

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 15, 2005** **1:30 p.m.**
 Date: 05/03/15
 [The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Deputy Speaker: Welcome.

Let us pray. Lord, guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

Vignettes from Alberta's History

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, today marks the 99th anniversary of the opening of the First Session of the First Legislature in Alberta in 1906. Also on this day in 1972 the first radio and television coverage of regular sittings of the Alberta Legislature began.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning the Speaker graciously hosted a special ceremony in the rotunda of our Legislature to mark the beginning of 15 days of celebration called Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie to highlight the contributions of the francophone community across Canada and to mark International Francophone Day on March 20.

The president of l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta was present in the rotunda to celebrate with us. He is in your gallery this afternoon with members of his executive and members of two francophone provincial associations. It is my pleasure to introduce them to the Assembly. I ask them to stand and remain standing as I call their names: M. Jean Johnson, president, Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta; three of his four vice-presidents, Ms Dolorès Nolette, Ms Adèle Poratto, M. Patrice Gauthier; the executive director of the association, M. Joël Lavoie. Also accompanying the group are M. Zacharie Tardif, the president of the francophone youth organization, and Mme Agathe St-Pierre, the president of the seniors' francophone group. Also accompanying them is the director of the Francophone Secrétariat, M. Denis Tardif. Please join me in giving them the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Brigadier Kuldip Singh Randhawa and his wife, Mrs. Amarjit Randhawa. They're seated in your gallery. Brigadier Randhawa is a professional engineer, recently retired from the Indian army after 30 years of distinguished service. He's a recipient of the distinguished service award of the government of India. The Randhawas are visiting here, and of course they also stopped over in Ireland on their way to Canada. They're spending the next two weeks with their family and friends in Alberta to discover and enjoy the beauty of this province and the hospitality of their friends. As I said, they're seated in your gallery, and I would now request them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Jean-Michel Halfon. Mr. Halfon is country manager for Canada of Pfizer Global Pharmaceuticals and the president and chief executive officer of Pfizer Canada Inc., the Canadian operations of Pfizer Inc., one of the world's leading research-based pharmaceutical companies. I had the pleasure of meeting with Mr. Halfon today to discuss research and development innovation and Alberta's 20-year strategic plan and how we meet the innovation agenda in Alberta and the role that Pfizer might be able to play in assisting us to do that. Mr. Halfon is joined today by Laura Fitzgerald, the senior manager of patient access and health policy in Alberta and a resident of Edmonton. I'd like them to rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

Mr. Dunford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have family in the gallery today, and I would like to introduce them to you and through you to the other Members of the Legislative Assembly. My cousin Mae Lake and her husband, Jim, are here with us today as well as my wife, Gwen Green. Now, Mae and I grew up in Portreeve, Saskatchewan, but Mae now lives with Jim in Swift Current. We're glad to have her here as a tourist in Alberta and, as a matter of fact, on the day that we actually debate a tourism bill. How about that? I wonder if we could give them the warm, traditional welcome as we normally do for guests of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests from the Alberta College of Social Workers. They are Mr. Rod Adachi, executive director of the college, and council person Ms Linda Golding. I'm so pleased that they could join us today, which is during Social Work Week. My ministry knows well the important work of social workers, as do many other government ministries, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector. I'd like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Prins: Mr. Speaker, today it is my pleasure to introduce to you and all members of this Assembly a group of 24 bright grade 6 students from the Clive school. They are accompanied by Mr. Robert MacKinnon, their teacher. He is here on his 17th trip to the Legislature – this is my first group coming here – accompanied by Mrs. Shauna Philip, a student teacher at Clive, and parent helpers Mr. Scott Clark, Susanne Schweer, Mona Woods, Alice Green, Margaret Reynolds, and Denne Rowley, their bus driver. If they would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House four young people who've been pushing hard for tuition relief in Alberta, part of an organization that has been doing so for years, student union executives from the University of Alberta: Jordan Blatz, president; Alex Abboud, vice-president external; Graham Lettner, president-elect; and Samantha Power, vice-president external elect. I ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a fine young woman who's been an active philanthropist on the local, provincial, national, and international scales. I will give more detail on the Mountain of Heroes Foundation, which she cofounded, during my member's statement on Thursday. This committed Albertan has also managed a small business on a global scale, organizing speaking engagements for children, charities, and corporations and guiding trekkers on adventures from the Rockies to the Himalayas. She's been invaluable to the constituency of Calgary-Lougheed, and she's been invaluable to me personally, professionally, and politically as well as to a little puppy named MacGyver. I'm speaking, of course, of my wonderful wife, Jennifer, who is in the members' gallery, and I will ask her to stand now to receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Leila Houle of Goodfish, who was recently crowned Miss Edmonton. Ms Houle is flying to Toronto this evening to compete in the national Miss Canada competition later this week. Leila also works with Treaty 6 chiefs and is a tremendous role model and an ambassador for Alberta's youth. She's accompanied by her very proud father, Ernest Houle, a private consultant from Goodfish. They are joined by Donna Potts-Johnson, the director of social development for the Samson Cree nation, and Susan Houle, a student at the U of A, also from Goodfish. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

1:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you a young group of 59 students from St. John Bosco elementary school, the future of Alberta. They are accompanied by Mr. Zydek, Mrs. Adolf, Miss Yetman, Mrs. Frey, Ms Glover, Mr. Richard Johnston, Mr. J.R. Hebrada, Mrs. Syskakis, Mr. Tabachniuk, and Mrs. Padovan. They are seated in both galleries. If they could receive the warm traditional welcome.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise today and introduce to you and through you members of the Yellowhead Tribal College in Edmonton-Calder. There is a group of 16 students along with their teachers, Linda Anderson, and M.K. Jardine. I would ask them to now please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly a long-standing Conservative and the elected president of the Alberta Alliance Party, Mr. Gary Horan. He is seated in the members' gallery today, and he is a concerned and dedicated citizen of

Alberta who has put in many hours of service to help build the Alberta party to make it what it is today. I would ask Gary Horan to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period **Impacts of Oil Sands Expansion**

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, Fort McMurray serves as the litmus test for the lack of infrastructure support for municipalities shown by this government. Fort McMurray has insufficient schools, hospitals, roads, sewage treatment, and affordable housing. Like other rapidly growing municipalities, it is struggling to cope while the provincial government swims in oil revenues. To the minister of infrastructure: will the government commit to improving the dangerous, indeed often deadly, highway heading to Fort McMurray before approving further oil sands expansion?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, we want to be in the position where we work with the oil companies to ensure that these expansions can take place. In the past two to three years there probably have been four to five different examples of plant expansions in the Fort McMurray region, and certainly that has put a tremendous amount of pressure on the infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, we are currently looking at what to do exactly with highway 63. We're over halfway finished paving highway 881, which provides an excellent route for trucks to come up to Fort McMurray. We're in the process of putting in staging areas that allow these huge loads that are being transported up to Fort McMurray to have a place where they can pull over and wait until the early hours of the morning, when it is their time to go through Fort McMurray.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'd love to be able to stand here and say that we had all the answers to what is going on in Fort McMurray, but the best things that I can say are: we're working with the oil companies, we're working with the municipality of Fort McMurray, and we will find solutions to this very good issue to have.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: will the government commit to providing the hospitals, schools, roads, and sewage treatment facilities that are so badly needed in Fort McMurray prior to further expansion of the oil sands plants?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I'll reiterate my answer. We are working with the oil companies. Certainly, we recognize that Fort McMurray has seen unprecedented growth, and we will continue to work with them to build schools, to build hospitals, to build the necessary infrastructure. As a matter of fact, as you well know and the hon. Premier announced a while ago, there'll be \$3 billion that will go to the municipal infrastructure program. Fort McMurray will receive around \$50 million to \$60 million to \$70 million, depending on how fast they grow. So there's a lot of infrastructure that can be built for that, but the key to this is working together, finding solutions for just an absolutely great problem to have for Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The minister refers to the \$3 billion they've committed, but there's an \$8 billion infrastructure deficit. Given that, when are we going to see the remaining funding put forward to address the issues faced by municipalities?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, the estimate for the municipal infrastructure deficit was around \$3 billion. The \$8 billion that the hon. member refers to is actually included in this three-year business plan, where we're looking at spending \$9 billion in the next three years.

The Deputy Speaker: Second main question of the Official Opposition. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has bragged that it is committed to sustainable development: the balancing of social, environmental, health, and economic values that will preserve the quality of life and natural capital for future generations. Fort McMurray is our test case on who is calling the shots on resource extraction and its impacts on the people and the environment in this province. My question to the Premier: how is the government accounting to citizens for the total impact – social, environmental, and economic – of this development?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation pointed out, we are dealing with this matter. This was not unanticipated. Certainly, it's been known for some time that some \$97 billion Canadian worth of new construction will take place in the Fort McMurray area relative to the oil sands by the year – what? I think it's 2010. This is a phenomenal amount of construction.

There will be a meeting in short order, as I understand it – I believe it's April 8 – involving a number of government ministers including the MLA for the area, the hon. Minister of Environment, the Minister of Energy, the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, the minister of human resources, industry players, as I mentioned, and other people from the private sector to address the infrastructure issue.

We have identified some priority areas. Certainly, one of the priority areas is the area of housing. The hon. minister has made available some public lands to accommodate more housing. Another area is the area of health and education. Both ministers are working to make sure there are adequate schools.

The other area of interest is the area of transportation, ostensibly highway 63 and highway 881. I can tell you with respect to highway 881 that the paving of that highway and the upgrading of that highway is proceeding at a very rapid rate as well as the upgrading of highway 63, plus infrastructure north of Fort McMurray to accommodate additional oil sands development.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will this government show leadership by shifting from its focus on GDP and begin to measure genuine progress indicators, GPI, or the triple bottom line, to assess the true cost accounting of these activities?

Mr. Klein: It's a good question, and it's a very subjective one, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker. I don't know if this hon. member is willing to go to Calgary right now and tell Mr. George of Suncor, "Stop your expansion," or if he's willing to go to Calgary and talk to Mr. Markin of Canadian Natural Resources and say: "You cannot expand. It's against the law. It's against my law." It's against the doctor's law to expand. As I say, the question is very subjective. Now, if this hon. member will stand up and go to Calgary and tell these people that if the Liberals are elected, you will not have expansion until all the infrastructure needs have been addressed, then I invite him to do that.

1:50

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the commitment of this government to share the responsibility for climate change and to reduce greenhouse gases, when will the government put the brakes on emissions?

Mr. Klein: I think we're doing very well. The hon. Minister of Environment may wish to supplement, Mr. Speaker, but certainly in conjunction with industry we have brought in legislation which addresses greenhouse gases and global warming but does it in a much more reasonable way than the internationally contrived Kyoto protocols.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To supplement what the Premier has said, of course, in actual fact in oil sands development emission intensity has gone down by 50 per cent because of new technology that was made right here in Alberta. So technology is a key principle as we continue in terms of protecting the environment with new technology, and that's exactly what we delivered with the federal government at COP 10 in Argentina recently.

The Deputy Speaker: Third main Official Opposition question. The Member for Calgary-Currie.

Apprenticeship Training

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Still on the topic of Fort McMurray, as has been noted in this House before, because of the oil sands Alberta's energy reserves rival Saudi Arabia. Such potential. And it's great to see the potential continuing to be realized, but Alberta citizens are being shut out of the work this bonanza is creating. To the Minister of Advanced Education: what plans does the minister have to revamp the apprenticeship program to ensure an ongoing supply of trained Albertans to fill the jobs in the oil sands?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member would know or should know that Alberta's apprenticeship program is the model of this nation. In fact, the apprenticeship program in this province produces 20 to 25 per cent of the new apprentices and new journeymen in this country at a red seal level, which is a very high qualification level.

Do we need more people? Absolutely, we do. There's no shortage of place in our advanced education institutions for apprenticeships. The shortage is in placement. So we're working with industry to encourage industry to hire more people so that we can enrol them in apprenticeship programs, and we'll continue to work with them to make sure that those places are available so that Albertans can have access to the advanced education they want and to the jobs they need.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: since the number of people going into the apprenticeship program has doubled in the last 10 years, how come there's only been a 22 per cent increase in the number of certified apprentices coming out the other end?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are all sorts of reasons why people go into programs and perhaps choose to change programs. In fact, in our advanced education system you'll find that no matter what program people enter, a very large percentage of them change programs before they exit. That is not a bad thing. That's called choice. That's called finding your passion. That's called finding the place where you want to advance your career and advance your education. Is the hon. member opposite suggesting that once a person enters a program, that's it for them? That's what they should do for the rest of their lives?

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, as I continue to ask the questions, can the Minister of Advanced Education explain why the government calculates its apprenticeship completion rate using second-year apprentices as the baseline when to use first year would make the numbers look so much worse?

Mr. Hancock: No, Mr. Speaker, I can't answer that, and I'd be very interested in reading *Hansard* to find out what the hon. member just said and in finding the answer to that.

The Deputy Speaker: First main question for the leader of the New Democrat opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Ambulance Services

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The fallout of the province's complete bungling of the ambulance transfer agreement continues. Today the city of Red Deer launched a major public appeal urging the citizens to get involved to hold the government accountable. The city of Red Deer says that the so-called government fix announced last week leaves them facing a \$1.6 million shortfall in 2005 and a \$4.1 million shortfall in 2006. My questions are to the Premier. How can the Premier justify saddling the citizens of Red Deer with a likely tax hike to pay for ambulance services when it was the Conservative bungling of the transfer that led to this unacceptable deficit in the first place?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, just as a preamble before I turn it over to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, there are claims, undoubtedly, from some communities, including Red Deer, that they were over- or undercompensated. The fact is that these claims are based on cost estimates that are now being verified, and that's why we suspended the transfer. We need to know what the actual costs are before going further, and that's why we embarked on the two pilot projects in the Peace region and the Palliser region, where they are ready and set to go. But I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we wanted to get dollars out as quickly as possible to the some 300 municipalities that weren't covered in the two pilot projects. When you use a per capita methodology, there may be some that gain more and some that gain less. In the circumstance with Red Deer, Red Deer had worked and had verified their figures with the regional health authority. However, over this next year with the governance advocacy and advisory group we'll review not only the discovery projects in Palliser and Peace, but we will review actually why ambulance services and costs in some areas were widely different from some of the other areas.

Certainly, in the case of the city of Red Deer they have an excellent ambulance system. No doubt that will continue, and no

doubt the advisory council will be very interested in working with the city of Red Deer and all other municipalities across Alberta to confirm just exactly what the costs are, what the methodology should be. If, in fact, we assume responsibility through regional health authorities for delivering ambulance services, we will know full well what the costs are and be fully accountable for them, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: why is the Premier defending the \$55 million figure when the government's own draft ambulance services report from 2001 identified the cost to be closer to \$106 million, and we now know that the estimates are closer to \$128 million? Why is he surprised?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right when he says that the costs have been identified as \$128 million. It's my best information, based on the report, that the original estimate was \$55 million, but I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think one of the grave difficulties that we have encountered is that when the regional health authorities looked at assuming governance and operations, costing for particularly integrated ambulance service delivery may not have been accounted for in exactly the appropriate way. It might have been, for example, a municipal authority's opportunity to account for ambulance in the fire service delivery. So in extrapolating those costs for ambulance, they were quite different.

Yes, there were costs identified in the report on ambulance service delivery that included the figure of \$106 million, but there were also dollars that were accounted for that were on the revenue side of the equation that may have not been fully looked at at the time that the amount of \$55 million was put in as the true cost – the true cost – of governance and operations of ambulance in the submission that was put in the budget the year previous while we were looking at transfer.

So we can play a lot with numbers here, but the bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that what we're doing now is trying to find the best way of assuring that the continuity of safe patient transport continues in Alberta, that proud tradition is maintained, and that whether or not in the future ambulance services are delivered by municipalities or health authorities or a combination of both, Albertans will feel secure that they have the best ambulance service delivery system possible.

2:00

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, let me put this directly to the minister. Why was the government using the \$55 million figure as late as a month ago when on May 23, 2002, your own MLAs' report on ambulance services used a figure of \$106 million?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, at the time the budget was approved for 2004-05, the identifiable figure for true costs was estimated for the budget year '05-06 at \$55 million. The exponential increase to what was described to me as a soft number of \$128 million was considerably higher, and what was even of greater concern to this minister was that I was told by several parties in Alberta that it could be as high as \$180 million. I thought it was responsible to do a thorough review of that. That's what we're doing.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Oil Sands Development

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Following in the flavour of the development of oil sands, another new multimillion dollar project has been announced north of Fort McMurray. Yesterday Suncor announced a \$10 billion project that will mean, as mentioned earlier, even more strain on the existing infrastructure of the city of Fort McMurray. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. With Suncor's announcement of the \$10 billion Voyageur project can the minister tell us what other projects are anticipated for the area?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's announcement clearly was another one of the very major announcements. These are very large megaprojects that continue up in the oil sands. It's because of the work, really, that the government's done over the years to set the right climate, to attract the investment to see that we could realize the opportunity that's before us today. With that comes huge challenges, and those are the things that we'll be talking about.

