

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 15, 2005**

**8:00 p.m.**

Date: 05/03/15

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Please be seated.

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

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

**The Chair:** I'll call the committee to order. This is the first time this Assembly, the 26th Legislature, has gone into committee, so I would like to note for some of the newer members that it's a more casual level of debate. Jackets for the gentlemen are optional. Also, members are allowed to occupy a seat other than their own. Sometimes this leads to some side conversations. I would ask that we still respect the member that has the floor. If your conversations need to get louder, perhaps they could take place out in the committee room.

### Bill 21

#### Hotel Room Tax (Tourism Levy) Amendment Act, 2005

**The Chair:** Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to rise and speak in Committee of the Whole to Bill 21, the Hotel Room Tax (Tourism Levy) Amendment Act, 2005. Our critic for Finance had laid out our Official Opposition response to the bill earlier this afternoon, but there were a couple of issues that I wanted to raise and, hopefully, get some response back from the sponsoring member or the minister. Hoping to, anyway.

As the critic laid out, the Official Opposition is supportive of the moves that are being contemplated here. I think it's something that the industry has been asking for for an extended period of time. I think the first time I heard about it would have been in about '96, but my notes indicate that the hotel room tax was introduced in '87. Well, I know that in '96 they were trying to get it turned into a levy and have that money redirected into tourism and marketing, so they've been trying to make that happen for at least nine years. Once again, we see that the wheels of the Legislature grind exceedingly slow. But we are happy to support this bill.

Just a couple of things that I want to note, and I believe the member raised them this afternoon, but I'll just underline them again. I think there is expected to be an increase in the amount of money that is available, but I note that it's still substantially below the money that's available for tourism marketing in most other provinces. I don't watch television very much, and I usually tape it, but I have noticed some commercials recently for Newfoundland and Labrador, really nice, well-produced television commercials, so they're socking a wad of money into promoting their province for tourism possibilities. I know that we always get a lot of advertising out of B.C. and Ontario. We're quite far behind in investing in that. I think we do have to look at this money as an investment in an economic driver because tourism is an economic driver for us, and we need to look at marketing dollars as an investment in that, in increasing our share of the marketplace, and I'm very supportive of that.

I think it's also important that the act not become unduly onerous with paperwork and reporting on behalf of the operators. You often hear from small business operators that talk about how many reports they've got to fill out and file and how onerous that is, especially if they're a fairly small business. I think that wherever we can simplify that, make e-filing commonplace, is very helpful.

We have heard from some very small bed and breakfast owners that they have concern with the present legislation. It's around definitions, I think, because something happens at a certain accommodation level, and below that they're treated differently than above that. Also, we get Health and Wellness defining a B and B by the number of people, eight or less, and the hotel act defining accommodation by the number of rooms. So there's a slight jurisdictional battle there that maybe can be addressed as part of this or worked out as part of this.

Now, the substantive part of what I wanted to discuss tonight is around two things. The first is: where's the money going? I could have missed something here – and I'm happy to be corrected by the sponsor of the bill – but as far as I can see in the act, the money is designated to be collected, but it doesn't say that it's going to go into a special designated fund, which tells me that it's going into general revenue. Since we're in Committee of the Whole, we can have a back and forth discussion here. I'll get the sponsoring member to get up and tell me on the record whether in fact this money is going to go into a special set-aside designated fund or if it just flows into general revenue.

My concern about this is that it's not secure funding. If we have a change in minister, a change in government – anything is possible – a change in government direction, none of this is nailed down. That 4 per cent levy . . . [interjection] We'll talk about ducks later. That 4 per cent levy/tax could not be directed into tourism marketing anymore unless it's going into a specific fund that is set aside for that purpose, and my reading of this bill indicates no such thing. There's no mention of a separate fund. There's no mention of designated, set-aside, tagged, enveloped money here, none of those things that we would usually look for when we're talking about money collected for a specific purpose that's tied to something.

So I'd like to get the government on the record with that one because what I'm seeing is that this is a tax that's being collected and flowing into general revenue, and then there's this sort of general discussion about: it will probably go back out to marketing. But that's not a very secure place for those hotel tourism operators to be hearing about. I think they're looking for some certainty here.

