.

The fact that there is no established fund in our province for research on complementary and alternative medicine provides the strongest rationale for taking Motion 509 to heart. There is a clear need for more qualitative and quantitative research in complementary and alternative medicine here in Alberta as well as in the rest of

the country because there is so little research that is being done presently. Alberta could really emerge as a leader in advancing and promoting increased and improved knowledge in this field.

Thus, Mr. Speaker, I believe that Motion 509 presents the Alberta government with a tremendous opportunity to show both leadership and commitment to health and well-being. The Alberta government has shown its commitment to take Albertans into the 21st century through its support of the Alberta Research Council. Scientists and researchers there have carried out groundbreaking work in the discovery and production of carbohydrate-based pharmaceuticals which have the potential to provide new treatments for diseases such as asthma, arthritis, cancer, and AIDS.

Establishing research funds for complementary and alternative medicine would therefore only further the already long-standing history of high-level research in this province. It would, I believe, further solidify Alberta's status as a leader in medical and scientific research. What's more, a solid body of evidence of the efficacy and safety of complementary and alternative medical therapies could pave the way for integrating conventional medicine with complementary and alternative therapies.

In 2002 the U.S. National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, NCCAM, suggested that public and private resources be increased to strengthen the infrastructure for alternative medical research. Currently, NCCAM's research priorities cover an extensive array of research projects that range from alternative therapy approaches to the treatment and prevention of asthma and allergies to the study of antimicrobial and analgesic effects of complementary and medical therapies on infectious disease, especially HIV/AIDS.

In Great Britain, like the United States, the integration of complementary and alternative therapies is progressing steadily. Britain's increasing reliance on alternative therapies represents a reversal of opinion in British attitudes towards the medical establishment. A number of British hospitals make available various complementary and alternative therapies in addition to conventional therapies.

These patterns are repeated elsewhere. In Australia 57 per cent of the population now use some form of alternative medicine. Meanwhile, 46 per cent of Germans find complementary and alternative therapies helpful, and in France 49 per cent of the population use complementary and alternative therapies of one kind or another. Considering the research efforts already underway in the United States and Great Britain, I believe that Alberta may be left behind if we don't take action to start conducting our own research in alternative and complementary medicine.

So, Mr. Speaker, I join my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed in urging the government of Alberta to provide funds for the express purpose of researching the efficacy and safety of complementary and alternative therapies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Lord: Good evening, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the merits of Motion 509 tonight as well. I'd like to begin my remarks by congratulating the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed for having the vision and foresight to introduce this motion. The intended purpose of Motion 509 is I think quite consistent with the notion that we need to develop new and innovative approaches towards health care in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, ours is a time, it seems, when so much of what we do revolves around science and technology. A look around us can be very revealing when it comes to making clear just how prevalent and ubiquitous all manner of gadgets have become as well as how so much of what we do is tied to science and technology. We have cellphones that enable others to talk to us most anywhere, and

there's the Internet, which allows us to reach most others almost anywhere as well. As I speak, spacecraft are preparing to leave our solar system, making them not only the first spacecraft ever to do so but also the most well-travelled man-made objects ever.

Closer to home, scientists have already cloned sheep and monkeys, and with some regularity we hear how a new and revolutionary cure or treatment procedure is being pioneered. Personally, Mr. Speaker, I'm in favour of cloning because I could use three or four of myself just to keep up. Anyway, such is progress. Yet for all our scientific advancement and our technological prowess there seems to be a resurgence of complementary and alternative medicine, much of which involves methods that have been practised for hundreds or even thousands of years, such as acupuncture or homeopathy. In addition, many people in our society use various herbal remedies on a regular basis. Names like echinacea, St. John's wort, and ginkgo biloba are if not names of products that we use certainly names with which many of us are quite familiar if for no other reason than that they are mentioned in the news or because we have seen commercials and advertisements for them.

8:40

What I find so interesting about this, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that even though there's so much science and technology around us, there's nevertheless a large number of people in our society who prefer complementary and alternative medicine over conventional medicine. For whatever reason, they find that there are some definite benefits to be had by relying on these decidedly nontechnological therapies rather than on what we may call mainstream or conventional medicine.

But, Mr. Speaker, how do they know that the therapies they receive work? How do they know that the herbal food supplements that they take do not cause harm or have adverse side effects, especially if taken in conjunction with other products, with other herbal remedies, or modern medicines? I get the impression that much of the clout of these complementary and alternative therapies is anecdotal in nature. I don't use the word anecdotal in a pejorative sense; rather, what I'm getting at is that in the absence of what we might call hard and empirical data derived through clinical and scientific trials, personal testimonials make up the bulk of the evidence, for lack of a better word.