I thought I'd mention a little bit of the scope of the activity, too, that's happening. It's not just that \$10 billion project. You can look at CNRL, that recently announced their willingness to go with another 10 billion plus dollar project. You've got Shell, that's also looking at an expansion of their projects. You can look at UTS, who's partnered recently with Petro-Canada. So you've got quite a bit of expansion. In all, you could see up to a hundred billion dollars of investment in this area alone in the province over the next 10 years.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what type of support will the government of Alberta provide to this part of the province, and will some unique approach be necessary to cope with these added pressures?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As he rightly said, this area of the oil sands actually expands beyond just even the oil sands. If we looked into the heavy oils just to the south of that area – the member himself is involved with it and the members from the Vermilion-Lloydminster and Bonnyville-Cold Lake areas. Very large deposits of heavy oil. So the combined region has some extraordinary issues that are going to have to be looked at.

It does have a special and unique case in the size of investment, in the quantity of infrastructure demand that this government will have to facilitate and accommodate. We've heard some responses already from the minister of infrastructure.

There is also a regional working group of the senior vice-presidents of the companies that are involved in the oil sands and the heavy oils, and we'll be meeting with them, actually, and the mayor of Fort McMurray later this week. That's been an ongoing working relationship, and we continue to see how we can facilitate and ensure that we realize the benefit of this great deposit in that area.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much. That's my last supplemental. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Just a reminder. We're striving for a 45-second time limit on questions and answers.

The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Labour Negotiations with Teachers

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many parents and educators and school boards are concerned about the on- and off-again funding for education in this province. Albertans clearly can't afford to repeat the teacher layoff disaster of 2003-04, from which most schools are just recovering. My question to the Minister of Education: can the Minister of Education assure Albertans that the money will be there to support fairly bargained or arbitrated settlements with teachers?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, every local school board has the right, the authority, and the responsibility to negotiate in good faith at the local level with their local ATAs. We provide the money in unenvolving fashion for them to do that, and as part of that unenvolving we brought forward the renewed funding framework, which has even given them more flexibility with respect to costs related to all education matters, and that includes the negotiated settlements. There are varying degrees and lengths of time involved in some of these agreements, and I feel quite comfortable that our local school boards are doing their very best to address ever-increasing costs with ever-decreasing enrolments.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad the envelope is large.

To the same minister: what specific measures is this minister considering to support school boards and educators in places like Fort McMurray, where even in the aftermath of a new agreement teachers can't afford to live?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, teachers can afford to live there, but the fact is that I think the costs of living there are somewhere between 10 to 30 per cent higher than elsewhere in the province, so the local school board does have an allowance for that built into their negotiations. I think they just came to a conclusion to that effect a couple of weeks ago, at least the public system did. We'll wait and see what the Catholic system does shortly.

That having been said, Mr. Speaker, there will be a group coming to Edmonton for a special visit, as our Premier alluded to earlier, and I will be part of that meeting. In fact, I will be advancing some of those very issues. I did meet with several hundred teachers during my rounds, and I did meet with a group in Fort McMurray as well. I am acutely aware of the difficulties they are having in attracting and retaining teachers in that area, and we will do our best to address it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister abandon his effort to impose a one-size-fits-all province-wide bargaining model and concede that teachers and school boards should be allowed to negotiate local matters locally?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, this is an extremely important question, and I'm actually grateful to the member for having raised it. The fact is that the Alberta Commission on Learning report did make a recommendation in this respect. It's found under ACOL recommendation 81, I believe.

Now, in response to that, the government has asked for additional work to be done as we try and steer our way through to a conclusive answer, and I will be striving for that very shortly. In the meantime, we do have groups like the Alberta School Boards Association, which at a meeting on November 22 voted two-thirds to find some sort of a model and bring it back to their general membership and thereafter provide it to me for further consideration. After I've received that input and after I've heard more from the local school boards themselves and from the ATA, ASBA, and a number of other players, I will bring forward a decision for this House.

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

Jetsgo Bankruptcy

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With Jetsgo grounded, many of my constituents are concerned about the dollars they spent on air travel. My questions are to the Minister of Government Services. What can my constituents who have bought and paid for tickets from Jetsgo do now that the company has folded?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, it's terribly unfortunate when any airline goes under and, in fact, people are stranded and don't get the services that they paid for. We would recommend that any individual that has bought a ticket and was unable to use it get in contact with their insurance agent. Many people have bought travel insurance, and they may be eligible for a refund on the ticket.

Secondly, if a person has paid for the travel by credit card, it could very well be that the credit card company will be in a position to – as a matter of fact, a number of the credit card companies have stepped up to the plate and offered to refund. Also, if a person has purchased the ticket on the Internet in Alberta, they're rather fortunate because under the Internet sales contract regulation you're guaranteed to get the service. The credit card companies have up to two months to credit the person. [interjections] It's very unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, all the chirping over across the way, that those folks aren't interested in hearing how a consumer can get their money back on this type of an issue.

2:10

Ms DeLong: Mr. Speaker, what can Albertans who travel do to protect themselves in advance if an airline goes out of business?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of things, and we've been recommending for some time that if you feel that you need to pay by cash, then you look at purchasing travel insurance so that you are covered. We do also recommend that you use a credit card because the purchase of a travel ticket is pretty well covered through that mechanism.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, what are we doing to help protect Albertans in the event of future airline failures?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, the airline industry is

under federal jurisdiction. One of the things that we are going to be doing this summer is actually going with our other provincial counterparts and talking to the federal government about setting up some kind of an insurance plan, some kind of a protection program so that when these kinds of events do occur, then the persons that have purchased tickets would have some kind of coverage.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Electricity Deregulation

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another day and the Enron scandal in Alberta continues to grow. Yesterday at an energy conference a senior executive stated that unnamed companies are unethically bending the rules six years after Enron exploited loopholes in electricity deregulation in this province, yet this Progressive Conservative government continues to keep consumers in the dark regarding this growing scandal. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Given that industry insiders now admit that power companies are still bending the rules, what will it take for this government to finally call for a full, independent public inquiry into this \$8 billion electricity deregulation disaster?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to first say that the market surveillance administrator does take very seriously their role. They act on behalf of Albertans to ensure that they are protected. They have acted on this. The investigation of Enron is six years old. They acted on it then. They're repeating investigations again today. They've also involved the federal Competition Bureau. So they continue to do the role for which they are there, and that is to ensure that Albertans are protected.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that it has also been stated that various companies have behaved in a way that has been not particularly ethical, which companies are unethically bending the electricity market in Alberta, and why are you so reluctant to name them?

Mr. Melchin: When we say "various companies," everyone here seems to be reluctant to actually bring forth any evidence. It's easy to bring forth allegations. That's what the market surveillance administrator is there for. If you have evidence, I'd suggest that we do bring evidence before the appropriate authorities. They can act on it if there is evidence.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that Enron and other companies have used the Alberta-B.C. tie-line to manipulate Alberta's domestic electricity market, why isn't the market surveillance administrator investigating electricity imports?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, there are many things in regulation to ensure that our marketplaces do work. They have worked effectively, and in this respect the market surveillance administrator continues to watch as a watchdog on behalf of Albertans. We are all interested, just as the market surveillance administrator is interested. We want to ensure that things continue to operate as they are designed to do. If there is evidence, please bring it forward.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

First Aid and CPR Training in Schools

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, when a bystander uses cardiopulmon-

ary resuscitation, otherwise known as CPR, on someone who has collapsed from a cardiac arrest, the victim's chance of survival dramatically improves. In Edmonton the survival rate has increased some 10 per cent because of frequent early bystander action, including CPR. The message is simple, Mr. Speaker. CPR by family members or bystanders could save the lives of hundreds of people in Alberta. My one and only question to the Minister of Education: would the minister consider implementing mandatory CPR and first aid courses in Alberta's high schools, which could be instructed by St. John Ambulance?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we already do provide some courses with respect to both first aid and CPR training. To my knowledge none of them are mandatory yet, not at this stage anyway. I know that at the grade 9 level we also provide some additional components through first aid and emergency care.

We have been talking now about something that we could do through the mandatory physical education 10 program, beginning in the fall of 2006 perhaps, where we could provide some type of additional training for our teachers so that they could pass on those skills to the students. In that respect, I'd be happy to chat further with the St. John Ambulance folks to see what role they might be able to play in guiding us along. I think it's an excellent idea, and I commend the member for raising it. We will be looking at this very closely.

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

Health Care Reform

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been three years since the release of the Mazankowski report, over two years since the Graydon report was completed, and over a year and a half since the release of the Westbury report. Despite all these reports, Albertans are still in the dark about the government's latest attempts at reform, termed the third way. In fact, it seems that the third way is really no way at all. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How much longer will Albertans have to wait before finding out the details of this government plan?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, early in January our Premier spoke to the Canadian Club, and he announced several things including the work that will be done this year, commencing in a more accelerated fashion so that we can achieve a target of an electronic record by January 1, 2008, which will be one step to making sure that we are linking the system and working more cohesively together. He talked about an innovative mental health fund. He talked about the supports for the kinds of things that could be done to make sure that our children were well looked after, particularly in the area of mental health.

Mr. Speaker, we've been talking now for a few weeks and even invited the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition to be a part of the international symposium which will gather a number of ideas of best practices from people world-wide to see whether or not those would be appropriate opportunities for us to link with some of the other initiatives that are going on in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the third way is not about any single, one idea but about a series of very good ideas that can be implemented in a very focused way across Alberta. We can assure Albertans that we are working towards one goal, and that is quality health care as quickly as possible for all Albertans.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. No details.

Back to the same minister: can the minister tell us whether the third way would mean more contracts with private providers like the Health Resource Centre in Calgary, which the Premier termed in January a health care success story?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe the Premier was very clear. He said that we were not going to try and challenge the Canada Health Act, we were going to unleash innovation and invite our health care providers, the regional health authorities, to bring forward methodologies for improving health care. The bottom line is that we are working on the assumption that we will complete the recommendations in the Mazankowski plan.

We will look over the next few weeks and months at the things that we can do to build on the primary health care reform. I say: stay tuned. I think that there are wonderful things happening in Alberta. The bottom line is that Albertans should remember this: no matter where they go, the best health care system in the world exists in Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that yesterday the minister said that "a wellness fund is an idea that could be looked at," why did government members vote down the Alberta Liberal motion for a wellness fund just last week?

2:20

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I said that it could be looked at in the context of other ideas. We are not going to simply react to every idea that comes along at the time it is presented. We have to look at a package of how we are presenting the very best possible strategies. In fact, today with the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation we talked about the great success of the rural seat belt strategy, which has seen an improvement in the use of seat belts. Twelve ministries are involved in strategies to improve the health and wellness of Albertans, particularly as it relates to seat belts. So to have any one fund or any one consolidation is something that we'd have to examine very carefully so that we were assured that we were getting all the pieces of it. It's not as simple as agreeing to a motion.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Policing Services

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For years the Conservative government has failed to adequately support policing services, which has resulted in Alberta having the lowest number of police officers per capita west of PEI. Adding 140 offices a year, as the government proposes, fails to put policing services on par with those in other Canadian provinces. My questions are to the Solicitor General. Why are Albertans being forced by this government to put up with a lower level of policing service than residents of every other province west of Prince Edward Island?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The 5,000 officers that we have in the province of Alberta are well respected by the communities that they work in throughout this province. The issue that we're looking at in the future is the resources we have in

rural Alberta as well as in the urban centres, but we want to look as well at the deployment models that we have and build on the integration that we have right now as well as building on other models that we want to look at across Canada, which includes regionalization.

Dr. Pannu: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Why won't the Solicitor General commit to increasing provincial police numbers, whether RCMP or municipal, by 500 additional front-line officers as proposed by the NDP opposition so that Albertans receive the same level of policing service as other Canadians do?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The 500 officers that the hon. member speaks about are a tremendous amount of officers to obtain. The officers that we want to see employed in the next year, two years have to be trained. They're not in place now. We can't hire them April 1. Some of them we can, but we're going to have to do this over a period of time to ensure that the training process takes place. Again, it's not just putting officers on the street. It's looking at the ability to deploy these officers properly in the areas where they need to be deployed, and that includes integrating our policing services so that the seven municipal police services and the RCMP are working together as one.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: while better approaches to fighting gang violence are needed and the minister is exploring them, will he ensure that most of the additional provincial money will be earmarked to strengthening community policing and thereby better prevent gang violence from taking root in the first place?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When we talk about integrated models and we're looking at joint force operations between either the Calgary Police Service and the RCMP or the Edmonton Police Service and the RCMP, we're also talking about intelligence-led investigations. In order to fight organized crime or in order to fight gang violence, the intelligence base that's required is tremendous. That's where we have to stress our services in the future: to develop the intelligence we need to go out and arrest these guys.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Exploitation of Children

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Modern technology is a double-edged sword that has put many people at risk including our children, who are very vulnerable. Some nasty elements of our society use technology such as cellphones, e-mails, and Internet chat rooms to prey on children, and through digital photography and the Internet they share pornography of all kinds easily and freely. My question is also to the Solicitor General. Why are we lagging behind? Why haven't we followed Manitoba's lead and created some kind of agency to protect our children?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government takes the protection of children very seriously, and several ministries are working together right now. The Ministry of Children's Services as well as the Ministry of Health and Wellness have programs in place that are working with those children that are in need. We also consider child pornography and Internet-luring as child exploitation, and we are building on the protection of these children. In fact, Alberta has the only specified Crown prosecutor that deals with these issues in Canada.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: when are we going to create an integrated child exploitation team?

Mr. Cenaiko: Mr. Speaker, at this present time we don't have a provincial integrated child exploitation team, or an ICE team, but I can tell you that the Edmonton Police Service, the Calgary Police Service, and the RCMP each have a member that is working in those areas. They do collaborate together. They do work with each other and are ensuring that the information collaboration is flowing between them.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister: what are we doing to protect our children?

Mr. Cenaiko: Mr. Speaker, in the budget that the Minister of Finance and Deputy Premier will be presenting in early April we'll be looking at, as well, resources for the integrated child exploitation team, and I'd ask that member to wait until the budget process is complete.

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

Funding for Youth Programs

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Ministry of Children's Services has failed to properly fund shelters for Alberta's youth. The government annual grant system does not give the shelters across Alberta any security. To the Minister of Children's Services: why does the ministry refuse to guarantee funding to youth shelters past one year?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we do. We provide Edmonton about \$13.2 million through FCSS, and it's up to them to determine how best to spend their dollars. We've also done some very innovative things with some programs through the ministry. If there's a particular youth shelter that the member is concerned about, I'd ask her to bring it forward, and I'll look at it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that shelters like the one in Grande Prairie and day programs like the Kids in the Hall Bistro have to be at risk of closing before receiving funding from the province, when will this government provide stable funding so they don't have to be in dire need before they get help?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, we did do that. It was brought to my attention, I believe it was in December, for the Kids in the Hall program, and if I remember correctly, we provided them with \$150,000. That funding is going to continue.

As I explained, if the member is aware of someone who is in a difficult situation, I'd be more than pleased to meet with her, sit down and talk to her or even the agency. None of these agencies, Mr. Speaker, have brought this matter to my attention. Please bring it forward.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Minister of Children's Services commit to a new funding regimen that would provide sustained, stable, and sufficient funding with annual reviews instead of contract renewals every year that leave agencies begging for money?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, if the member has a particular organization or shelter that she is deeply concerned about, I'd ask her to bring it forward to me. We'll look at it. We provide money, like I indicated, to Edmonton FCSS. They receive \$13.2 million. That's another one of the stakeholders that have to be contacted because they get the money out to them too.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Emergency Preparedness

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday there was a vapour release at the Shell chemical plant in northern Strathcona county. This incident raises some important questions about emergency preparedness. This is similar to questions that were voiced after the BP ethane well fire in the area in 2001. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What's the government doing to help keep Alberta communities safe during incidents such as these?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, as I did yesterday, I want to assure the hon. member as well as all members of the House that this province's municipalities are very well prepared to respond to disasters and emergencies. Municipal Affairs through Emergency Management Alberta, or EMA, works closely with municipalities to ensure that they are prepared for and can respond to and recover from incidents such as the one that occurred yesterday. All Alberta municipalities have emergency plans in place, and these plans are validated annually and tested at least once every four years. In addition, Mr. Speaker, EMA has expanded and maintains the Alberta emergency public warning system, which allows local officials to transmit information and warnings to affected municipalities via television or radio.

2:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental to the same minister: since the BP well fire what has changed in terms of municipal emergency response?

Mr. Renner: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize the actions of officials and first responders from Fort Saskatchewan and Strathcona county as well as those of Shell. From the moment that they learned of the vapour release, they responded in a timely and effective manner, and they continue to do so today. Thanks to our

experiences during the BP well fire we gained an opportunity to tighten up and improve the communication and information aspects of municipal emergency response.