In some cases, the evidence has a bit more heft than just personal testimony. Take acupuncture, for instance. This ancient form of healing predates recorded history, and as a philosophy it is rooted in the Taoist tradition, which goes back over 8,000 years. Aside from that, most people seem to know that acupuncture involves needles and needles being inserted at specific points on a person's body. Among the illnesses and predicaments for which acupuncture is said to have benefits, we find migraine headaches, depression, and heart disease, and people have also been known to use acupuncture as part of smoking cessation. Aside from personal testimonials and in some cases long histories of use, however, there is very little in the way of scientific evidence to back up the claims that this or that complementary and alternative form of medical treatment actually works.

Quite often what seems to be entirely absent are rational explanations that show why or how these therapies work. In other words, if you use a particular nonconventional therapy, then this particular effect will be had, which in turn will yield a particular desirable result. Even in cases where such data is said to exist, it is often questioned at best or even considered fraudulent at worst, yet people keep using these products and treatments. Do they know something that we don't know? Do they know something that advocates of modern medicine don't know? It would almost seem like it, wouldn't it?

For most of us proof merits greater attention than do personal anecdotes. If someone says to us, "Here, this is a really good car," I would say that we'd be less inclined to buy that car than a car that had been subjected to extensive testing whose results were subsequently published in some sort of car buyers' guide.

Now, that's why Motion 509 is so important. There is a large number of people in our society who find health benefits in using various complementary and alternative medical therapies, but there is little evidence to show why or how they work or if indeed they work at all. By establishing a fund whose sole purpose would be to facilitate research on the utility and safety of complementary and alternative medical therapies, we would incur several benefits. First and foremost, Mr. Speaker, the public, health care professionals, and makers of health care policy would really know what if any benefits complementary and alternative medicine has to yield. By the same token, we would also learn what harm could possibly come from these therapies.

Another advantage to having a dedicated fund for this purpose is that it could help in the efforts to broaden the scientific body of knowledge. As any other medical research does, research on complementary and alternative medical therapies would add to our knowledge base. This would not be limited to knowing if a particular therapy is safe or if it causes more harm than it does good. For example, other information to be gleaned may involve how a particular nonconventional therapy interacts with a conventional therapy. Are there side effects when combined? Does one cancel out the benefits of the other? Do they amplify each other's benefits? Without a doubt, having such knowledge would be of considerable assistance to health care professionals, health policy-makers, and the public in attempting to make informed decisions.

Yet another benefit to be had from this kind of research fund is that it could actually facilitate a dialogue between what now quite often appears to be two rather adversarial camps. Many proponents of modern medicine have little use for complementary and alternative forms of medicine and use a wide range of epithets to characterize them and those who provide them. In the absence of scientifically credible data these therapies have at best marginal results, most often a placebo effect, and at worst they make their users sicker rather than healthier. On the other hand, advocates of nonconventional medicine often take the approach that modern medicine has become too specific and relies too much on chemicals whose long-term impact is not yet known. They argue that rather than treating the whole person, modern medicine treats symptoms in isolation, therefore causing perhaps greater problems.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it does seem quite reasonable to suggest that having a scientifically credible body of knowledge in the area of conventional and alternative medicine could very well increase the availability of qualified and knowledgeable practitioners of conventional medicine and of nonconventional medicine alike. Ideally, this would also enhance collaboration among them, which would expand the range of care and treatment options available to Albertans.

With this in mind, Mr. Speaker, I offer the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed my wholehearted support for Motion 509, and I urge all members of this House to do the same. Thank you.

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure to be able to speak to Motion 509 in the Assembly this evening. Tonight I'm going to focus my comments on the need for correct health information and the concerns that many Albertans have regarding the information that does or does not exist surrounding complementary medicine.

This motion will go a significant way towards including alternative medicine treatments and techniques within our health care system. As such it is an important motion to discuss and debate this evening, because it is clear that the jury is still out on the benefits of these alternative treatments.

There exists a bit of a rift between complementary health practitioners and the medical community. To a degree this rift is based on legitimate concerns from one side or the other regarding the dangers of both new, untested techniques or complementary health practitioners and concerns of overmedication by the traditional medical practitioners. Other parts of this rift are caused by financial concerns each side has. Each side wants to make the money, and each wants to ensure that they will not lose business. So there are two sides to this conflict, Mr. Speaker.

That being said, we need to move beyond whatever squabbling does exist and look out for the best interests of Albertans. Given that Albertans are looking to complementary medicine, we need to know what the bright spots are and where the dangers are. If we can prove that a medicine works or that a treatment works, then we've passed phase 1 of deciding whether or not it's justifiable to fund that medicine or treatment.

That's the problem with alternative therapies. Most of the proof that these treatments work is anecdotal. If a person takes vitamin therapy and then their health improves, then it's said to work. On the other hand, the stories which raise red flags surrounding alternative therapies are also anecdotal. If someone takes St. John's wort for depression and then goes into a deeper depression, the St. John's wort might be blamed for the depression.

We in this Assembly have to take into account that many Albertans are turning to alternative therapies and for a variety of reasons. Some Albertans have had little luck treating certain problems with the traditional health care system so will try other avenues to see if they'll do better. Other Albertans are beginning to become more and more concerned about the degree to which the health care system relies on pharmaceuticals. These sorts of Albertans are somewhat leery of using pharmaceuticals to a large degree; therefore, if they can avoid it, they're not willing to seek treatment within the traditional health care system.

Alberta is now home to many immigrants who have grown up with what we call alternative therapies in their countries of origin and continue to want to receive treatment that's in accord with what they're used to using. This is a part of the debate that we often forget. While alternative medicine is new and alternative to us, it's been a regular part of life in many countries in which the various treatments originate.

If Albertans are using these treatments, it does make sense that as a government we would position ourselves to provide valuable health information on the effectiveness of these products. It makes sense that we would move beyond anecdotes and provide some solid figures and recommendations regarding the use of these products. Mr. Speaker, this is reason number one for developing this fund. If we operate under the premise that health care is one of the most important undertakings of individual Albertans and of this government, then we need to provide the best health information possible to Albertans.

Our minister of health has taken great steps in the areas of wellness and health information and ought to be commended. It's my belief that passing this motion puts one more tool in his belt as he works to inform Albertans about the various health choices that do exist. In this light I think it's important that we pass Motion 509. It's our duty to ensure that Albertans have the opportunity to know more about these products.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

8:50

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to join debate on Motion 509 urging the government to establish a dedicated fund for researching complementary and alternative medicine. I would first like to thank my colleague from Calgary-Lougheed for having the vision to sponsor this motion.

Some alternative medical procedures are centuries older than conventional medicine. It's ironic how western societies depend on manufactured pharmaceutical drugs to cure pain when acupuncture has been used very successfully by numerous cultures for centuries. The majority of Albertans turn to conventional medical procedures to recover from illness or injury. Therefore, the majority of medical research grants are awarded to projects that address conventional medical questions.

Some Albertans already use alternative medicine and know that it works. Whether this is mind over matter, which can be more powerful than medication or treatment at times, scientific evidence is still very important. Alternative medicine is not seen as relevant as other health research that addresses common health problems such as obesity, diabetes, and cancers. That is why the vast majority of grants from the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research go toward conventional medical projects.

Mr. Speaker, alternative medicine may be more easily accepted as safe and effective by the medical community if there is formal research in place. Funding targeted for alternative medicine is not without precedent. Canada, Great Britain, and the United States, among others, have set up funds in an effort to promote alternative medicine.

Motion 509 proposes an interesting policy decision for the provincial government. If passed, a fund dedicated to alternative medicine could set several precedents. First of all, many in the conventional medical community view alternative medicine with a great deal of suspicion because of the void of scientific research, so this fund may not be viewed as an appropriate investment of public dollars. It is regretful that alternative techniques that can heal and promote wellness, faster in some cases than conventional techniques, are ignored and denigrated by the medical community.

In 2003 the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research awarded grants for projects dealing with kidney disease, home care, mental illness, and improving the health of Albertans. Although it would be difficult to argue that alternative medicine is more pressing than these issues, those who have benefited from alternative health care feel that these areas would also benefit from the savings that would be generated by using alternative medicine in the right places.

I personally know of a young person who could not be helped through conventional medicine. He was examined by the best doctors in Alberta and Spokane, Washington, and was unable to walk without pain in his knees. He was treated by a touch-for-health therapist and went from walking with constant pain in his knees to dancing up and down long staircases without pain.

A dedicated fund for alternative medicine would likely fall under the scope of the Auditor General. In the event that research projects were unclear and the peer review process continued to award grants to these people, it would be brought to the attention of the Alberta government.

As the sponsor mentioned earlier, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research has funded projects that test the effectiveness of some alternative medical procedures. However, the deck seems to be stacked against people who seek grants to investigate alternative medicine. Medical research is very important, and it's also very

expensive. Since the fund was created, over \$750 million has been granted to support health research in Alberta. However, over the past six years only approximately \$310,000 has been granted to four proposals related to alternative therapies. I believe that a dedicated fund is necessary. A dedicated fund, separate from the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, would elevate some complementary procedures to mainstream medicine.

The Alberta government has talked about looking at the best practices from other health care systems to improve health care delivery and stabilize funding. Alternative medicine may be able to improve the health care system by achieving better results faster and cheaper in some cases than the conventional health care system. A research fund dedicated to alternative therapies may be an opportunity to spend money on research that could provide savings to Alberta's health care system and improve the health of Albertans.