I'd like to highlight two of the important improvements. First, communities and industry worked in the Heartland Industrial Area in partnership to design and implement a community notification system for the entire region. The system, Mr. Speaker, is unlike any other, and it enables officials to send telephone emergency warnings directly to affected residents. The system complements the radio and television warnings available through the emergency public warning system.

Secondly, the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board in co-operation with EMA updated the emergency response plan for upstream petroleum industry incidents to have a far more stringent call down the system, which is regularly validated through exercises and very real events.

Thank you.

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

Medication for Seniors

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A University of Lethbridge study of 1,500 residents in 24 Alberta nursing homes found that there is a high use of sedative and antipsychotic drugs, almost double the use in Europe and the U.S. These drugs are potentially dangerous given their side effects and, in particular, the fear of falling. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What will the minister do regarding these reports that Alberta seniors are being drugged to make up for staff shortages in nursing homes?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that we are working diligently to try and accomplish the objective of having quality health care for long-term patients in our institutions. The regional health authorities along with the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports and myself have met on a number of occasions to talk about ways that we can improve the quality care in these various facilities. I'm very satisfied that there are great strides being made by many. For example, we are looking at the continuum of care from the time that home care is delivered right through to the seniors. Long-term care facilities vary throughout the province. Nursing home services, including levels and types of staffing, should be based on individual need.

As to the particular question about the use of drugs for seniors in these facilities, we're working with health authorities and with the attending physicians to make sure that they are used in an appropriate fashion. Mr. Speaker, for the largest part I'm satisfied that they are. I realize that questions have been raised publicly by a couple of the facilities in Alberta, and we are exploring what the alternatives are. But Dr. Jerry Predy's work with a long-term care facility to introduce Cold fX as a measure of prevention for flu and other anomalies associated with the frail elderly I think is a positive example of use of drugs of a preventive nature in long-term care facilities.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Following that commercial, the question is to the same minister. What is this government doing to ensure that continuing care facilities have enough funding to provide adequate staffing so that sedation is not necessary?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the funding question will be very appropriate once the introduction of the budget comes forward. I think one of the great challenges for regional health authorities dealing with long-term care facilities is the mix of patients with various levels of acuity in the facilities, which formula basis staffing is arranged to look after them. It's difficult, Mr. Speaker, to measure just exactly what's needed in every facility, but that work is being done. As to further funding that might be provided for long-term care facilities, I would say to the hon. member opposite: stay tuned; the budget will be out in a few weeks, and we'll have that discussion.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Again to the minister of health: despite waiting for the budget, what guarantee could you give the families of nursing home residents that this won't be happening over a period of time, that their loved ones are not being unnecessarily sedated?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, you know, with great regret it sounds to me like there is some sense of allegation here that doctors are overprescribing for their patients in long-term care facilities. Clearly, families, if they have that concern, can approach the physician that's attending that particular person, can speak to the matron about it, and explore whether or not the appropriate level of drugs is being provided for that patient. But I think that unless there's a specific case in point that the hon. member wants to raise privately with me, it's my view that the physicians are doing the prescribing, and any other concerns could be addressed on a private individual basis.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, before we go into Members' Statements, I'd just like to say that we've done 15 questions today, a tad shy of our previous high standard that was set. So I would encourage us all in the future to focus more on brevity.

Could we have unanimous consent to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an absolute privilege and honour to be able to introduce to you and through you 43 people from Rolling Hills, Alberta, who have journeyed here to see us in the Legislature. There are 33 students with teachers Gail Sapergia, Christopher Zottl; parents Gerjan Stikker, Kelly Shackleton, Michele Hemsing, Jackie Sereda, Irene Nannt, Kimberley Fletcher, Carmen Thomsen; and, of course, Jay deJong, who has brought up many people as a bus driver. I would ask them all to stand and receive the very warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly several of Alberta's chiefs of police and their representatives. We are meeting this afternoon to develop strategies in our fight on organized crime. They are each

on their own tremendous leaders in our Alberta communities. I'd like to ask these individuals to please rise and remain standing as I introduce each of you: Acting Chief Darryl daCosta and Acting Deputy Chief Dave Korol from the Edmonton Police Service, Inspector Tom McKenzie from the Lethbridge Police Service on behalf of Chief John Middleton-Hope, Chief Marshall Chalmers from the Camrose Police Service, Deputy Chief Rick Hansen on behalf of Chief Jack Beaton of the Calgary Police Service, Chief Norm Boucher of the Medicine Hat Police Service, Chief Bill Zens of the Lacombe Police Service, Chief Terry Dreddy from the Taber Police Service, and Chief Superintendent Knecht from the RCMP. I'd ask that these individuals receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Deputy Speaker: We will call on the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for Members' Statements.

Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie

Mr. Ducharme: Merci, M. le Président. Aujourd'hui c'est un plaisir pour moi de présenter à la Chambre une explication d'un événement canadien qu'on appelle Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie.

Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie se déroulent à la grandeur du Canada sur une base annuelle. Cette année Les Rendez-vous ont lieu du 4 au 20 mars. Durant cette période de temps on célèbre les communautés francophones afin de promouvoir la langue et la culture françaises tant par ses activités sociales et ses célébrations que par sa dimension humaine et communautaire.

Les Rendez-vous contribuent à renforcer les liens entre les anglophones et les francophones du Canada et favorisent un plus grand respect entre ces deux communautés.

2:40

De plus en plus nos municipalités albertaines se joignent aux Rendez-vous en tenant des cérémonies pour reconnaître leur communauté francophone; parmi ces municipalités cette année on compte Red Deer, Lethbridge, Calgary. Félicitations à ces municipalités.

Comme je le mentionnais lors de la présentation des mes invités spéciaux, ce matin à la rotonde de la Législature le Président de la Chambre était hôte d'une belle célébration dédiée à la reconnaissance de la contribution des francophones à notre province. C'est un geste que la communauté apprécie beaucoup, si on en juge par la participation importante de la communauté.

Je tiens aussi à remercier mes collègues de l'Assemblée qui se sont dérangés pour assister à la célébration.

Cette septième édition des Rendez-vous revêt une signification spéciale parce que le thème de cette année porte sur les centenaires de l'Alberta et de la Saskatchewan avec un accent sur les communautés francophones de ces provinces.

Pierre Sabourin, un jeune artiste franco-albertain, est présentement en tournée canadienne avec un groupe d'artistes francophones de l'ouest pour promouvoir Les Rendez-vous et le centenaire de notre province.

Merci, M. le Président.

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my pleasure to provide the Assembly with information on a wonderful Canadian event called Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie. Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie are held throughout Canada on a yearly basis, and this year they run from March 4 to 20. During that period of time attention is focused on francophone communities with the idea

of promoting French language and culture as much through community and human relations as through social activities and celebrations.

Les Rendez-vous contribute to the reinforcement of links between francophones and anglophones in Canada by fostering greater respect between the two communities. More and more of our municipalities are joining in Les Rendez-vous by holding ceremonies to recognize their francophone communities. Red Deer, Lethbridge, Calgary are some of the municipalities that held flag-raising ceremonies to mark the launch of these celebrations. Congratulations to all of them.

As I alluded to earlier while introducing my special guests, this morning the Speaker of the House hosted a wonderful ceremony in the rotunda to recognize the contributions of the francophone community to our province. It was very much appreciated by the francophone community, judging by the large attendance. I also want to thank my colleague MLAs who took time off their busy schedules to stop by.

The seventh edition of these Rendez-vous takes on a special meaning because the theme of this year's event is centred on the centennial of Alberta and Saskatchewan with a focus on the francophone communities in these provinces. Pierre Sabourin, a young Franco-Albertan singer from Edmonton, is part of a group of western francophone artists presently touring Canada to promote Les Rendez-vous as well as our centennial.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [As submitted]

Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie

Mr. Chase: Aujourd'hui je voudrais reconnaître la fête de la Francophonie, une célébration qui a eu son début en 1998. Cette fête célèbre les accomplissements et les contributions de millions de Canadiennes et de Canadiens français. Pendant leur/notre histoire les francophones de l'Alberta et à travers le Canada ont dû se battre pour les droits de langue dans leurs églises, leurs écoles, et même pour le droit de parler français au sein de l'Assemblée Législative de l'Alberta. Les organisations comme Les Bons Amis et la Société St-Jean-Baptiste et l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta continuent toujours la lutte.

J'ai commencé mes études de la langue française au quatrième niveau d'une école élémentaire sur la base militaire de Namao à Edmonton. J'ai continué ces études à un lycée à Ottawa avant de suivre des cours de français, mon premier choix, à l'Université de Calgary. J'ai enseigné le français aux enfants et aux adolescents pour plusieurs années à Calgary.

Je voudrais remercier les francophones de l'Alberta pour leurs cadeaux d'arts et de culture, et surtout merci à ceux qui ont contribué au succès de cette province. Merci, et bonne fête.

[Translation] Today I would like to recognize the annual get-together of French-speaking Canadians, a celebration that began in 1998. This festival celebrates the accomplishments and contributions of millions of French Canadians. During their/our history French-speaking Albertans and those across Canada have had to fight for language rights in their churches, schools, and even for the right to speak French in the Alberta Legislative Assembly. Organizations like the Good Friends, the St. John the Baptist Society, and the French-Canadian Association of Alberta constantly continue this struggle.

I began studying the French language as a grade 4 student on Edmonton's Namao air force base. I continued these studies in high school in Ottawa before majoring in French at the University of Calgary. I taught French at the elementary and junior high levels for several years in Calgary.

I would like to thank French-speaking Albertans for their gifts of arts and culture and especially for their contribution to the success of this province. Thank you, and happy birthday/holiday. [As submitted]

National Social Work Week

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today and recognize that March 13 to 19 is National Social Work Week. As a former social worker I understand that their work can be a difficult yet extremely gratifying profession. Social workers in our province make a difference in the lives of so many Albertans, from the youngest to the old. As Albertans we should all be proud of them.

This year's theme is Social Work: Fairness and Well-being, which is a very fitting theme for a profession that seeks to achieve equality and wellness for each person they serve.

Social workers perform a variety of roles as they work with people in need. They could be part of a family counselling agency providing services such as parenting and marriage counselling. Many work as part of health care teams, working with patients and family members to overcome emotional, behavioural, social, and financial difficulties. Others work with youth and adult offenders in correctional services.

Social workers are part of our educational system, providing services for students, parents, and teachers. Government departments also benefit from the help of social workers to deliver social programs, including income-support programs, child protection programs, child care programs, and foster care and adoption programs. Community agencies also employ social workers to meet community needs and address problems such as homelessness, family violence, addiction, or racism. There is a great diversity in the work they do, just as there is diversity in the many kinds of people they serve. Social work is a demanding profession requiring patience, sensitivity, and an understanding of others' beliefs and values.

Earlier the Minister of Children's Services introduced Mr. Rod Adachi and Ms Linda Golding from the Alberta College of Social Workers. I, too, am pleased that they could join us today. I commend the men and women who take on this rewarding line of work. Their efforts too often go unappreciated. I hope that this week we all take time to celebrate the vital contribution social workers make in the lives of Albertans.

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

Construction Labour Trades

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 40,000 highly skilled tradespeople represented by the affiliated unions of the Alberta Building Trades Council were recently dealt an unnecessary and unfair blow by this Conservative government. On December 6, 2004, the provincial cabinet issued an order in council unilaterally changing the rules under which the Horizon oil sands project, a major oil sands project north of Fort McMurray, will be constructed. The order in council was granted under the little used division 8 of the Labour Relations Code after a request from Canadian Natural Resources Ltd., owner of the Horizon project. There was no prior consultation with the affected building trades unions.

This division 8 provision allows CNRL to unilaterally negotiate terms and conditions of work outside existing collective agreements. Instead of having to negotiate with the building trades unions, the company can instead use company-friendly unions such as CLAC or the non-unionized Merit Contractors. CNRL will be allowed to

bring in lower paid foreign temporary workers without first having to demonstrate that there are no qualified Canadian tradespeople available to do the work.

This unilateral change of normal collective bargaining rules is fundamentally undemocratic and completely unjustified. There have been two decades of labour peace in the construction trades in this province with no major strikes or job disruptions. This labour peace has been one of the foundations of Alberta's sustained economic growth. Alberta's building trades are playing a crucial role in building all of the major multibillion dollar oil sands projects. These skilled tradesmen and -women do hard, dangerous work often far from home. Alberta's building trade unions are warning this government that the imposition of the division 8 provision will lead to job site conflict, less qualified, inexperienced tradespeople being hired, and as a result, lower quality work and more accidents.

Mr. Speaker, answers have been hard to come by as to why the Conservative government made this provocative move against unionized construction trades. I urge the government to abandon its policy of confrontation and move quickly to re-establish a co-operative labour climate in the oil sands so Alberta's continued economic prosperity can be ensured.

Thank you.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present a petition signed by 1,088 people in Calgary and Edmonton urging the government of Alberta to "introduce legislation that will provide immediate tuition relief to students attending post-secondary education institutions across the province [of Alberta]."

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am presenting a petition signed by 87 parents and constituents from Edmonton and Sherwood Park who are in support of Bill 202 and are urging the government of Alberta to introduce legislation that will allow parents the authority to place their children who are abusing drugs into mandatory drug treatment and fund urgently required youth treatment centres.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

Bill 26

Corporate Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2005

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 26, the Corporate Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2005. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 26 amends the Alberta Corporate Tax Act to parallel federal provisions, including measures to ensure that tax cannot be avoided by transferring property out of a corporation at less than fair market value and does make some other technical changes. It also amends the ABC Benefits Corporation Act to facilitate payment in lieu of tax programs for Alberta Blue Cross.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a first time]

head: 2:50 **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to table in the Assembly the requisite number of five copies of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta annual report for the previous year, 2003 to 2004.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a Statistics Canada table that shows Alberta to have the lowest number of police officers per capita of any jurisdiction in Canada west of P.E.I. and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a press release issued by the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, dated March 11. The release describes Capital health's cut to physiotherapy as "robbing Peter to pay Paul" and "another example of Albertans being forced to assume an increasing cost for health care."

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today. The first is from a constituent, a student at the University of Alberta who writes to the Premier in response to the Premier's comment that the \$180,000 severance was not a lot and notes that as a student with a lot of debt, enrolled in four classes this semester and working an average of 20 hours a week at a part-time job, it matters to him and it is a lot of money.

My second tabling today, Mr. Speaker, is an announcement from the city of Red Deer commenting on their "dismay over the delay of the province-wide transfer of ambulance services from municipalities to Regional Health Authorities" and noting that it will cause a deficit for the city of Red Deer and a possible almost 3 and a half per cent increase in their tax rate as a result of this.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings from James Carss, the president of the University Heights Community Association, located in the southwest corner of Calgary Varsity. In a letter to the Premier and in a second letter to the residents Mr. Carss expresses the community's grave concerns about the marked lack of stakeholder input regarding the widening of 16th Avenue N. What used to be a vista view of the Bow River to the south and the Rockies to the west, an idyllic parkland setting, is about to be turned into a sound wall penitentiary bisected by lengths from the Foothills hospital to the new Children's hospital, which was pigeonholed into their community without their permission or meaningful consultation. Two hundred and forty-eight trees are about to be bulldozed to make way for road expansion . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I'd like to remind the hon. member that it's just for tabling, not for making a speech.

Anyone else with tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings

today. The first one is the EUB decision numbered 2002-103, dated December 19, 2002, and for the information of the Department of Energy and the minister this is the document that indicates that there was an overcharging by Engage Energy to the transmission administrator of \$63 million.

The second tabling I have this afternoon is further information in regard to the Enron scandal in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. This is an e-mail from Richard Sanders, a legal adviser for Enron, dated December 2000, and it indicates in this e-mail that Enron's "intelligence indicates that the government's investigation is not moving forward in any organized manner."

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have very voluminous reports to table under Tabling of Returns and Reports: the annual report for Capital health for 2003-2004, the Aspen regional health authority annual report 2003-2004, and finally the Peace Country health annual report for 2003-2004. The required numbers are here.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a few tablings here today, and I have the number of copies available here. One is a unanimous resolution from the Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta – that's all the reserves in northern Alberta – and it's condemning the government as "irresponsible and short-sighted and offensive" to their people and to their treaty regarding their employment immigration policies.

The second is a letter from the Treaty 8 First Nations grand chief speaking to the same issue and stating that it is creating an "extremely irresponsible and potentially explosive" situation.

And another group of letters from a number of concerned Albertans – I understand, again, all from government members' ridings – deriding the government on their temporary foreign replacement worker policy.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's good to see that you were able to get that straight because earlier today I received some mail from your office for the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who has the same last name as I do.

Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to have the opportunity to rise today and table the appropriate number of copies of an electronic mail that I received from a constituent and her family. Actually, there are five of them altogether: Sharon Hawrelak, Kris and Jason Kropiniski, and Nick and Nancy Hawrelak. They are writing today to their MLA to express a great deal of support for a total smoking ban in Alberta.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I have the appropriate number of letters, again an electronic mail, that comes from a lady by the name of Wealtha McKenzie in Red Deer. She is the president of the Alberta Bed & Breakfast Association, and she writes to raise some minor concerns that she has with the Hotel Room Tax (Tourism Levy) Amendment Act, that we're going to be debating later today.