I believe that this idea merits more debate and consideration by the Alberta government. There are many factors that can be influenced by the fund proposed in Motion 509. A new health procedure has to be effective, reasonably priced, and above all safe for the patient. The fund proposed in Motion 509 could help other alternative therapies gain credibility.

After experiencing the benefits of alternative health care and with the intent of having others experience these benefits, I wholeheartedly support Motion 509, and I would ask that my colleagues also support this motion. Thank you.

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

Mr. Yankowsky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a pleasure to join debate in support of Motion 509 sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Health care and healthy living are important issues in North America. This Assembly is aware of the incredible cost of pharmaceutical drugs and the success of drug companies who research and develop their product.

I've been a consumer of natural medicine for many years. However, sometimes I wonder if current sources of information provide reliable and safe advice about natural medical products. I wonder if consumers are buying the right medicines for their health problems or throwing their money away on products that don't work. There is a great deal of information on natural medicine available on the Internet, in magazines, and from health food clerks, but how accurate or reliable is this information?

A research fund could give people using natural medicine at least some direction about the necessary product. Research dedicated to natural medicine could also verify which products are the most effective.

Mr. Speaker, this motion calls for research to develop scientifically credible information about the safety and effectiveness of complementary, natural medicine to assist health professionals, policy-makers, and the public in making informed decisions. I think a dedicated fund for this research is long overdue, and I urge all members to support Motion 509.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed to close debate.

Ms Graham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the observations and comments by members who have spoken in support of this, and I thank them very much for their good comments.

I think it's pretty clear, Mr. Speaker, that it is in the public interest that we pass this motion and do this kind of research both for the

health and safety of Albertans who do use CAM therapies or who would like to and also for the potential cost savings to the health system. If we are going to move to integrative health, combining traditional medicine with CAM, then we need this research to be done. Otherwise, we can't rely on what we are doing.

Before I call for the question, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Bud Rickhi and his institute in Calgary, the Canadian Institute for Natural and Integrative Medicine. He did not solicit me to do this, but I am very interested in what he is doing. It's very important work. I think he is a visionary, and he is highly regarded across North America and beyond. He established his clinic in Calgary 11 years ago with the encouragement of the department of health, which was then wanting to go in this direction, but cutbacks occurred. He hasn't really had any help since, and he has persevered. He wants Alberta to be number one in integrative health, and he wants to do outcome studies linked to cost.

I'd now call for the question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 509 carried]

head: 9:00 **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 31
Highways Development and Protection Act

[Adjourned debate May 5: Mr. Stelmach]

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

Mr. Bonner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do have a few comments on Bill 31, the Highways Development and Protection Act. I'd first of all like to thank the minister for the opportunity that he afforded my researcher and me to meet with him and his people in the department and for the briefing that we got on this particular bill. At the briefing it was indicated that there was much consultation that went on before this bill was brought forward.

It is a bill that amalgamates the Public Highways Development Act and the City Transportation Act, and it also consolidates the minister's powers over controlled roads into one act. As well, in amalgamating these two acts, there are some changes that do occur. One of the changes is the definition of a provincial highway to include all designated primary highways. The act also defines freeway as "a multi-lane controlled highway or controlled street." This bill allows for any existing or future highway to be designated as a freeway, almost the same as a highway, and it removes secondary roads from the designation section.

The bill also allows the minister to decide a fair and just amount to be paid for reparation of the roads, and this is no change from the previous act. It also places the highway authorities in charge of maintenance instead of the minister, who was directly responsible in the previous act.

As well, Mr. Speaker, it adds a freeway size of 115 metres from the centre line to the regulation controlling highways, and it adds telecommunications to the act: prohibitions of 30 metres from controlled highways, which were formerly our secondary highways, and 60 metres from a highway and 115 metres from a freeway.

This act also gives the right to the minister to remove access roads made by citizens onto controlled highways. This, I think, is a very important point because particularly in areas where there are freeways and highways where the speed limit is up to 110 kilometres per hour, certainly we have to have stringent controls on how traffic is entering these particular highways.

What this act will also do is provide compensation for citizens' loss of access. I think of a situation just in the last couple of years where access to a set of businesses was cut off. This was right on the boundary of the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek and the county of Strathcona. It certainly had a great deal of impact on those businesses when that access was cut off, yet where there were overpasses within a few kilometres in each direction, from a safety standpoint it was a good decision. So we do have some strengthening of rules for the highways with this particular act. It also allows no person to create an access onto a highway without a permit, again another very good point because it does allow us to control that access onto highways and certainly do it in the safest possible way.

As well, the act allows bylaws from city council to be sent to the minister and "the Minister may approve the bylaw in whole or in part."

Now, then, also in Bill 31 section 38 says that the province takes ownership of any road plans that it cancels within municipalities that connect with highways. Certainly, one of the questions that I think is of concern to larger urban areas is the question: is this the way the province is going to gain control of ring roads? What control does this give the minister over future development of highways in cities?

As well, under the act the minister may make regulations on highway use for exploration under the Mines and Minerals Act. I think this relates back to questions that were asked in the House earlier of the minister on how this would, for example, affect the highway 3 development in order to get the magnetite mines going in southern Alberta.

So, certainly, a number of good points. This bill, the Highways Development and Protection Act, will also modernize and amalgamate the City Transportation Act and the Public Highways Development Act.

I don't see anything too contentious in here at all, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I will have no trouble supporting this bill. Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a second time]

Bill 33

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2004

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to move Bill 33, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2004, at second reading.

As has long been the practice in this Assembly, this bill comes to the floor of the House only after all parties have agreed to its contents. So, in that light, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that we move on with second reading of Bill 33.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Certainly, I will be brief. In regard to the miscellaneous statutes I appreciate the comments from the hon. Minister of Community Development and Deputy Government House Leader. The consultation process has been getting quite vigorous in regard to the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2004, Bill 33, to say the least. There seems to be more and more legislation incorporated into it. I think the more discussions we have

in this Assembly in regard to legislation the better off the province and the citizens are.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development to close debate.

Mr. Zwozdesky: I just want to say thank you to all members of the House on all sides for agreeing to this particular bill.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a second time]

9:10

Bill 34

Income Trusts Liability Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Hlady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand and move second reading of Bill 34, the Income Trusts Liability Act.

In the past few years income trusts have grown considerably as another investment vehicle for many Albertans. Right now there are approximately 150 trusts listed on the TSX, with a market value of nearly \$90 billion.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Hlady: Ninety billion dollars.

Mr. Speaker, the main purposes of this bill are to deal with issues around personal liability and investor protection that maybe limiting the participation of certain investors in this type of investment. No matter what the entrepreneurial spirit of an individual might be, most people are uncomfortable with the risk, however remote, of being held personally liable for more than their initial investment when investing in a company or an income trust.

This bill defines an Alberta income trust as one that was created in Alberta and is governed by Alberta laws. It also provides that an investor in an income trust cannot be required to cover the liability of a trust in the event that the trust's assets are insufficient to cover that debt. It is similar to the protection that is already afforded to investors in corporations or limited partnerships, and it makes sense to put this in place.

The other key area that is addressed in the legislation is that of investor protection. This bill contains consequential amendments to the Securities Act to ensure that regardless of the way the income trust is organized, investors will receive the information they need to make informed decisions by strengthening existing disclosure rules as they apply to income trusts.

The bill also provides that all those who may be in possession of material, nonpublic information, are caught by the definition of "insider" so that they are prevented from using their privileged position or knowledge in the trading of income trust units.

Investor protection is closely tied to governance-related issues. I understand that the government plans to release a discussion paper in June on additional governance issues relating to income trusts to receive further input from key stakeholders, and over the summer Alberta government officials will consult with stakeholders on additional issues relating to income trusts, including the rights of investors.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I would like to point out that this bill does not mean that these investment vehicles are without risk. Potential investors in income trusts need to research and understand

all potential risks before making an investment decision, much like any other investment. This legislation simply puts the investor in income trusts in a similar position to that of shareholders in corporations with respect to investor protections under the Securities Act and limited liability under the Business Corporations Act.

I urge all members of this Legislature to give support to Bill 34. Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is legislation that certainly on the surface looks like it is worthy of support. The first idea I had that this legislation would be coming during this sitting was of course during the hon. Minister of Finance's budget. It was mentioned in the fiscal plan on page 25 that income trusts and unlimited liability corporations "are becoming a significant part of Alberta's business sector and another source of investment in Alberta." It notes here also that income trusts were long established in the resource sector, becoming increasingly popular, and are now being used in other sectors of the economy, and that

by transforming themselves into income trusts, companies can significantly reduce, or entirely eliminate, their corporate income taxes. Instead, they flow their income directly to investors, who then may pay personal income taxes on the income.

Now, it goes on to say here in the budget:

Market opportunities for income trusts have increased and the industry is growing throughout Canada. Income trusts provide for the distribution of the available cash flow to the investor while retaining liability in the operating entity. The trust sector has asked several provincial governments to pass legislation explicitly confirming the limited liability provided to investors . . . Nova Scotia is currently the only jurisdiction in Canada where an unlimited liability corporation can be incorporated.

There have been various reports that have been slightly different than that in the news media, but to see this legislation introduced now is quite interesting.