Thank you.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the hon. Mr.

Boutillier, Minister of Environment, pursuant to the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act: the Ministry of Environment, environmental protection security fund annual report, April 1, 2003 to March 31, 2004.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Transmittal of Estimates**

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I have received a certain message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Deputy Speaker: The Lieutenant Governor transmits interim supply estimates for certain sums required for the service of the province and of certain sums required from the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

head: **Government Motions**

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I now wish to table the 2005-06 interim supply estimates. These interim supply estimates will provide spending authority to the Legislative Assembly and the government until June 1, 2005. By that date, it is anticipated that spending authorization will have been provided for the entire fiscal year ending March 31, 2006.

When passed, these interim supply estimates will authorize approximate spending of \$5.1 billion for expense and equipment and inventory purchases, \$136 million for capital investment, \$32 million for nonbudgetary disbursements, and \$316 million for lottery fund payments.

3:00

Interim supply amounts are based on departments' needs to fund government programs and services until June 1. While many payments are monthly, other payments are due at the beginning of each quarter and at the beginning of the fiscal year, and some payments, Mr. Speaker, are seasonal.

13. Mrs. McClellan moved:

Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2005-06 interim supply estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 13 carried]

14. Mrs. McClellan moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 58(9) the number of days that Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2005-06 interim supply estimates shall be one day.

[Government Motion 14 carried]

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

Bill 21
Hotel Room Tax (Tourism Levy)
Amendment Act, 2005

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. members. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 21, the Hotel Room Tax (Tourism Levy) Amendment Act, 2005.

This legislation has not been amended since it was introduced in 1987, so there are technical improvements, clarifications, and administrative issues that need to be addressed through this process. There are also changes that will benefit administration of the hotel room tax, tourism levy, and bring it into line with other tax programs that we administer. That said, there are some very key components of this bill that will indirectly but undoubtedly contribute to the strength of our province.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I love this province and its many wonders and natural attractions. We have great beauty here that is beyond compare, and we truly have a lot to offer in Alberta. This bill will provide another way for more people to take advantage of what we have to offer and, in turn, benefit our economy. This is an important bill, particularly to Alberta's tourism industry as it continues to work diligently to strengthen Alberta's position as a great destination for visitors and effectively compete with other regions for guests.

One of the key elements of this bill is that it will be a factor in increasing funding by an estimated 75 per cent for tourism and development in Alberta. Basically, the way it will work is that on April 1, 2005, the bill will change the name of the tax from the hotel room tax to a tourism levy and reduce the rate from 5 per cent to 4 per cent. The revenue that's generated from this levy will be put into the province's general revenue fund, and the proceeds collected from the levy will be used to determine the funding levels for tourism, marketing, and development.

Mr. Speaker, there are some that may feel that the 1 per cent reduction alone may not seem significant to the guests staying one night at a hotel, but if you look at the collective savings based on this year's numbers, it is more than \$11 million. As with most tax reductions, people will choose to spend, or invest, that reduction back into the economy.

Mr. Speaker, there will also be a smooth transition for operators. There will be no substantial change in the process for operators in the province as they will continue to collect the levy from their guests and remit it to the province. One of the key reasons there will be a smooth transition for industry is because of the valuable input from the industry itself. Government has been working with the Alberta Hotel & Lodging Association, with Travel Alberta, and with others in the industry over the past few years for an improved way to benefit both the consumer and operators and for ways to help Alberta compete for tourists with provinces like B.C., Ontario, and Quebec.

In our province's centennial year this bill will help stimulate further travel to our province by lowering the cost of accommodations, and it will provide another avenue for improved funding to promote Alberta in the years to come. I urge all members to give their support to Bill 21, and I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Dunford: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to indicate today to all of the members in the Assembly that the only way taxes go in Alberta is down. What we have today, again, is an example of the fiscal responsibility of this government. This has been the keynote of this administration since we were elected in 1993, and I'm pleased to state to all that are represented here today that this remains, then, the keystone as we move forward into the future.

There are a few people that I want to thank and congratulate for bringing forward the bill today. First of all, we've just heard the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, and I want to thank him both from the standpoint of the government caucus and also individually for his support of this bill. Now, we don't want to forget, of course, the Minister of Finance. That is the department that is bringing forward this bill. Again, with her guidance and encouragement we've been able to proceed through the processes, then, that are necessary in order to be able to bring a bill to this House. I would urge all members, of course, to support the bill, and we'll get into some reasons why we might wish to do that.

First of all, let's talk about a bit of the history. My colleague that sits to the right of me, the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, back in 1994 was chair of a committee that first started looking at what we might do with the tourism industry here in the province. While the tourism industry for a long time has been very strong in Alberta, we felt that perhaps there were ways in which we could strengthen it. I'm reminded continually of a frame of reference that my colleague from Calgary-Nose Hill uses, and that is that just because we're doing good doesn't mean we can't do better. I think this is a great example of that.

Now, where the discussion first started was: what were we going to do in terms of the pillow tax? It was certainly not called that by any act of legislation here in this House, Mr. Speaker, but on the street that's how the situation was referred to: the pillow tax. Of course, there's been lengthy discussion throughout the province as to what might be done and what could be done over time. It was actually quite controversial at various points because there was reason for support for it because, of course, this was a way in which, then, to provide revenue into general revenue.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Of course, the main objective that we have had since 1993 and, certainly, I had in even getting involved in politics was not only to eliminate deficit but was to reduce debt to zero. So it wasn't an easy thing to be able to give up existing revenue patterns. But, again, my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod and others persisted, and through the years I think we saw a gaining of momentum in this project.

3:10

It wasn't until my predecessor Minister of Economic Development put together an MLA team, a strategy team, that really went to work on this particular initiative and actually was successful, then, in bringing it forward and having the government agree that this would be approved. We're now here today talking in terms of a government piece of legislation.

I haven't had time to look at the tabling that was made earlier today and purported to be, perhaps, an objection to the bill. I'll have to spend time later today to look at that and will certainly do that prior to this bill going to committee, but I'd be very surprised to learn of any serious objection, really, to this piece of legislation.

What we have of course is not only the reduction of a tax, but by moving from a hotel tax to the tourism levy, what we do have are funds that are going into and will continue to go into general revenue. In fact, then an equal amount will come out of general revenue and go into, actually, the budget of Economic Development and into our tourism file. So as the Member for Calgary-Lougheed had indicated, about a 75 per cent increase in that particular budget line item.

Now, how will we use it? Well, Mr. Speaker and fellow members, what we will be doing with it is dedicating it to the develop-

ment of marketing plans for tourism in Alberta and also in terms of the development of tourism facilities. Now, all of us are aware of the four pillars of tourism in this province – i.e., the city of Calgary with its Stampede, the city of Edmonton not only with the West Edmonton Mall but its becoming a festival city, and we want to encourage that, and then, of course, the majestic mountains and the resort areas of Banff and Jasper – but, Mr. Speaker, as you well know, and as we've heard in the maiden speeches on the Speech from the Throne as this session has unfolded, there's a lot more to Alberta than just these four pillars.

I want to indicate to you that as many of us travel around the province, we see the sights that strike our imagination. My personal indicator as to whether something is impressive is whether or not I get the goosebumps. I want to indicate to my fellow colleague that would represent the High River area but also Cayley that if you have had the opportunity like I have – and I'm sure that you have. Every week I get to drive south on the number 2 highway south of High River. When you get to a little place called Cayley and you come up over the rise, there is Alberta.

If you ever want to see Alberta, there's where you want to go. Mr. Speaker, it will give you goosebumps, I tell you. Over to the east you have territory that is as flat as the floor of this House. You can see for miles. You could watch your dog run away for three days. Over to the southeast is the town of Nanton, an historic town, a town that is involved in the rural development strategy and has become, perhaps, a centre for antique shopping. If you see the signs on the side of the highway, they're not only offering an opportunity to get involved in antiques, but they have walks where you see murals, then, that are on the sides of the buildings.

Straight ahead of you, Mr. Speaker, are the Porcupine Hills, a beautiful, beautiful sight, and you can see immediately why they are called the porcupines. Then over to the southwest and to the west of you – mind you, I'm keeping my eyes on the highway as I'm doing all of this, and I'm well within the speed limit – you will see, of course, foothills and again those majestic mountains. It is a wonderful, wonderful sight.

Recently in Germany I got talking about tourism, and of course the German people love Alberta. They love the aboriginal situation. They love the cowboy heritage that we have. But I got talking about the hoodoos, and I got quite excited about the hoodoos, Mr. Speaker. I want to say to the people that are around – my mind has gone blank on the name of the park.

An Hon. Member: Writing-on-Stone.

Mr. Dunford: Writing-on-Stone. That's it. Again, if you were to visit this site, nobody – nobody – could come away without being impressed by the wonderful sights that you see.

Now, in the coulees in Lethbridge we don't quite have the hoodoos, but we've got the next best thing in terms of the coulees and especially on full moon nights. I invite every member in this Assembly with your spouse or your significant other, whatever the case is, to come with my wife, Gwen, and myself on a full moon night. Midnight is about the best time because you have the angle then of the moon on these coulees. It's magnificent, it's breathtaking, and it's exciting. I can't tell you the word I used in Germany to describe this, but there are staffers that you might know in my office that will surely tell you. If I knew the German translation, I might be able to get away with it in the House. In any event, I want to tell you that this is a spectacular situation.

I have no idea how much time I have left, but I'm trying to instill in everyone that there is a lot of product in Alberta that can be developed. What we have to do, Mr. Speaker, is go, then, beyond

the corridor, go beyond these four pillars and move into the rural areas of Alberta and develop that tourism product.

Ms Calahasen: Yes, and northern Alberta too.

Mr. Dunford: Yes, absolutely. Northern Alberta: beautiful, beautiful sites and arrangements of trees. Actually, being from southern Alberta, I want you to know that I'm becoming a bit of a timber expert because I saw a tree.

These are situations, again, in this province, Mr. Speaker, that we want to congratulate.

Now, on the more serious side with the time that is left, despite a bit of the fun that I'm having – perhaps I'm showboating for my family that's here; you know, say it isn't so – I want you to know that within Economic Development, within the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council, within our administration we have the kind of minds, the kind of dedication, the kind of energy that we believe will stand you in good stead in approving this bill, in allowing the tax levy dollars to be given to us and taken into our possession. We promise that we will use them to the benefit of all Albertans from a marketing standpoint and from a tourism development standpoint. This is so important that we get this work done because we want to take the tourism industry, right now about a \$4 billion industry, and we want to move that up. We want to make it stronger in Alberta.

3:20

We want to do this for a number of reasons, not only the obvious economic development reasons, but I remind all of us who are becoming more in tune with the ecology, becoming more environmentally oriented that this is clean industry. This is clean, sustainable economic development. We want it, of course, not only to grow but also to prosper, then, as we move on through the years.

I would be again surprised, maybe even disappointed, to hear objections to this bill. I hope that people can see the wisdom of what the government is doing with this bill and can support it.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I want to say thank you to everyone for their kind attention, and I look forward to them supporting the Member for Calgary-Lougheed on this particular bill.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, earlier today the hon. Deputy Speaker provided an historical vignette for the Assembly. I would now like to provide a geographic vignette. Edmonton is in southern Alberta. The geographic centre of Alberta is located 110 miles to the north and west of this city.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the government is in a bit of a rush to have this bill proceed, and I can appreciate that. It was, as the hon. member mentioned, first introduced in 1987. It's been some 18 years now that the industry has been waiting for some changes to be made. Here we are two weeks away from the date on which they were hoping to have it implemented, and it's first being discussed in the Legislature today. So I recognize the need for some hurry up.

However, having said that, I had hoped to be the first member opposite to speak to this bill, and I was a little perturbed, quite frankly, that the Speaker in the chair at the time, for whatever reason, did not see me prepare to speak. I was certainly prepared to speak. Anyhow, that's an issue to be discussed later.

The Speaker: Hon. member, we can always ask for unanimous consent of the House to let you go on. But proceed now. Let's see what we've got for the first 15.

Mr. R. Miller: We'll see if I can fill that time up, Mr. Speaker. I may have to call my family in and reminisce about some drives down the highway in order to do it.

Mr. Speaker, I am in fact pleased to have the opportunity to commence the debate on behalf of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition on Bill 21, the Hotel Room Tax (Tourism Levy) Amendment Act, 2005. We live in a province with almost unspeakable natural beauty, from the grasslands of the southeast – here I go now; I'm starting to wax eloquent here – to the vast, wide open prairies all the way up to the beginning of the great Canadian Shield, the incredible sight of the Alberta Rockies, the rolling foothills which lead into the eastern slopes, the Lakeland district in the northeast, the hidden treasures of the Peace country. I'm not sure that I can even name them all.

I have been fortunate enough in my 44 years to have travelled to every corner of this great province, and I consider myself even more fortunate to have met many tourists from all over the world, many of whom have become really good friends. We have a plethora of tourism facilities and attractions in this province, Mr. Speaker, and endless opportunities for ecotourism, shopping, cultural events, and urban nightlife.

According to the Economic Development ministry, approximately 120,000 Albertans are employed in the tourism industry, and they rate tourism as one of Alberta's fastest growing industries. In fact, it is estimated that tourism generates somewhere between \$4 billion and \$5 billion in business each year in this province. So it is clear to me and, I think, clear to most Albertans that this industry is one that requires our attention, and dealing with the hotel tax is an appropriate thing for this Legislature to be doing.

As you well know, the current hotel tax, as I mentioned earlier, was implemented in 1987. At that time it was an effort to deal with the ever-increasing yearly deficits that our province was experiencing under a Conservative government, I might mention, and it was to have been a temporary measure, somewhat like most taxes. When they come in, it always seems as if they're designed to be temporary measures.

Somehow, 18 years later, Mr. Speaker, this tax is still alive and kicking. The deficits are long gone, thanks in large part to much higher than expected energy revenues that we've experienced over the last many years but also thanks in part to the many sacrifices that Albertans have made as a result of government cutbacks. The debt is also gone. At least, that is to say, we have enough money to pay off the debt, and that's a good thing although, in reality, most of us know that we're going to be paying off the debt for another three years or so. Yet the hotel tax remains.

Mr. Speaker, this tax has been an unpopular thing with the industry ever since it was first implemented, and it's been the focus of discussion and possible changes for many years now. Five years ago, in fact, the Treasurer of the day was considering eliminating the tax altogether at the urging of the industry. At exactly the same time the mayors of Alberta's two biggest cities were lobbying the government to allow the municipalities to collect the tax and use it to promote local tourism initiatives.

Now, more recently the hotel and accommodation industry has been working with the government to have the tax changed into a levy, and the hon. Minister of Economic Development alluded to the fact that there has been very close co-operation. That's obviously a good thing, and hopefully it will allow this legislation to move forward with a relatively smooth ride. The new levy, Mr. Speaker, would generate monies or, at least, is designed to generate monies that would be earmarked for the promotion of tourism and travel to and within Alberta. Hence, we have this legislation before us today. As I indicated, the government has been working closely with the industry on this legislation for some time. There is a great deal of support from industry for the bill, and I'm glad to see that.

Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting this bill in principle during second reading. Legislation which will result in a lower rate of taxation and at the same time provide some assurance to the industry that the levy imposed will be used to promote the industry certainly sounds like a good thing on the surface.

I do have a number of small concerns and one major concern, Mr. Speaker. The major concern that I have as it relates to this bill is as follows: the government has made a lot out of the fact that this bill will change the hotel tax into a tourism levy, the intent of which is to provide stable and predictable funding to the industry in order to promote itself and the wonderful opportunities that exist for visitors to Alberta and, indeed, to Albertans themselves. I was spending some time on the website this morning, Mr. Speaker, and it very much trumpets the fact that this will channel money specifically into promoting the industry, yet there is not one word – not one word – in this legislation that commits the government to ensuring that the levy collected will actually be earmarked for the promotion of the tourism industry.

The bill talks about reducing the tax from 5 per cent to 4 per cent. This is good. Taxes are going down. I think we all like that. Certainly, the people renting hotel rooms, staying at bed and breakfasts will appreciate the fact that the taxes are going down. But nowhere does it talk about ensuring that this money will actually go to promote the industry, and that is supposedly the main reason why we're discussing this bill today. In fact, a phone call to the Finance ministry this morning indicated, and the Minister of Economic Development confirmed it here a few minutes ago, that the revenue generated will flow into general revenue.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm kind of new to this game. I don't mind admitting that. But if the intention of the bill is to commit more money to the promotion of tourism in Alberta, then why doesn't the bill make any mention of this at all? I would have presumed that the legislation would have some mention of where the funds collected would be held, how it would be proposed that those funds would be managed, how they would be spent.