Now, there can be significant reductions in corporate income taxes, as stated in the budget document here. They can be significantly reduced. If we go, Mr. Speaker, a little further along in the budget to page 33, to the page concerning tax revenue, to the third paragraph down, after we're talking about total tax revenue and personal income tax revenue, which is expected to grow strongly in the next three years, the hon. minister gets to corporate income tax revenue. It states here:

Corporate income tax revenue is also forecast to decline in [fiscal year] 2003-04, due to about \$200 million in refunds for 2002 and prior tax years that were paid in 2003-04. After adjusting for this, corporate income tax revenue is expected to grow only modestly over the next three years to \$2.1 billion by 2006-07. Corporate income tax cuts in 2004-05 and assumed declines in energy prices are expected to mostly offset growth from Alberta's strong economy.

We can cut corporate income taxes. This side of the Assembly has supported those measures, but we have to be careful here. I would like to know how much money will be saved in the corporate sector with the use of income trusts. Now, if we see that there have been about \$200 million in refunds for the year 2002 and prior tax years that were paid out, how will this bill change that? Will there be more refunds? Will there be less refunds?

Two hundred million dollars is a significant amount of money. We could build a lot of schools in Calgary. We could repair a lot of schools in Edmonton. We could maybe go a long way to building a new hospital or maybe the Victoria school of arts, the new one, the \$60 million school that hasn't been built. You know, if there's a

shortage of cash, we should have a look at this. I would like to know who is going to benefit and how much before we consider supporting this legislation. If there is going to be a significant reduction in the amount of money that corporations are going to pay in tax, who's going to pick up that amount? What other sectors of the economy are going to have to pay?

Now, certainly, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View – I always think of Bridgeland, but it's Mountain View. I don't know why I want to call it Calgary-Bridgeland, Mr. Speaker, but I do. It's Calgary-Mountain View. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has talked about the income trust unit holders being personally liable for defaults or other legal measures, such as paying for an environmental disaster, for instance.

Ray Turchansky, who is a freelance writer and income tax preparer – I wish I had got him to do my income taxes this year actually – writes:

R. Malcolm Gilroy, an expert in global capital [funds], wrote in this month's issue of *The FundLetter*: "Many legal experts believe that the possibility of personal liability ever taking effect is almost nil."

He goes on to write:

Regardless, concern over liability was a major reason why income trusts were not included in the S&P/TSX Composite Index, after S&P committee deliberations in the fall of 2002.

So there has been an interest in pursuing this from various parties, and I believe the Ontario provincial government is going to address the issue. The Canadian securities commission, an umbrella group of the 13 provincial and territorial securities regulators – it says 13 here – proposed a policy to govern the income trust industry. So this is certainly fitting. Whenever you look at other jurisdictions, there is a need for this bill.

9:20

Mr. Speaker, when we look at providing limited liability for unit holders of Alberta income trusts, I think this bill is also going to improve the transparency of income trust operations and strengthen controls on insider trading, which the hon. member has mentioned, and by improving investor protection, it is notable that the government aims to increase investment in income trusts. There is certainly, as the hon. member has stated, a market value of close to \$90 billion, if not a little greater, and income trusts are a significant part of Alberta's business sector.

Now, is this legislation going to be held over for the summer until this consultation process takes place, or are we going to pass this legislation through the Assembly this week? Hopefully, we can come back next week and have some more discussions and hold the government accountable, but if not, I would like to reserve judgment on this bill until the consultation process is complete. In light of the fact that there don't seem to be many examples, if any, of personal liability by investors in the cases of income trusts to date, I don't think there's a sense of urgency here. Hopefully, the consultation process that the hon. member has discussed will take place and we can hear from any parties over the summer and early in the fall, and we could conclude debate on this bill at that time, Mr. Speaker.

With those remarks, I will cede the floor to another member of the Assembly. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just would like to enter debate for a few brief moments to compliment the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View for bringing forward an important bill at an important time. I think the urgency of the bill is

also duly noted given the state of the industry and the progress being made to date.

Some elementary history, Mr. Speaker. Some years ago, in about 1996, 1995, this industry, the oil and gas industry in Alberta, was somewhat starved for capital. Generally, it takes about 120 per cent of cash flow to keep growing in the oil and gas business, and people were looking for increased rates of cash flow. The industry traditionally returned about 3 to 4 per cent return on capital. So a number of companies went to Wall Street, to the New York investment bankers and dealers there, and they had some short but curt advice given to them by the New York banking community, and that was: go big or go home.

So at that time some grew big, and I think we saw the amalgamation of PanCanadian and Alberta Energy Company into a very, very successful Canadian industrial called EnCana. We also saw what usually occurs in Alberta, a unique entrepreneurial solution to a difficult issue, and that unique solution became the capitalizing on the existing income trust rules. That grew, Mr. Speaker, to the point where today that represents over 12 and a half per cent of total activity in the oil and gas industry. That trust mechanism is critical, and it's very important to the onward and continued growth of this industry as we continue to supply important reserves to our biggest customer, the United States, and also as we continue to keep people in Toronto working on Bay Street and in other areas.