It's very much, Mr. Speaker, like the tire recycling fund. Right now we collect I think it's \$4 on every new tire that's sold in Alberta, and there's a process outlined that determines exactly what that money will be used for, how it's going to be collected, how it will be used, what's going to happen to it. I would have thought in this legislation there would be something similar. If this is the grand vision of this bill, to promote industry and to make sure that the money collected goes to industry, it should be in there.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, there's been, what I've perceived to be, at least, and I think others would agree, a growing trend by this government to do more and more business by regulation as opposed to legislation, and I'm afraid that this may be just one more example of that. It leaves us and, in fact, the industry with no choice but to take the government's word that the levy that is collected will be used in the promotion of the industry.

There's another concern. The Minister for Economic Development alluded to the letter that I tabled earlier this afternoon, Mr. Speaker. It's not necessarily opposition to the bill, but it is a concern which I will be raising when we get to Committee of the Whole. There was up until now and presumably until March 31 a \$25 commission per reporting period that is allowed to be claimed back by the operator when they file their hotel tax submission.

Now, Mr. Speaker, \$25 may not seem like an awful lot of money to larger hotels and motels, the larger operators, but for the small operator of a bed and breakfast operation that \$25 allowance is, I think, some recognition of the amount of time and paperwork that's

required on their part to fill in this remittance. In most cases it would be for a very few number of rooms, a very few nights of stay. Nevertheless, it requires a certain amount of paperwork and time input on their behalf. It would appear on first blush – and I know the Minister of Economic Development indicated not, but until we get into the details, we won't know for sure – that there will be perhaps even more bookkeeping required than there was before, and as I say, that \$25 commission is gone for those small operators.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I mentioned that I'm new. I don't mind admitting that. I'm on a rather steep learning curve right now, but one thing I have learned rather quickly is that there are often cross-jurisdictional contradictions between ministries. This is another one of the concerns that is raised in this letter from the president of the Bed & Breakfast Association. It would appear that both Alberta Health and Wellness and Alberta Human Resources and Employment have legislation on the books which treats establishments that accommodate more than eight guests as a motel or a hotel, yet this legislation as it's currently written, and indeed the proposed new legislation as well, contemplates four or more bedrooms in defining which would be a lodging that would be required to collect and remit the tourism levy or, as it is now, the hotel tax.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think this raises a little bit of a question in terms of contradiction. On the one hand, you could have fewer than eight people staying in your facility and you wouldn't have to comply with certain regulations that apply to hotels and motels, and on the other hand, four bedrooms is the number. I would just like to see some consistency across the ministries.

Now, I also mentioned, Mr. Speaker, that there have been concerns raised in the past about the way the money would be used to promote tourism in Alberta. Last year in this Assembly there was a motion, Motion 506, debated and ultimately passed. It was presented by the Member for West Yellowhead. It called on the government to establish just such a levy as we are discussing today and to dedicate that money to the province's tourism marketing framework. There was considerable debate at the time as to how to best promote the province and the various tourism possibilities that exist here.

I have to admit that my first thought when I was reading through last year's debate was that I would be worried as a citizen that we would be concentrating on what I call the big three; namely, the Calgary Stampede, the Banff corridor, and the West Edmonton Mall. Mr. Speaker, of course we all recognize that these are world-class attractions, and in fact they're world-famous attractions, but at the same time Alberta has so much more to offer. I certainly would hope that we don't lose sight of that fact in any future promotional campaigns that we undertake. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure there's probably 83 members in this Assembly, quite frankly, who would have some very strong ideas on how to best promote tourism in their province and particularly as it might affect their individual constituencies.

When I look at the numbers that have been bounced around a little bit both on the government website and by the Minister of Economic Development, I wonder if perhaps we shouldn't be allocating even more money to this endeavour. The proposed legislation, Mr. Speaker, according to the Finance minister's own press release would boost funding for tourism by approximately 75 per cent to somewhere in the area of \$42 million in the coming fiscal year.

According to published newspaper reports from last August, Ontario was spending \$144 million on tourism promotion, Quebec was spending \$125 million, and even British Columbia was spending \$50 million promoting the industry in their province. Given that tourism is bringing in such tremendous revenue, as we said, somewhere between 4 and a half billion dollars, \$5 billion, and we

recognize that it is a major employer in this province – certainly, it's seen as a growth industry – I think it could be reasonably argued that perhaps \$42 million is not enough.

In summary, I think I'd like to just tell all members that I believe that anything that we can do to help revive an industry that has been ravaged somewhat in recent years by the events of 9/11, the SARS outbreak, and more recently the onslaught of BSE, anything we can do to ensure that our tourism industry continues its recovery and goes on to thrive and prosper, Mr. Speaker, would be a good and noble thing for us to be doing.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now in effect. Five minutes for comments and questions if there are.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are you taking advantage of Standing Order 29, or are you participating?

Mr. Taylor: No. I'd like to speak to the bill if I might, Mr. Speaker, and I won't take a long time. I just have a couple of points that I wanted to bring to it from the perspective of somebody who is an Albertan by choice. A very large part of the reason that I made that choice is because I fell in love with this province as a tourist some three months before I moved here.

I remember, as you drive through Strathmore headed towards the mountains on highway 1, on the Trans-Canada highway, there's just a little rise as the highway comes up out of the town. At that point, with my wife driving and me sitting in the passenger seat, I got my first glimpse of the Rocky Mountains, only at the time I didn't know that that's what they were.

I saw this shimmering white on the horizon, and I thought, oh, there's a bank of clouds coming in to ruin what had been till that point about three beautiful cloudless days in a row. I made a comment like that to my wife, and she sort of smiled because she'd been out here before and I never had. She didn't say anything, and we drove on maybe for another five minutes, and I said: "Those aren't clouds. Those are mountains." From that moment, Mr. Speaker, I was hooked on the awesome natural beauty of the province of Alberta. Three months later, as I said, we were living here.

So I understand the draw that this place has and the hold that it can develop over you once you've seen it. The issue, I guess, is to get more people to see it and stay here and take advantage of it and, in so doing, spend their money on Alberta.

I'm reminded of something else that happened before I first laid eyes on this province and on these mountains, when I was living back in Toronto and I was doing a radio show there. This probably would have been in the late '70s, maybe early '80s; I don't remember exactly. Two representatives from Travel Alberta stopped into the radio station and paid us a visit. They were there to promote tourism in Toronto. I remember asking them, "Why did you come all this way?" I mean, seeing that Alberta was so far away. Of course, you have to understand, Mr. Speaker, that when you live in Toronto, you think that you're in the centre of the universe, and you think that, you know, Hamilton is a day's journey away because you see no reason to go there. But I digress. They said: "Well, you know, there are a lot more people living in Ontario than there are in Alberta or Saskatchewan or British Columbia or Montana or Idaho. We need to draw business. We need to draw tourists from further afield."

At that time there was money in the budget, obviously, for Travel

Alberta to send representatives far afield to promote the natural beauty, the natural wonder, and all the attractions of this great province in which we live. I remember most specifically them promoting – now, I'm not sure which ranch it was. It might have been Bar U; it might have been one of the other guest ranches. But going: wow, there really are ranches and real cowboys still left in the world. I wanted to see that although it took a couple of years to get around to getting out here.

3:40

Why I bring this up is because it seems to me that we could do more in this bill to fund tourism marketing and promotion than we are. If we put all the money that the tourism levy will generate as proposed in this bill into tourism marketing and promotion, it will generate about \$42.5 million in around that figure. As my colleague pointed out, Ontario spends roughly three times that amount. Of course, when you're as devoid of mountains as Ontario, you might need to spend more money to make people think that there's any reason to go there.

But we could spend more. We could do more to promote tourism. It is our fourth biggest industry in this province. This is arguably the most beautiful piece of geography on the North American continent. We could, we should do more, and I would urge that when this bill gets on to committee, that we take a look at that.

Mr. Speaker, thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Additional speakers?

Then the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed to close the debate.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Economic Development for giving us all goosebumps during his poetic address. I would also like to thank the hon. members for Edmonton-Rutherford and Calgary-Currie for their comments. But I see no need for further comment from me at this time, so I would like to ask to call the question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a second time]

Bill 6

Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2005

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 6, the Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2005.

The Fair Trading Act came into force in 1999, when it combined seven statutes into one. Amendments are now needed to fine-tune and update the act. Government services received overall support from stakeholders on these amendments. Over 8,000 stakeholders were consulted, ranging from cheque cashing agencies, electricity marketers, moving companies, natural gas marketers, payday lenders, and time-share operators.

These amendments, Mr. Speaker, will clarify the interpretation of certain definitions and principles in the act; ensure that certain business practices such as negative option practices are prohibited; provide that consumers give express consent for continuous agreements; expand the list of individual representatives of a business who can be sued when the business deals with consumers unfairly; increase the amount of access and control that individuals have over their personal credit information stored by credit reporting agencies; require individuals to provide their express consent to

credit reporting agencies before these agencies can provide credit reports about them unless the report is provided to collect a debt; specify when loan brokers can charge a fee for their services; strengthen the director's authority in the areas of licensing, investigation, and enforcement provisions; improve the act's provision for investigations, prosecutions, and remedies including removing the \$100,000 cap on restitution payable by offenders to consumers; add regulation-making authority to deal with issues such as identity theft, reverse mortgages, and loan brokering; and expand regulation-making authority in the areas of credit reports, licensing, debt collection practices, and public options.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments will tighten the legislation, increase administrative efficiencies, and add flexibility to address existing and future marketplace and consumer problems. I look forward to hearing the comments during second reading. Should there be any questions or concerns raised, I undertake to respond to them at the next stage of the bill process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. The hon. member serves as the caucus critic in this area. Please proceed.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take this time to commend both the hon. Minister of Government Services and the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for sponsoring Bill 6, the Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2005. We as Official Opposition realize the value of good legislation. We will support any and all government initiatives if they're meant to facilitate good market and business practices and if the paramount goal is to always look after the consumers and taxpayers of this province. This act appears to be geared towards doing just that, and for that, we will throw our weight behind it and support the minister and the hon. member.

The Official Opposition is more interested in constructive dialogue and co-operation with the ruling party for the good of the people than in idle debate and wasteful bickering. This is a common goal that ought to be shared by all parties and ideologies represented in this Assembly, and as the Official Opposition critic for Government Services I must say that I was pleased with the co-operation and information that I received from the hon. minister and his staff and from the hon. member when we briefly met, I think yesterday.

Having said that, it's noteworthy to mention that from our side we're trying to set a tone in this Assembly today which fosters trust and co-operation and avoids animosity and friction. When we as opposition members – and I hope I am speaking for all 21 of us – raise certain concerns or ask a question with regard to a particular bill or a motion, we're not adversarial or confrontational. We simply want an answer to a question. Nothing more, nothing less.

I like this bill because it seems to address certain issues and areas which are very important to most Albertans if not all. One point in the bill that caught my eye was the item about protecting consumers from contracts that may include unknown renewal clauses or other attributes which were not previously agreed to. The hon. member alluded to negative billing, for example, and probably on numerous occasions many of us have experienced that in one way or another. Things like the book of the month or the tape of the month or the video of the month: once your initial period has expired, you are faced with a new bill, and usually it's for an amount that's more than what you agreed to initially.

There's also another area which makes all credit reports that banks use when loaning money more open to all Albertans so they are better informed on the process of loan approval. Many people in the public would go to a bank, apply for a mortgage or apply for a loan, and be denied when, in fact, they actually went ahead and did their

own research and say, "My credit report is okay; I should be entitled to that loan or that mortgage," not knowing that the banks and the collection agencies have different pieces of information that are available only to them but not to the applicant.

It changes the rules on sales contracts for time-shares so that consumers have more time to look over the contract. I think it extends it from seven days to 10 days now. Again, maybe relating to a personal experience, many of us would attend a presentation or a dinner or take a cruise not knowing that we're expected to attend a sales meeting. Usually it's between 90 minutes and two hours in length, and basically what the company is trying to do is sell you a time-share. You know, many of us would actually feel pressured, and there is no way out. You're on that cruise. What can you say? Let me off? You cannot say that. So it extends the period during which you could actually review the contract you have been entered into by 10 days, which is good.

It also protects Albertans from all lending institutions using wage assignments. I think this is particularly important because more and more Albertans are subjected to a heavy debt load which is not proportional, or representative, of the income that they're earning. To prevent wage assignments is actually a good thing.

I also like the particular point about providing that a reporting agency cannot furnish a report unless the consumer has given express consent. I think this fits quite nicely and snugly with the requirements to protect personal information and privacy, so I commend the hon. member for bringing that forward.

The point about requiring a principal, director, manager, employee, or agent of a corporation or a partner in a partnership to be held accountable or guilty of an offence if they aided or abetted in perpetrating a crime makes a lot of sense. It was only previously extended to corporations, but now it also offers the same definition to partnerships, and I think that this is a commendable addition.

3:50

Also, it ensures that criminal record checks can be performed before providing a licence, and I think this is timely. It was overlooked in the first main act, but I think it's timely to bring it in today.

It makes sure that investigations into companies that may be performing fraudulent activities are run more smoothly and that investigators have better access to the information. There were some minor loopholes in the previous act, you know, through which certain areas could not be investigated, so this streamlines it.

It also stops companies from running ads with misleading information. Many of us have seen false ads in the media promising quick and sizable incomes stuffing envelopes or working at home reselling some stupid report on a CD or, you know, just schemes that were meant to extract money from the unsuspecting public where no product or service is furnished. You fall prey to scam artists, basically. Multilevel marketing in some malicious way could also be added to that definition.

Media outlets have to be held accountable and stop running such ads if they're alerted to the falsehood that it promotes. An ad in a paper or on radio or on television may be construed or perceived as being trustworthy just because it's run in a media outlet, and the public actually thinks it has that weight behind it and all that merit because it's in a paper or on TV or on the radio. So I think the government is taking a progressive step forward to ask media outlets to stop running ads propagating falsehood, and I think the natural thing to do for the media outlets is to basically show some leadership and follow the government initiative and stop airing or running those ads in their outlets.

Having said that, we still have minor concerns that I would

tremendously appreciate some clarification on from the hon. member. We're concerned that there appears to be a trend developing where this government removes the core components of bills and laws and loosely puts them into the regulations. I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford also mentioned the same point. While we realize that sometimes the ministry or the department needs to make a timely decision in response to emerging practices or new situations, it's still a little alarming because regulations are set and changed without full consultation or input from a cross-section of the affected public. The minister at the time and some board members would decide which regulations to add, which ones to omit, and which ones to amend.

I fully understand the rationale that certain decisions have to be made when this House is not sitting, but perhaps this might take us to the argument that this House is one of the shortest sitting in the western hemisphere. I, for one, and all my caucus colleagues don't mind sitting twice as many days so we can collaborate and work with the government. We feel that this preferred government approach gives the minister too much power and discretion and effectively eliminates any need for consultation or opinion seeking.

Who decides who ends up joining these boards? Who sits on those boards? Who qualifies to sit on those boards and draft those regulations? Also, which companies or stakeholders were or will be represented on these regulations boards? Will the meetings planned for changing the regulations be open to the public? Can Joe Average or, to quote the Premier, can Martha and Henry attend those meetings or at least even submit written recommendations or suggestions?

Lastly, I urge the hon. minister and the hon. member to ensure that the sections which are going to be repealed do end up in the regulation sections. They have to be clearly stated to ensure that the continuation of consumer protection is implemented, and I'm mainly referring to sections 46 and 48 pertaining to credit reporting. It's an area, actually, that is receiving a lot of attention in the media recently. Many people have written to me as the opposition critic regarding credit reporting and the practices, you know, with respect to student loans, previous finances, mortgages, and so on. I am a little concerned that they're being repealed from the existing act, and I would like to see them highlighted and emphasized in the regulations after.

Citizens who felt that the initial Fair Trading Act was brought forward to protect them and offer them tools to evaluate and possibly repair their credit ratings are now concerned that repealing this section might just leave them with a bad credit report forever. I would hate for them actually to think that this government is letting go of its commitment, so I urge the government, I urge the minister and the hon. member to promptly and properly draft those regulations to alleviate this concern.

To end today, I repeat our agreement as the Official Opposition with the proposed amendments, and we look forward to working alongside our government colleagues. Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of this bill, and together with my colleague for Edmonton-McClung I will commend the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake and the minister responsible for bringing this legislation forward.

Speaking to some of the areas that it touches, such as identity theft, I think is really important considering the real problems we saw last year with the theft of identity information of many senior government people that got into the hands of alleged organized criminal elements. The ability to restrict the use of any information

of their identity and to deal with that somewhat more effectively I think is very important.

Also, to deal with utility marketing schemes as different ways to make money seem to be arising through means of the way we govern ourselves and problems with time-shares and payday loan dealers and such. You know, these are things that must be regulated.

Of course, and to concur with my colleague for Edmonton-McClung, we must be wary of the inclination of this government to deal with things by regulation and orders in council. I think the division 8 debacle that we saw in December with the Alberta labour code has, you know, underlined that fact, and we have to be very careful in this province that we don't go too far with that type of thing.

I'm very pleased to see movement on the practice of negative options. That's where a consumer is not liable to pay for any goods or services received under a negative option practice. This bill strikes out "unless the consumer agrees in writing to pay for the goods or services." That's very good. You know, the negative option is something that just kind of really pulls consumers in without their knowledge, and to have something that effectively deals with this I think is a responsible move on the part of the government.

Some questions arise. It takes out the list of information an agency can and can't include in its reports and puts that in regulations. Again, it's a regulation problem. Most of the members duly elected by Albertans to look after their rights as individuals and consumers will not then have a say as to how this will be developed, and it will be approved behind closed doors. I think that's a concern of some importance.

It takes out of the act provisions demanding that a reporting agency must disclose a person's file to that person on request. I guess it begs the question: is there anywhere else that requires a reporting agency to disclose to an individual or their representative what's on their file once this is repealed?

It removes the whole section allowing a person to dispute the accuracy or completeness of information in their file. Once this section is repealed, is there anywhere else in legislation that gives an individual the right to dispute the information in their file in the sense of this type of important consumer legislation? It vastly expands the aspects of the act which, again, the minister can control through regulations. It's our major and biggest concern in this particular legislation.

The updates on the reverse mortgages are timely. We've all seen the ads there. I mean, it's something that must be looked at.

The receipt situation. It repeals the section requiring that every collection agency must acknowledge the receipt of any money collected from a debtor. Does that mean that they don't have to issue receipts now for payments made? It repeals the reporting requirements of a collection agency in the section prohibiting certain activities by a collection agency or collector.

4:00

Removing these sections, Mr. Speaker, makes the public more vulnerable to rougher treatment and possibly even harassment by collection agencies, even more so than happens at the moment. The removal of some of these prohibitions of certain activities opens the door for infringement on the debtor's privacy. There's also some vagueness. It adds failing to comply with other applicable legislation as a reason to refuse to issue or remove or suspend or cancel a licence. Well, what determines what's applicable? Sometimes legislation can be too broad, and you know, in the application of certain provisions and laws we have to be very careful in that area.

One other area that's related to that is the ability for the director

to have the authority to do anything to enforce an order against real property. I think that is far too wide reaching. It speaks to the rights of property that many of us hold dear, and it is, I think, too much of a wide berth as it's termed in this.

I think the rights of consumers are very important in our legislation. I think that to uphold in this particular act respect for the law increases respect for the rule of law. I again commend the movers of this bill. We'll be in favour of that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Ducharme: Question.

The Speaker: The question has been called. Are there additional speakers?

Then the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake to close the debate.

Mr. Ducharme: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

Bill 1 Access to the Future Act

[Adjourned debate March 9: Mr. Eggen]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of Bill 1 and want to say how much I appreciate the opportunity to speak on behalf of many Albertans with respect to advanced education and investments.

I graduated in 1973 and was fortunate enough after six years of school, including four years of medical school, to complete that education without any significant debt. That seems to be a thing of the past, and increasingly, as a part-time teacher now in university, over the last decade I've heard from a lot of students about the longing they have to be less stressed in their pursuit of higher education.

The citizens of Calgary-Mountain View, where I am representative, have a fairly significant rate of postsecondary education. Approximately two-thirds have postsecondary training. Many of them expressed concerns during the last six months and during the election period about postsecondary education and about the future for their children and opportunities that they wanted to see and that they experienced but that have been less accessible as a result of some of the changes over the past decade in this province.

Most of my constituents are pleased that Alberta has paid off its debt, but the decade of cuts has indeed left people, including teachers and students, in a deficit position, stretched and stressed over the lack of resources for learning, the lack of support for learning, for infrastructure, and for building and maintenance. That was quite evident to me as I worked both on the main campus and in the medical school over this past decade. Many of them in the constituency are calling on government for sustained, reliable, predictable funding through an endowment, not depending on the ups and downs of our oil industry, that would allow consistent planning into the foreseeable future and the funding that would allow for quality education and supports.

My constituency happens to have the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, the Alberta College of Art, the University of Calgary

medical school, and all have indicated tremendous support for this bill. Truly, our future does depend on attracting and retaining capable people in Alberta.

I'll talk just about two major concerns that I was party to, and those are student concerns and faculty concerns. In relation to tuition there has been a 250 per cent increase over the decade, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated earlier, I found it hard to justify the fact that I graduated after six years of university without significant debt, to turn to students and justify the fact that their tuition left them between \$20,000 and \$21,000 in debt on average. That is an average. That doesn't account nearly for the amount that many students incur because they're not supported by their parents, and up to \$40,000 and \$60,000 debts I encountered with some of my students.

Class sizes. I myself experienced where students had to sit on the floor because of the lack of space. Certainly, the lack of access has been well publicized over the past year particularly, when we had to turn away 14,000 students who were otherwise qualified in the Calgary area.

These were serious and recurring expressions from students, some of whom we had in the Legislature today.

I've heard from many young people about concerns in the apprenticeship area, the lack of access to apprenticeships. My own son is one of those who's trying to get into an apprenticeship program and struggling to know where to begin and how to ensure that there will be access and a job afterwards. So I would ask in terms of this bill that we try to address an approach to facilitate apprenticeships in various trades so that apprentices are not discouraged from trades of their choice and therefore not dropping out, as we heard earlier today.

They also expressed concerns particularly, obviously, from the Alberta College of Art, concerns about the lack of commitment to arts, humanities, and the social sciences. Truly, Mr. Speaker, these are integral to healthy human and community development. If we're talking about a sustainable future in Alberta, we have to invest not only in the hard business faculties and the professions but surely in the arts, humanities, and social sciences, which are integral to quality of life and, indeed, to reducing mental stress in our culture. I think we're paying a significant price in the health care sector, in which the health of people has been limited to looking at whether they have a job and whether they have a significant income, as opposed to what the arts and humanities bring to the total picture of our humanity.

Other issues related to disadvantaged people and immigrants and how to make more accessible loans and subsidies for their further education.

I alluded to some of the stresses that I experienced as a teacher at the University of Calgary, and I would say that our health system is dealing with a lot of these issues. We're experiencing another deficit, then, that has not been measured over the last decade, and that's a mental health deficit, especially among college students but also among faculty who have been forced to leave or downsize their expectations. The literature is showing an increasing number of mental health problems in our health care system, most particularly college students with increased rates of depression and anxiety and, indeed, suicide threats over this past decade.

These are all part of postsecondary education demands that teachers and other faculty on campus have to address and part of a deficit that is much more difficult to measure, one that is borne increasingly by the health care system. We need to find the roots of these. I'm not saying that they all lie at the base of the education system, but I am saying that we have an increasingly stressed and health-challenged population, and we need to look at roots and solutions into the future.

4:10

In terms of the faculty this decade of cuts has had significant impacts. There has been increasing concern about the targeted investments in postsecondary education, and I can speak for the medical school, where a number of very dramatic and influential special projects have been developed: bone and joint issues for example, the new Markin chair in health and wellness. These have been important contributions, but as another member has indicated, this should be icing on the cake of a continued, sustained operating grant system where people can count on a budget, can make plans for two to three years into the future, and can count on the classroom supports that they need to do what is a reasonable quality of teaching.

The lack of operating support extends also to the clerical and the secretarial and the communications side of the faculty, and many have expressed the frustration that unless the operating grants, the ongoing grants apart from capital and new budget expenditures, are addressed, many of our best teachers will leave and have left this province for other fields.

There is, then, Mr. Speaker, a need to rebuild trust in the whole process of postsecondary funding and a commitment to professors and infrastructure and students. This has been lost during this decade of severe austerity in postsecondary education. The public has repeatedly said that education is the best investment we can make for our future. All of us here agree. The question now is how and in what manner to sustain that so that people have confidence and not only come here but stay here as a result of the investment we're making.

I simply want to leave with a message of urgency to the government to move ahead as quickly as possible, to aid the population who holds the future, our future, in their hands. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

The hon. member for Edmonton-Mill Woods to participate in the debate.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I applaud the initiative by this government towards a change. For most of the last decade students and teachers have been trying to cope with increased demands and inadequate and declining resources. While some of the erosion has been halted, much remains to be done. Albertans consistently rank education as one of their top priorities. Polls have indicated that Albertans want to see improvements in teaching and learning conditions.

Michael Fullen, renowned author, states that although change is unpredictable, you can set up conditions that help to guide the process. You must establish a sense of urgency, create a guiding coalition, develop a vision and strategy of what we want, communicate the vision, empower broad-based action, generate short-term wins, and anchor new approaches in the community.

We have a sense of urgency, and the government must now move to ensure that all Alberta families have access to the education they need, from kindergarten to postsecondary. We need the high school graduates for postsecondary, and our high school completion rates are determined by factors beginning with kindergarten.

Too many Alberta students are still trying to learn in overcrowded classrooms, where opportunities for individual assistance and support are limited. Education is investing in our future, opening opportunities for inner-city children to break the cycle of poverty by gaining access to a properly funded education. It is the right thing to do. Even our schoolchildren responded to the tsunami disaster, a

way for young people to take their little money and invest in someone else because it is the right thing to do.

There is a huge variety of different careers young people must prepare themselves for in the future. Postsecondary education provides the backdrop for preparation. We need more resources for counselling students to help them make wise choices for their postsecondary training and careers because Alberta has the lowest average rate in Canada for students to move on to postsecondary education, and demand for postsecondary education is expected to grow. Seventy-nine per cent of all new jobs created in Canada and Alberta are expected to require postsecondary essentials and credentials.

Yet despite having paid down its fiscal debt, Alberta has allowed the infrastructure debt to balloon to between \$7 billion and \$8 billion. In the education sector spending on infrastructure has not been sufficient to provide high-quality learning environments for all Alberta's students. Key recommendations of Alberta's Commission on Learning have yet to be acted upon.

Alberta's Commission on Learning made many recommendations that if implemented would improve classroom conditions. These include ensuring that all students have access to adequate counselling, diagnostic, and other specialized services necessary for them to succeed; ensuring adequate support is in place when children with special needs are integrated into regular classrooms; providing classroom teachers with adequate support to develop and implement individual program plans for children with special needs; setting province-wide standards for the types of technology that should be available in every classroom; providing adequate funding not only for the purchase of hardware and software but also for necessary technical support, training, and continuous upgrading of equipment; providing significantly improved support for aboriginal students and their families; establishing parenting centres in communities across the province with close links to elementary schools.

The government has yet to provide targeted financial assistance to school boards to enable these recommendations to be implemented. Alberta's students are still waiting for improved classroom conditions. We need to address needs for education at all levels. We can create a guiding coalition. This government can do this.

Bill 1 is the beginning, but it falls short. We must develop a vision and strategy of what we want for Alberta education. We know the value of postsecondary education, without a doubt. At the very time when postsecondary is becoming more basic to individual success and more essential to the future of Alberta, this government has treated it as a high-priced option. We must support all postsecondary schools as the investment they are, beginning with kindergarten.

Finally, my focus, Mr. Speaker, is on the legislation's intent. In the preamble I find four 'whereas' statements that I take as goals. First is a belief in advanced education as a means of economic growth. Second is an intent to provide education for skill development and quality of life. Third is a commitment to ensure educational access to the qualified and motivated. Fourth is a support for innovation to facilitate access and eliminate barriers. I suggest these goals in aggregate because I support them in aggregate. I have difficulties with the order in which they appear, however. At present this implies that economic values are paramount and education is a servant of the economy.

An earlier Alberta government championed education in very different circumstances in the Depression. It supported education as a goal in its own right regardless of financial return. It may be that this government shares that belief and has simply not given attention to the order these objectives appear or the priority. I suggest a reordering of the goals in the preamble to Bill 1 to emphasize the

individual and that the economy exists to serve the citizen and not the reverse. This vision can begin to provide an anchor for education in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to make a few brief comments on Bill 1. First, I'm happy to see that the government has finally begun to address the postsecondary funding issue in this province. Alberta has the money and the expertise to become a postsecondary beacon in North America, and I challenge the government to aim high and not settle for anything but being the best.

But as I look at this surprisingly thin bill, some questions come to mind. Without sounding too mercenary about it, I have to ask: what's in it for my sons? Now, two of my sons are college-age, certainly qualified for postsecondary education. The third is a junior high student who is intent on becoming an entomologist, of all things. You won't believe what we have as pets in our house.

I wish I could say that my two older sons are enjoying college life and all it has to offer, but I can't. They're at an age when they could be taking arts courses or perhaps exploring business or science, but they're not. Why is that? Well, simply put, postsecondary learning in Alberta has become so expensive that it has become a barrier to education, the one overarching concern of thousands of Albertans in the great, overlooked middle class. My son, for instance, wanted to take a commercial art course at Grant MacEwan this past year, but it would have cost him \$6,500 for one term. That made him change his plans in a hurry.

4:20

You know, Mr. Speaker, just a little over 10 years ago the arts tuition fee at the University of Alberta was just \$1,229. Today it's \$4,537, and that's just for one year. To obtain a bachelor of arts degree at the University of Alberta will set a typical student back about \$20,000. Once that student has the BA framed on the wall, what do they then do? Usually they go back to school. As wonderful as it is to have a BA, we all know that it doesn't set you out on a career path to riches. The sky-high cost of tuition in Alberta has made the admirable goal of education for the pure joy of expanding your mind into an out-of-reach goal for the great middle class. As far as I can see, there's nothing in this bill that addresses this problem.

Mr. Speaker, the bill promises "plans for ensuring that financial need is not a barrier to pursuing advanced education opportunities." There are also "plans to increase the participation in advanced education of individuals who are disadvantaged due to social, economic, geographic or cultural factors," which if implemented would be good news for Alberta's chronically overlooked and undereducated aboriginal community. But, again, I have to ask: what's in this bill for the middle class, the middle-class Albertan, the type of person who makes too little money to qualify for grants but not enough to be able to fund postsecondary education without going into serious debt?

This bill does not address the single greatest problem postsecondary institutions face: the lack of predictable, long-term operating grants. This has resulted in the University of Alberta, which is legislated not to run a deficit, doing exactly that. It has resulted in the anomaly of cranes dotting the skyline at the U of A as high-profile big-ticket buildings go up while the buildings around them decay. In Bill 1 we see promises of seed money for innovations,

which is code, basically, for new stuff that we can show off to the world. We see more scholarships for Alberta students but not an overall decrease in tuition that would benefit every single student.

Now, maybe I'm missing something, Mr. Speaker, but as far as I can tell, in all these promises there's not one commitment to increasing the base operating funds for institutions. So while there may be money for high-profile new initiatives that make headlines for the U of A or the U of C, these new initiatives have to be sustained by operating budgets that can't keep up. It is the equivalent of building a new hospital but not supplying the money to staff it, clean it, or heat it. I can't speak on behalf of postsecondary institutions, but I would suspect that if you asked each college and university to compile a wish list, at the top would be: give us predictable, long-term funding, and let us do our job.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, as the debate over Bill 1 progresses, that we can expect some help for the middle-class students, the middle-class parents, and the low-profile but important faculties struggling to keep up. Thank you.

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

I'm prepared to recognize additional speakers. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I support putting more money into advanced education. Who doesn't support that? The question is how, and is this the right model, the right way to go?

I want to first make a comment about the title, Access to the Future Act. The key word in that title is not "future." Of course, universities prepare our young people for the future. The key word is "access." The key word in this name in terms of practical outcomes is the word "access." This is an important word, and in my experience it is usually associated with the capability of students with lesser financial resources being able to access higher education.

This is a huge issue in this province given the fact that Alberta has the lowest average rate in Canada of students who move on from high school to postsecondary education – it's at 43 per cent – and given that Alberta has the third lowest number of postsecondary degrees granted per capita in Canada compared to other provinces. So it's important to ask ourselves whether our students are getting access to advanced education and what are the roadblocks, the obstacles in the way of getting access.

Maybe on the list of definitions in this bill there should be a definition of the word "access" because most would think that access is about the opportunities and possibilities open to our students to get into university. Can they get access to the programs that they need? Can our students, no matter what their financial status is, get access to colleges and universities?

The one clause that I really quite agree with, 2(c), is the emphasis on "plans to increase the participation in advanced education of individuals who are disadvantaged due to social, economic, geographic or cultural factors." Many years ago I was involved in a program at St. Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, a program which was set up to admit disadvantaged people from the black community and also aboriginal students into St. Mary's, a program that enabled them to reach the required literacy levels so that they could compete in a university environment. That led to a number of students being able to get into university who wouldn't have otherwise qualified. So that kind of special emphasis on a special program to enable the disadvantaged to get access to advanced education is very, very important.

I think, considering that our universities and colleges are mainly in urban environments, it's very important in Alberta to look at rural education. Much innovation has gone into distance education. I for

a whole year drove from Edmonton to Slave Lake to teach a course one day a week, and it was a great experience for me. Those students had an opportunity to take a university course without having to come to Edmonton, and I think that's very, very important. These kinds of programs are absolutely essential.