In fact, if you look at Canada from an exporting perspective, Mr. Speaker, the number one product that is exported in Canada is energy, and in fact the number one investment product in Canada is the oil and gas sector, at some 27 billion dollars plus. We have an opportunity to make something that is good even better, and I think that we want to take advantage of this time, to move with both alacrity and dispatch to deliver an appropriate amendment at an appropriate time.

I can say to those who have followed the work of the Minister of Environment and looked at those liability restrictions that are necessary for reclamation, site reclamation and reclamation in that perspective, I think that that matter is appropriately covered there.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, to those who feel that there is a leakage or that we have either a tax abatement or tax leaving Alberta, I would say that I think we have seen the benefit in some studies that indicate that the return, the investment, the growth, the productivity, the economic turn that that money takes in Alberta far outweigh any type of tax leakage that we would see. In fact, limiting this liability, as is proposed by the member, would in fact expose trust units to a much broader investment community, that being the United States, where they can hold these trust units for appreciation and not be so concerned about the tax implications.

So I think it meets an important test of legislation. It's appropriate to the marketplace, and it's extremely timely that this bill be passed. I commend the member for bringing it forward at this time.

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

Mr. Bonner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly listened with interest this evening to comments by numerous members that have participated in the debate on Bill 34, the Income Trusts Liability Act. I do it with a lot of interest because like so many people, I think, in this Assembly we really don't understand all about income trust liabilities.

I think, as well, that our responsibility here is not only to supply capital for oil companies. I think it's also an excellent opportunity, when things are going right, for people to invest and get a very good return on their money compared to what you can get in a savings

account or even the mutual funds, especially after today. So there is an opportunity here.

Again, what we are dealing with in the energy sector is a sector that has over the history of its existence here in the province had a boom and bust type of activity. If we go back to the early '80s, when things were not too rosy in the energy sector and the price of a barrel of oil dropped dramatically, then what I have to question and what I have to certainly get some answers for as we move further into the debate and get into Committee of the Whole and whatever is: what happens to these income trusts if, for example, we do have OPEC deciding that they aren't going to have quotas on oil production, that we are going to have unlimited oil production, if we do again get into a situation where the price of crude drops dramatically in the world, where we have a glut on the market, where we have perhaps some companies folding because they don't have enough capital? What sort of protection is the average Albertan that invests in these income trusts going to have?

I think those are very serious questions. We have to realize here in this Assembly that we are not only here for big business that requires capital to do business – and I think that's a very valid point that the minister brought out – but as well we have to as legislators provide a certain degree of protection for the average investor. I don't know how many times all of us have sat in this Assembly and heard discussions as to how people have to take care of themselves in the future, that they have to plan for the future, that we have to do more than just a pension plan, if we're fortunate enough to have it, because we will not have adequate funds for retirement. So if we have people that are putting a great deal of the money that they are banking on for retirement into an income trust, then certainly there has to be a certain level of protection for them so that they do have some security when they are investing this money.

We have seen the disastrous results when people aren't protected. I think that all we have to do is look at Enron, I believe it was.

9:30

Mr. MacDonald: One of many.

Mr. Bonner: One of many, definitely, where many people had their life savings wiped out by accounting irregularities. I'm not suggesting that that would happen here, Mr. Speaker, but certainly in a bust part of the cycle in the energy sector we could have a situation arise where many people could lose their life savings.

With those comments, I will take my seat and listen to more comments on Bill 34, the Income Trusts Liability Act, and certainly hope that I can get some answers to my questions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29. Anybody else wish to participate in the debate?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View to close debate.

Mr. Hlady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the members for Edmonton-Gold Bar and Edmonton-Glengarry for their questions this evening, and I would like to thank the Minister of Energy for his excellent comments, adding value and explaining and letting people understand how this works inside our number one industry of energy.

To add just a couple of quick comments to that, Mr. Speaker, it's understanding the cycles. In the last 20 years we've seen at least three cycles happen, seeing the investment money and the circle that goes on about seeing new companies start up again. It's been pretty historic in the last couple of years when the income trusts come in

and buy up some of the assets that are here to allow the flow of cash. They've been paying some premium prices, paying very good prices.

Well, that money goes to our smaller and our medium-sized oil and gas companies. Those oil and gas companies in turn reinvest that money back into Alberta, which creates the jobs in Alberta that everybody wants, the high-paying jobs in the oil and gas sector. It's a very, very exciting piece, and it's a part of the cycle that will continue. By seeing that external money from all over the globe investing through income trusts back into Alberta, we'll continue to see our economy grow and see us be able to have the revenues that we do have in this province through royalties and other ways. So that's a main piece of what I hope helps the hon. members understand where we're at.

I hope to get into Committee of the Whole tomorrow, and I will answer the other questions that they had today at the beginning of tomorrow. Let us move forward with the question for this evening.

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a second time]

Bill 35 Companies Amendment Act, 2004

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

Mr. Hutton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to move second reading of Bill 35, the Companies Amendment Act, 2004.

This is a very simple and small modification to the act. The Companies Act allows not-for-profit companies to incorporate under part 9. At least 50 per cent of the board members of every company must be Alberta residents, and business cannot be transacted at a meeting unless 50 per cent of the board of directors present at the meeting are Alberta residents.

What's transpired to bring forward Bill 35 is that an Edmonton company, an Alberta company, technically is breaking the law. In 1999 the Cancer International Research Group incorporated under part 9 of the Companies Act, and since then CIRG, as they are known, has grown into an international research organization and has a board that has grown to reflect the international community. We've grown into quite a global marketplace and community, Mr. Speaker, and it is very important that we make this slight adjustment to the act.

I saw a case when I was at the Glenrose rehab hospital where one of the doctors had several million dollars worth of research money, and he was enticed away from our city, our province, and the money went with him. In the case of CIRG they are advising the province that unless we make changes to the residency requirements in the Companies Act, they are going to have to leave. So that's jobs and dollars for Edmontonians and Albertans, and we certainly don't want to see that happen.

So that they will remain within the law, we're making this slight adjustment to the Companies Act to give the Lieutenant Governor in Council the authority to exempt companies from the application of the Alberta residency and meeting requirements. We certainly do want to have this company stay. This isn't *carte blanche*. We are leaving it up to the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make this exception. If there should be any others after this, we don't know, but at the present time we certainly want this company to stay and continue to do their research. Therefore, I would like to see this moved in second reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to get an opportunity to speak to Bill 35, the Companies Amendment Act, 2004. This is legislation that originally had been discussed as part of the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2004, Bill 33. I am pleased to see that it is legislation that is being brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, and all members of the Assembly will have an opportunity, if they so wish, to discuss this bill. Certainly, we have to do everything we can to facilitate research into, hopefully, a cure for one of the most horrible diseases that affects pretty well every family in the province and in the country and probably around the globe.

Now, when we are going to allow the Lieutenant Governor in Council, in this case upon the recommendation of the Minister of Government Services, to exempt a nonprofit organization from certain provisions of the Companies Act, particularly the requirement that at least 50 per cent of its board members be residents of Alberta, this is not a one-time deal, as I understand it. This amendment could affect many different organizations, and I think that's why it's important that it stands as a bill on its own.

Certainly, the hon. member talked about this bill and how it relates to one Edmonton company. In fact, I believe a researcher from this city started this company, and now as a result of an expansion of those efforts there are 450 people doing cancer research around the world. Fifty of them are here in Edmonton. Some are in Los Angeles. Some, I understand, are in France, but there are contracts from different industries, large industries, to do research. The pharmaceutical industry, I believe, finances a lot of this research. I hope it continues, and I hope it continues in Edmonton.

9:40

Mr. Speaker, with those comments I think it's important that all members have a close look at this legislation. We've been told by Government Services representatives that, you know, there's a chance this medical research organization could move to as far away as France or to Los Angeles and that without this amendment Alberta would definitely lose a very vital organization. The city of Edmonton would lose an important research facility as would the University of Alberta. But when we're having a look here at amending the Companies Act, we have to recognize that this is more than just housekeeping, because we are leaving the door wide open for ministerial discretion at a future date for there to be other changes.

I would have to remind all hon. members of this Assembly of this member's reluctance to support this bill in the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2004, because sometimes, if you can imagine, this government acts in very secretive ways. [interjection] I hear, "Oh, no, it doesn't," but I had to work very diligently to find a ministerial order from last December that set up the Utilities Consumer Advocate, and that was at the discretion of the minister. I was naive I guess, Mr. Speaker. I thought all ministerial orders were public knowledge, but to my amazement they are not. Anything could happen with this current government, so I think the more we discuss initiatives like this in the Assembly, the better off all Albertans are.

There's certainly no sense of urgency on this side of the Assembly to have an end to the session. We have a role to play, and that's to hold the government accountable. If the government is open and as transparent as they claim, well, then our job certainly would be easier.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would urge acceptance of this bill,

Bill 35, but let's be very, very careful about how we use this legislation in the future.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 35 read a second time]

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It has indeed been a very electrifying evening of debate and discussion. We've all been hugely impressed. On that note I would move that the Assembly stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 9:44 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