The rhetoric of equality of opportunity is not enough; there must be also equality of results. We have to put funding into programs that really do enable students who are disadvantaged to get ahead and to get the kind of education they need to participate in this great province. We need equality of results.

Mr. Speaker, the word "access" in this bill is not primarily focused on guaranteeing the kind of accessibility that I've been talking about. In this bill access seems to mean the ability of educational institutions to access funding, so an access to the future fund is proposed. The emphasis of this fund is on innovation and excellence, but that places the onus on the institution rather than the individual's potential. So we're no longer talking about a student's access to higher education; we're talking about a university's ability to prove that it's innovative enough to attract money.

Why should the ordinary student growing up in Alberta bear that kind of burden? Instead of access being determined by the real needs and abilities of students applying to go to university, access is determined by the decision of some kind of elite access advisory committee overseeing the universities and colleges and meting out or agreeing with this program or that program.

Mr. Speaker, in my education in Canada one of my favourite philosophers is the Canadian political philosopher George Grant, who taught us many years ago in all the books that he wrote that we in Canada are moving gradually toward the universal homogenous technological state, and it seems to me that this bill is encouraging that process to take place. What it's moving us toward is a kind of 'multiversity' in Alberta in which we would all have the same common application process. No matter where you want to go to school, there's the same common application process, which seems to me to overlook the tremendous variety of programs, the high-quality programs that are everywhere in Alberta. Students applying to an agricultural or forestry or nanotechnology program or whatever are applying to highly specialized programs, demanding that the student fit the program and so is able to choose the program of his choice. I don't understand this idea of a common application process. I don't know what that would mean. I don't really understand it, and I hope that that can be explained as we move through this bill.

4:30

Also, I want to raise a question. In terms of moving, it seems like we're moving in a formation of a kind of highly technologized multiversity for Alberta. We're moving in the direction of having a kind of super institution in which the ministry really hovers over advanced education institutions in this province in a way, as the bill says, "to monitor, evaluate and report on the quality." Well, I have a lot of problems with that. Mr. Speaker, I don't understand how this can be suggested given the tremendous traditions of academic freedom that universities have established.

Now, if Alberta wants to have world-class universities, then there has to be a respect for curriculum development, respect for university professors, their academic freedom. I've taught many courses at the University of Alberta, courses on the history of the occult, courses in spirituality, comparative religions, and I never felt that I was accountable to some superministry, some government out there, which would be evaluating the standards of excellence that I was following for my course. I, of course, was accountable to my peers and accountable to rich traditions of academic excellence that are

well rooted in Canadian culture and life, but I really object to a kind of ministry hovering over advanced education.

Of course, that means that money that goes to universities and colleges in Alberta has strings attached to it. I find this ironical because this government is always criticizing Ottawa for transferring money to the provinces with strings attached, yet in this bill they're suggesting: "Okay. We'll give money to advanced education, the universities and colleges, but there are going to be all kinds of strings attached. You have to meet these various criteria in terms of proving quality."

I just submit to you as evidence of this a recent document that was presented to the House of Commons by the Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations, which points out that in Alberta the government has imposed performance measures to ensure accountability in the postsecondary sector for 10 years, and it hasn't worked. It hasn't worked. There's been too much ministerial micromanagement, which doesn't work because there are not enough staff to ensure that it does work. So the conclusion of university professors is that restricted funds are not the way to go in terms of ensuring the tremendous excellence of our universities.

I point out that the University of Alberta, in their strategic business plan, specifies that the solution to the university's budgetary problems lies in securing "unrestricted revenue," not revenue with strings attached where they have to be accountable to some superministry that hovers over them but unrestricted revenue, "while continuing to manage expenditures effectively." When too much of an institution's revenue comes with restrictions on how it can be spent, the institution's ability to respond to change is greatly impeded.

So over and over again the connection between performance measurement and the restriction of funds just leads to tremendous problems in the advancing of education in this province. It takes a long time to build up resources in various programs. They have to have secured funding in order to develop those programs, in order to move in the direction of becoming world-class universities.

So, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I think it's great that so many billions of dollars are being earmarked for higher education, but there has to be the insurance of the autonomy of higher education and the protection of academic freedom. The basic problem, as I said already and as has been mentioned again and again by the university professors that I have talked to, is the lack of secured, unrestricted funding. When you also couple that with the fact that Alberta only invests 5.2 per cent of its total expenditures on postsecondary education, making Alberta's rank second lowest in Canada, no wonder we have problems in the area of advanced education.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

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

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I just would like to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora where he reads in the bill that the provision of providing for some measurements and some understanding as to whether or not we're getting close to our goal of being a world-class educational system comes with strings attached, and if he doesn't read that in the bill or doesn't see a connection in the bill that says that money for universities and for colleges in advancing education in this province is not connected to those parameters but that the parameters in the bill clearly set out that we're trying to monitor whether we're achieving our goal, why he would make that up and then negative it.

Dr. B. Miller: It's the section under Quality. What does it say?

"The Minister shall develop and implement mechanisms to monitor, evaluate and report on the quality of advanced education." Well, isn't that some strings attached? How do you measure the quality of a course that I teach on the history of the occult? I mean, does the government have any idea how that could be done? Or a course on nanotechnology. Surely, how do you do that? How do you measure the quality?

Universities set their own standards of quality in conjunction with the professional societies of academics to which they are responsible. They have all kinds of ways of assessing the quality of their own classroom work and education. They're continually producing articles that receive feedback and criticism from their peers. They're part of organizations that involve faculty around the world. That's how you maintain the quality, through peer oversight and the responsibility to your peers. It has nothing to do with governments setting any kind of standards, so really I don't understand this section 3, quality. It sets up a kind of draconian emphasis in terms of this special fund.

The Speaker: The intention of this is short answers, short questions. Another question?

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora would prefer that Albertans be reduced to reading *Maclean's* magazine in order to determine whether or not their universities and colleges and technical institutes are appropriately ranked or have some understanding of the quality. Understanding the hon. member's point about how you do determine quality and the need for independence of the institutions and not detracting at all from those commentaries about how institutions actually maintain their quality, is there a better way to have Albertans understand where their institutions rank other than reading *Maclean's* magazine?

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Okay. Additional questions? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Would it be fair to say that the hon. member's position is that the taxpayers of Alberta should give him or someone like him, really, an unmonitored amount of money so that he can teach the occult?

Dr. B. Miller: I think I don't have to justify the teaching of courses like the history of the occult because, I mean, in the history of the development of religious studies in various universities – my own degree is from the University of Chicago – this is the kind of curriculum that we develop to cover all the religions of the world in every different kind of culture. So there are good reasons for developing a fine program in comparative religions. We don't take our instructions from anybody beyond us, and we report, of course, through the proper channels. The president of the university has the responsibility of reporting to the public what happens in a university and so on.

Sure, you should be concerned that your tax dollars are being properly used, and there should be some kind of accountability, but what I'm dealing with is the issue of quality and standards. The quality of advanced education – it sounds very draconian to have some sort of superministry hovering over, determining, monitoring, evaluating. Just the reading of it sounds quite draconian.

4:40

An Hon. Member: They're unqualified.

Dr. B. Miller: That's right. They're unqualified to do that kind of work.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development on this question portion?

Mr. Horner: A question, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted . . .

The Speaker: Oh, I'm sorry. We've now expended the time.

The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose to continue the debate.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to begin my remarks with a quote from a famous educator from my constituency, Dr. Chester Ronning: "Live until you're old, learn until you're old, and there's still so much [more] to learn."

As many of my colleagues know, my background lies in education. I had the pleasure of teaching and working at Augustana University College for many years, and prior to that I attended the institution as a student. My experiences have shown me that the value of an education cannot be overestimated. It is crucial that postsecondary education remains accessible for Albertans who have the ability and the drive to pursue one. Whether an individual is working towards the acquisition of a master's designation in the trades or a university degree, our future success as a province is tied to the accessibility of learning.

Bill 1 recognizes this fact and lays out a comprehensive strategy to ensure that Albertans are able to gain the training they choose. This will be accomplished through a variety of ways, such as developing new ways to share information. The Lois Hole digital library will increase accessibility to learning materials in our province. Using the infrastructure provided by the SuperNet, this library will allow Albertans throughout the province to access digital information and print materials that are contained in our postsecondary institutions. In such a large province as ours proximity to a large academic library can be an issue, and this initiative will facilitate lifelong learning in this province. The ultimate goal of this library is that whether you are in Peace River or Calgary, you will be able to access the same information.

Another concept that Bill 1 devotes energy toward is the issue of transferability. Bill 1 works toward improved transferability of postsecondary credits between institutions and from other learning arenas. This will recognize the skills gained through different learning experiences and make it easier for students to achieve their educational goals.

As well as addressing transferability between institutions, this act will also make it simpler for students to receive financial assistance, whether this takes the form of bursaries, scholarships, or loans. This bill calls for the investigation of the implementation of a one-window system where students will be able to browse and apply for financial assistance. In addition to this, Bill 1 calls for the addition of \$1 billion to the Alberta heritage scholarship fund. This will increase the amount of funding that is available for scholarships, grants, and bursaries in this province. Having a greater number of bursaries available will benefit all students, ensuring that financial status will be no barrier to continuing education.

However, Bill 1 does not only work to increase accessibility to learning; it also introduces new avenues for learning in our province. The proposed centre for Chinese studies at the University of Alberta will provide our province with an amazing opportunity to learn more about this rich culture. As a province we already have a great number of ties with China, and the opportunity to learn more about one of the most populous nations in the world is one that I am sure

many Alberta students will appreciate. I find it almost providential that this centre has been announced within a year of Augustana University College in Camrose becoming a campus of the University of Alberta. This stems from the passion that one of Augustana's former presidents had for China.

Mr. Speaker, I began my remarks today with a quote. These words, as I mentioned before, were spoken by the late Dr. Chester Ronning. This man was an academic, a teacher, an MLA, a foreign diplomat, and a personal friend of mine. Dr. Ronning was the principal at Camrose Lutheran College, which is now Augustana, from 1927 to 1942, after which he went to a career in the foreign service.

His special interest was China, where he grew up, and Augustana University College had put forth a concept to create a chair of Chinese studies at the college, which would be named after Chester Ronning. Unfortunately, this plan did not come to fruition as hoped, but with Augustana becoming a campus of the University of Alberta and the announcement of this new centre focusing on Chinese studies, Augustana has the opportunity to be involved and be a part of this.

Mr. Speaker, continued investment in postsecondary education through increased funding for scholarships and innovative ideas such as the centre for Chinese studies is but one part of the Access to the Future Act. Bill 1 also concerns itself with another issue which will greatly affect the province's future, and that is research. This is only fitting as postsecondary learning and research are inextricably linked, and increasing funding is one area that affects the other.

In Bill 1 the government commits to expanding the value of the ingenuity fund. While this will be beneficial for research in a variety of areas, there is one that I would like to highlight in particular, and this is the area of water research. Through the ingenuity fund the Alberta Ingenuity Centre for Water Research was born. This centre focuses on the broad picture when it comes to this precious resource, and it will be instrumental in the further development and application of the province's water for life strategy.

Water quality, water use, and water conservation are issues that are important to Albertans and to the constituents of Wetaskiwin-Camrose. Of particular interest to myself and my constituents is the Battle River basin. Mr. Speaker, the Battle River flows through my constituency, and there is continuing research on this river because of the diverse flora and fauna it supports as well as its unique water source. The Battle River relies solely on surface water runoff and groundwater to feed it. It does not benefit from the snowpack runoff from the mountains and the foothills or the glacial melting that feeds many other basins in Alberta. As a result, this river has naturally low volumes, and this presents challenges because of municipal and agricultural pressures that increased development brings. Additional capital for the ingenuity fund could result in increased funding for water research into issues such as those that I have already mentioned as well as a wide range of energy, environmental, and life science projects.

Mr. Speaker, the Access to the Future Act addresses many challenges that are facing our province as we head into our second century. Through supporting our postsecondary institutions and research that is performed throughout our province, we will be well equipped to deal with any challenges that we may face in the future.

I support Bill 1, and I urge my colleagues on both sides of the floor to do the same. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Then I'll call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although the government's

proposed Bill 1, the Access to the Future Act, may seem like a step forward, may seem like a long overdue look at the obstacles and hurdles faced by our postsecondary students, it still fails to address the core issues.

This government's philosophy resembles very much the band-aid approach. When we're playing sports and someone gets hurt, someone gets an abrasion or a cut, their coach tells them to bandage it and keep playing. Later, when time permits, when we have more free time, we may take a thorough look at it, and we may try to tackle the real issues. Sometimes the pharmacist in me resurfaces, and I make a reference to a pharmacy term. This bandage, Mr. Speaker, will not work. This approach will never work when we're talking about chronic issues, chronic problems which besiege our postsecondary institutions and hold our university and college students hostage. Our postsecondary education system is beleaguered by lack of space, lack of funding, and lack of empathy for the students.

4:50

I repeat, Mr. Speaker, that although Bill 1 may appear to be forward thinking—that's relative to the typical Conservative position—it still in my opinion is a little short-sighted. The Conservative government plagiarized our Alberta Liberal postsecondary plan right out of our campaign policy book, changed the wording a little, tweaked it a little bit, and laid claim to the idea. I am not terribly mad at the Conservatives because the end result would be one that would help alleviate difficulties which our students face in finding spots and in affording spots in our colleges and universities.

I could also go as far as saying that I understand the Conservatives' motives in scrambling to hastily put together what appears to be a plan to address voter anger at the Tories, to react to voter receptiveness to the Alberta Liberal platform, and to pretend to be listening to what Albertans told them in their very own It's Your Future survey.

I think I can find it in my heart to co-operate with the ruling Conservatives on this one if they accept the following guiding principles. One, removing the cap that they put at \$3 billion on the endowment fund. Uncapping the endowment fund is the right thing to do, especially in our allegedly debt-free stage and with our huge surpluses. If we take the \$3 billion and split it up amongst all students and apprentices in the province, they would each get something like \$16,000. A place like Princeton, on the other hand, has an endowment fund of up to \$1.3 million U.S. per student. So if we're talking excellence and talking setting the stage for Alberta students and Alberta universities and colleges and institutions to excel and be world renowned and world respected, we have to look at other places like Princeton and Harvard, for example, and see where we stand in comparison to them. This government, unfortunately, sees education as a liability. It looks at education as merely a budget line entry on the debit side. In fact, it's a sound investment in a stronger tomorrow.

Two, committing to at least 10 years of funding the endowment out of future provincial budget surpluses. This act talks about one year, and there is no assurance and no guarantee after April 1. Our postsecondary institutions are faced with uncertainty and vagueness when dealing with this government. If we treat them as businesses, or if we expect them to make decisions and long-term plans, the least we can do is to offer them some clarity and some certainty so they can forecast and plan. Leaving it to the whim of the minister at the time and his or her personal agenda or his or her personal preference or whichever lobbying group happens to have his or her ear at the time is totally unacceptable.

Three, we as the Official Opposition demand that an independent

postsecondary education commission perform a full review of the entire system. We're talking funding, tuition, accessibility, quality, et cetera, not a cosmetic ministry public relations exercise or a make-work project for Tory MLAs. The planned affordability review, which will be performed by Tory backbenchers, will surely not be there to criticize the ministry so much.

Four, this government puts too much emphasis on the applied or marketable research, and it totally underestimates the value and merit of pure research. Again, this is a government looking under its feet, only realizing short- or medium-term gain. Investing in pure scientific research and fields like the arts, the humanities, or social sciences would provide a wider scope, and it's probably more useful to society at large, not only to select private interest groups. This bias has to end.

Five, the government has to investigate all options and try its hardest to ensure that students get actual physical placements in postsecondary institutions. Physical enrolment should not be replaced with virtual e-learning except in very select cases, very few cases, not the norm, and when offered as an option. So that student has to actually have that choice and decide whether they want to have distance e-learning from their home or whether they want and deserve to be bum in a seat in an institution, attending class.

So, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I don't mind working with the government and accepting their Access to the Future Act if they in turn listen to our suggestions and take our proposed improvements into consideration. This is not a tit-for-tat position. Presumably we all want what's best for our province's students and what's best for our institutions.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if the hon. member is not somewhat ashamed of accusing the government of plagiarism when their own party platform actually borrowed from a resolution that the Edmonton-Riverview Progressive Conservative Constituency Association brought forward to an annual general meeting which was adopted unanimously, which actually has more bearing on the policy that's being reflected in Bill 1 than the Liberal platform, which came many, many months subsequent.

Mr. Elsalhy: No, I am not ashamed to say this. We listened to a report that was put forward, and we put it in as part of our campaign platform. We're proud to be listening to the people of this province. The Tories, on the other hand, accepted the policy that we brought forward and implemented it and laid claim to it after the election. They ran on empty during the election, Mr. Speaker. We had an idea that we adapted from a report, and we accepted it. We improved on it. So, no, I'm not ashamed.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, let me get this right. So when the Liberal Party borrows an idea from a PC constituency, it's called listening to Albertans and accepting good ideas. But when a Conservative government borrows an idea from a Liberal platform, it's called plagiarism and stealing. Am I correct in understanding that?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the hon. member could just clarify. He started off by calling the bill short-sighted, then claimed ownership of it as a Liberal policy, and then criticized

it for being hastily put together. I wonder if he could just clarify whether he likes it or not. Is he for it or against it?

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. To clarify to the hon. member, it was short-sighted because it was hastily put together without ensuring that it's to be continued after April 1. After April 1 we have no assurance in this amendment act to ensure that the endowment fund would continue to be funded from the surplus or from any other revenue.

We laid claim to it during the election. We ran with a strong campaign platform. The Tories, on the other hand, had nothing, and I think that what they're doing now is sort of damage control to try to please some of the voters who punished them. Two hundred and some thousand voters did not vote Tory this time because the Tories did not have anything to say.

An Hon. Member: But they didn't go over to you.

Mr. Elsalhy: Well, some did. [interjections]

The Speaker: All right. Through the chair, please.

Hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, do you have a question?

Ms Calahasen: No.

The Speaker: Additional? We have time.

Additional speakers, then.

Mr. Backs: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise to speak on this bill. There are a number of items here I think the government is good to move on. You know, it's good to finally have something so that we can say to Albertans that the government is looking to try and improve access to education and trying to improve the ability of our educational system to deal with and for the future.

I very much like the \$500 million in the heritage science and engineering fund. I have many relatives that are in engineering and in construction and in trades, and they look forward to doing this sort of thing. I have some that have been in research. I think that it's timely and can hold great benefit to Alberta just as such funds have done in medical research.

Mr. Speaker, placing a greater emphasis on postsecondary education is crucial to the future livelihood of all Alberta families. Even if the government is not going far enough to provide stable, long-term funding for our postsecondary institutions, at least the endowment portion of this bill is a start. At least the other aspects of this bill are beginning to look to the future.

5:00

Postsecondary education is not just the education which happens at our bricks-and-mortar institutions such as universities, colleges, and technical institutions. Postsecondary education is also the on the job training provided in our formal apprenticeship training and in other training. Access to apprenticeship has become increasingly difficult for young Albertans for a number of reasons. Work is often intermittent, even though at times it can be frantically busy. A good trades job can be no good to a young family if it only lasts for four months of the year and then they get a layoff. Heavy overtime and huge demand for apprentices' services often slack off into sudden layoffs, unemployment, and forced hanging around if there's not a new job to go to.

With dramatic development slated to take place over the next 10 to 15 years and even longer in the Alberta oil sands, it is key that the apprenticeship system be administered in a responsible manner.

This responsible approach must reflect the true needs and opportunities for individuals in our marketplace. Training must be responsible and at a sustainable and ongoing level.

We've seen such wide variations in apprenticeship training over the years, Mr. Speaker. There are gaps, almost a generational sort of appearance that we see. The generational age representations you see on many of our construction projects is because in some periods of our history we've trained very, very few apprentices, and you can see that right now on job sites.

It must be at a responsible level. Most responsible employers I've spoken to are adamant that there be proper apprenticeship ratios that give rise to good training. Many place that at about 3 to 1 in construction, for example. They know that this is the optimum level for the proper training of an individual in his or her chosen trade. Young apprentices get the opportunity to interact with different tradesmen to get the proper attention they deserve and require to know their trade. Too many apprentices make for a group grope, a what-will-we-do-now approach. Even there there may be more lower wage individuals on a job site. In fact, this can decrease productivity and raise costs because people really don't know what they're doing.

We've seen a number of projects where costs have ballooned and gone out of control. It's not really the labour aspect, but I think it's important that the best qualified crews and the best makeup of these crews be made available for our ever important oil sands projects. It's obvious on construction sites where apprenticeship ratios have been abused and the ever present problem of rework becomes a common and costly problem.

Better access must provide for more flexibility and indentureship. This is the system where an apprentice is sponsored over the years of his apprenticeship and works with his or her mentors. As apprentices often work multiple short-term jobs, it makes sense that the hiring halls and trades organizations which they work through be empowered to indenture. Then they can be assured that they at least can have some sense of steady employment.

When there are slow and excessively busy periods, we must recognize the interprovincial trades mobility agreements already in place in Canada. There's long been this safety valve system in place in our country. What happens in this process is that, for example, a contractor calls for a number of tradespeople that he or she may need, and those skilled tradesmen are then sent, or dispatched, to a job site. They will often call first for the ones they know and have experience with, and then the hiring hall will send others with the proper qualifications that are available.

If there are not enough people in northern Alberta, then these hiring halls will call their counterparts in southern Alberta. If there's no one available in southern Alberta, these hiring halls will then call their hiring halls in other provinces of Canada. On the rare occasion that this demand cannot be filled from Canadian sources, there are sources of trade supply in this system, in this interprovincial, intercountry system. In our continental system they can get people from the United States, and they have done so in the past, and Canada has sent people to the United States in the same way. This system has historically successfully supplied trades labour for all the megaprojects that have been completed in Alberta.

The government must recognize that this ability of skilled labour is a true availability of skilled labour for projects that are upcoming. It must recognize the ability of the system to trim the peaks and fill the valleys in labour demand, and it must develop some system which better targets labour market needs, surveys both supply and demand – I underline that: both supply and demand – and can give planning for Albertans, give the ability to Albertans to look and plan for their future to ensure that their families have some security and a real sense of involvement in the wealth of Alberta.

There are many groups that must be accessed in training. There are many unemployed farmers as people are increasingly leaving the family farm, with the steady and regular stories of more people in financial difficulty because of the situation there with BSE. We have unemployed youth, which are at the highest level in the country. We have underemployed landed immigrants. Many, many stories have been in the media about their inability to use their skills and to be utilized for the development of our province.

Of course, you know, we have our very important and underutilized aboriginal people. I'll quote from a letter that was tabled earlier today from the Treaty 8 First Nations, paragraph 3.

There are significant numbers of our people and other Albertans that, with some appropriate support and training beyond current practices that could fill the employment needs that industry and your government are concerned about. The forecast of shortages of people for employment in certain skills areas should be taken as a first challenge on the "home front" rather than a "quick fix" using foreigners that will backfire in the long run.

And in the sixth paragraph:

Should these actions take place it would be extremely irresponsible and potentially explosive. You and your government talk about an "Alberta Advantage" that to us means your words talk of the well being, caring and development of First Nations peoples, other Aboriginal peoples and in general all Alberta citizens. Importing foreigners without taking more serious steps amongst our members and within the Alberta population pool at large to qualify unemployed people should be unthinkable.

Mr. Speaker, I think that that statement speaks well to some of the feelings of the Treaty 8 First Nations, which are the reserves that occupy much of northern Alberta.

Just one more point. I think that our system must look not only to postsecondary education like the universities and the bricks-and-mortar institutions that look to academic skills, but they must also recognize those skills of the hands, the different types of intelligence that different individuals may have: you know, the tradesmen, the farmers, the artists of our great province.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, investment in Albertans, investment in our people, and investment in those special people for whom we all work, Alberta's children, I think is what is most important here. I look forward to further discussion on this bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, please.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. MacDonald: I have a question for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, and it is this. I was listening with interest to his remarks. What further steps would he like this government to take other than facilitating the recruitment of temporary replacement workers for jobs in the construction of the oil sands plants in the north? What steps would he like to see the government take instead of recruiting temporary foreign replacement workers, particularly with First Nations people, who have a very chronic rate of unemployment?

The Speaker: A fine question, hon. member, but I think we should adhere to the rules of relevancy. The bill that we have before us is the Access to the Future Act. If somehow this could be tied in together, proceed, but tie it together, please.

5:10

Mr. Backs: I think that the training of many individuals that are capable for this is certainly part of this act, and access to postsecondary education is certainly most important. The way that we look at postsecondary is not something, I think, that should be only looked at in terms of universities and technical institutions and colleges. We've got to look at it in terms of the many other sometimes innovative ways.

You know, I've seen aboriginal companies work very closely with some of our major employers like Syncrude and Suncor, and I've worked with some of these companies in the past to try and encourage aboriginal employment in a way that brings them into the mainstream of our economy and helps them to develop as citizens that are taking part in this Alberta advantage, as mentioned by the Treaty 8 First Nations.

I think there are many areas where we can look at this, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the questioner for the question.

The Speaker: Additional questions, hon. members? Additional participants?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar then.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the debate this afternoon on Bill 1, Access to the Future Act. Perhaps the title of this bill could be the affordable access to postsecondary education in Alberta's future act because, unfortunately, access to postsecondary education for many in this province has become unaffordable. Many speakers this afternoon have discussed that.

Certainly, when we look at access, affordability, and quality of postsecondary education, we all know that they were important issues in the provincial election which occurred last fall. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is to be commended for bringing these issues forward and leading the charge, so to speak. I'm not saying that the government is copying many of our ideas that were presented during the election, but certainly I think this is a political reaction to what Albertans have known for quite some time, and that is, again, that postsecondary education has become unaffordable for more than a few young Albertans.

When we look at unemployment rates, if we want to talk about apprenticeships and industry training and how they're going to be affected by this bill, we have to ensure that young Albertans have access to postsecondary education so their unemployment rate goes down and it is the same as the provincial average of roughly about 4 per cent. It is more than double the provincial average at this time for the group between the ages of 16 and 24. I would certainly endorse this legislation if it would reduce that unemployment rate.

Certainly, I would like to see access for First Nations to postsecondary education so they, too, can see a significant drop in their unemployment rates. Surely, there will be partnerships developed with industry to ensure that First Nations young people are trained before we go about recruiting these temporary foreign workers.

I would hope that the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert at the next caucus meeting would take some of his hon. colleagues aside and say, "Look, before we continue with the recruitment through our technical colleges of replacement workers to work in construction in the north, perhaps we should develop a special program for some of the farmers who are facing financial difficulty right now and may want to work out and pick up a few dollars on the busy construction sites of this province." So perhaps we should have a targeted initiative to ensure, not only for the compulsory but the optional trades that are available in this province,

that farmers come first. I think this would help a lot of farmers make ends meet in these difficult times if they could work out. If they could go to a place like Fort McMurray and have a trade ticket, a valid trade ticket, in their pocket, they too could participate in that construction boom. I would like to see this, and I certainly hope that access will become an issue, and we will look at training those individuals before we go searching far and wide around the world for people who may not have the standards of training of this province.

Now, under this current government, Mr. Speaker, funding for postsecondary education certainly has not kept pace with inflation or enrolment increases. This Progressive Conservative government cut funding to postsecondary education by 21 per cent in the three years between 1994 and 1997. More recent increases have not enabled institutions to recover or deal with rising enrolments or inflation. In fact, four Alberta universities alone project that they need \$160 million in new operating dollars just to catch up with their peers. Now, other hon. members this afternoon have talked about this infrastructure deficit. We certainly have been successful in paying down the debt, the enormous public debt that was incurred by this same Progressive Conservative government, but now we must look at a lot of the infrastructure debts in the province, and we have to go no further than our postsecondary institutions.

It is unfortunate, as we debate this bill, Bill 1, that again most postsecondary education institutions are projecting budget deficits in one or more of the next few years. This has been brought forward by a group called Public Interest Alberta. I'm sure that the fact sheets that are put out by Public Interest Alberta are read with keen interest by government members. Certainly, I find some of the research that is presented by Public Interest Alberta informative and very worthwhile, and I thank them for making us a much better province.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, funding for postsecondary education in the past was often dependent on fluctuating government revenues. Funding, as a result of this, has become unstable and contingent on bureaucratic measures of performance. Financial uncertainty makes planning impossible. It doesn't matter whether it's the Department of Health or the Department of Environment or Human Resources and Employment. In order to plan, there has to be a standard. There has to be a commitment. Hopefully, with Bill 1 there will be a renewed commitment, a renewed interest by this government, and this won't be just fallout from the provincial election, but this will be a renewed commitment to postsecondary education.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when we look at some of the numbers surrounding postsecondary institutions in Alberta, we have to look at the amount of money. When we look at the amount of money adjusted for inflation and on a per student basis, transfers to postsecondary institutions in Alberta fell from \$14,274 in 1992-93 to under \$11,000 in the 2003-04 fiscal year. Now, if we look at funding for postsecondary education during this current Progressive Conservative reign – and for new members of the Assembly there are, you could almost call them dynasties; there are three. There was one from 1971 through to '86, then there was a second dynasty from '86 through to '92-93, and then the current dynasty. One has to wonder how long this current dynasty will last. In this last dynasty funding for postsecondary education fell as a percentage of provincial expenditure from 6.2 per cent to 5.1 per cent. This is a measure, one could say, of this government's commitment to postsecondary education, and I'm disappointed that Alberta ranks ninth out of 10 provinces on this measure.

There's a lot of work to do, and if my support for Bill 1 would help, I would certainly provide it and endorse this bill because while it may not be perfect, I think it is a step in the right direction, Mr. Speaker.

5:20

Now, lack of funding has created a backlog of deferred maintenance not only in roads, bridges, schools, hospitals but also at universities. The two largest universities alone have deferred maintenance of approximately \$1 billion. Again, this is information that's been provided by Public Interest Alberta, and I'm grateful to them for that. The government gets a real dollar return on its investment in postsecondary education. There's no doubt about that. And we need to see some commitment to repairing the infrastructure at our larger facilities.

We know that the business community would like to see a commitment to postsecondary education. The business community points out that for the long-term economic competitiveness and diversification of this province it's a number one public policy.

Mr. Speaker, we were talking earlier about affordable access to postsecondary education. Now tuition costs. It doesn't matter whether it's this government or other right-wing governments around the world, there seems to be this drive to limit access to education. I disagree with that. I think we should look at the Irish model and follow that. That model has been discussed over the course of time in this Assembly by many hon. members on both sides of the House, but let's not forget about it. If access is virtually free, many companies will want to set up shop because they know that the prospective employees will be able to read the manual, they will be educated, and they will be able to follow directions and be productive and, hopefully, very well-paid workers as well.

Now, institutions have been forced to increase tuition. For university tuition, Alberta saw the largest percentage increase in the country – in the entire country – between 1990-91 and 2004-05: 270 per cent. The average tuition for colleges and technical institutions has also increased, a little less but really a significant amount: 250 per cent.

Tuition increases have not consistently been accompanied by an increased level of access to student financial aid. Yearly tuition as a percentage of the Alberta student loan program: the maximum, in 1992-93, used to be about 20 per cent. It is now almost 40 per cent. Students make up the difference by working part-time and even full-time jobs. Almost 65 per cent of Alberta university students now work while in school an average of about 20 hours per week, or three shifts. The overwhelming majority of these students say that this negatively impacts their academic experiences.

Student debt, Mr. Speaker, has also risen substantially in Alberta. University students graduate with an average debt of over \$21,000 and college students with \$19,000. Seventy per cent of Albertans believe that university and college tuition is too high. Is Bill 1 going to be able to reduce tuition fees? This remains to be seen. We'll have to wait and see.

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

Then I'll call on the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak to Bill 1 for a minute. I'm very excited about the future and that we're increasing the opportunities for Albertans by opening up the universities and vocational education. I'd like to see the government perhaps look at an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. In Europe we see vocational schools opening up in grade 9. There are many kids in our junior and high schools that don't have the interest in academics and are falling through the cracks. Especially in the rural areas, there's lots of room in the schools. Some are only at 50 per cent capacity. If we were to spend some extra money at that level and open up vocational education for the students, I feel that we could benefit greatly.

There are too many kids in grade 12 that are graduating and have no skills because they didn't work hard while they were in school. They saw no need to, and then when they go out, they have nothing. But if we were to start having more educational opportunities and work employment in the early years, that would greatly improve their ability.

I just want to give my own personal example. In grade 11 I did not like all the options – band, art, and some of the other ones – and I went and talked to our school administrator. He set up a program where I was able to go down to the butcher shop and work for half a day. Consequently, when I graduated from grade 12, I had the opportunity to go and work in a butcher shop at an increased pay, as opposed to some of those kids who had no work experience and were unable to do that.

In many of our small towns, Raymond for example, there's a small business owner there who has a muffler shop and a wheel balancing place, and he's ready to retire. There should have been 40 or 50 students that could have gone through and learned that and bought that business when it shut down. Instead, the rural areas are dying because there are no tradesmen and craftspeople that are able

to pick up on some of what's happening in the rural towns. We have cabinetmakers, all kinds of good opportunities. So I would urge this government to look at increasing their spending in the high schools and start that vocational program much earlier so that the students can exercise that right.

Also, we see with the sports programs and band and other ones that we have a lot of teachers that come and spend countless hours helping those students develop those talents, and I think that there would be a lot of students that would be excited to have teachers that would help them with carpentry, with mechanics, with electrical, all types of trades if in fact we were to allow them to have that opportunity. But the funding isn't there for vocational education, and it would be appreciated.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for about 12 seconds.

Hon. members, the Assembly stands adjourned until 8 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]