Let's face it. It's not as though this government doesn't operate with a number of tagged levies or royalties that are collected off particular sectors that are then set aside for specific use. Certainly, we see that with oil and gas royalties. Certainly, we see that with stumpage fees: collected, set aside. They're not going into general revenue. So it's okay to designate on the front-end load, but on this one, which perhaps you could say was a back-end load, there's great reluctance to tag it or to put it into a special fund. I'd like to hear some discussion around the choices the government has made with that one.

Ducks. I'm interested that the government says: well, we've gotten rid of this 5 per cent tax, and now we're going to have a 4 per cent levy. Oh, come on. If it walks like a duck and it quacks like a duck, you know what? It's a duck. I appreciate the attempt at levity that's brought forward around calling this a levy rather than a tax, but you know what? It's a duck, and it's a tax. Okay? Thank you for bringing me a bit of amusement while I talk about this, but it's a duck.

The second issue I have is: who controls the dollars? Who will distribute the dollars that are collected? Assuming that they are

going to go into a special fund, who is going to designate where they go, and how will this be done? What's the criteria that it's going to be based on? It's all pretty loosey-goosey. Oh, my, we have a f-o-w-l theme happening tonight: ducks, geese. But it is very loosey-goosey. This money is going to get collected. We don't know where it's going to go or how it's going to be held aside, and we're not getting any indication of who's in control here. Where does the buck stop, in other words?

#### 8:10

Now, I'm aware that the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council, which was an advisory body to the minister, maybe was supposed to distribute it, or maybe it has distributed the first wave of it that's already been happening, but I don't think so. I think Economic Development stepped in and said: we're going to tag where the first amounts of money go. There was an expectation there, certainly on my part, that the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council was going to be designating where these funds go, but first time out we've got Economic Development involved here. So what's happening? Why is that happening?

Now, a third layer of this. One, is the money going into a special fund? Two, who's going to designate it, and what's the criteria for designating and doling out the money on the marketing tourism end? Three, what kind of monitoring audit function is there going to be on this, performance measurements, et cetera, et cetera, the way that we will be able to look at this particular initiative and judge it a year, two years, five years, 10 years down the road and go, "Boy, this was successful," or "No, it wasn't, and we need to fix it a bit?" I'm not seeing anything that is laying out for us how we the Members of the Legislative Assembly, we Albertans, we the public, we the Public Accounts Committee are going to be able to look at this money and say, "Yes, we got value for our dollar there; yes, it was wisely used" and all the other monitoring transparency and accounting functions that go along with that.

Now, a couple of other sort of small, niggly factors that come up. I know that there was a PricewaterhouseCoopers poll that was done around this idea, and there's very strong support for it, which is in large part why, in fact, we are supporting it. But there were some that were less supportive, and it seems to be that sort of 10 per cent level, and that same 10 per cent – and I can't tell you whether it's exactly the same people, but there's more or less a consistent 10 per cent – feels that the increased marketing money won't help. They appear to have given up. It correlates to the rural small-business owners in the hotel industry. See, in response to the question, "Would the government fulfill the promise?" there was still around 10 per cent – it's actually 8 to 15 per cent in that particular one – that weren't exactly believing that the government would fulfill the promise that's being put forward with this bill.

You know, to other questions like, "Do you expect a levy to be beneficial?", a number of people did, a very high percentage there, almost 65 per cent, for a couple of reasons. One, because it showed government commitment to the sector, and they feel very strongly that they haven't had government – well, sorry; I can't speak for them. I would argue that the government has not been supportive of the tourism and marketing sector for many, many years. They are saying, according to this study, that they believe it is showing government commitment to the sector and also that it's a good marketing opportunity.

When I look at that kind of feedback coming from the sector, I go back to my initial questions about: where's the money going, and how's it being kept separate? Is it designated or set aside or kept safe? That is what we really want to know, that it's not just going

to be snatched away by some other department. Already, as I pointed out, the very first allocation of the money seems to have already been decided by Economic Development, which wasn't quite what we were expecting there, so there's already a bit of inconsistency in what we're expecting.

I'm also interested in the criteria to allocate the funding. Assuming that it is going to go to tourism and marketing, what criteria is going to be used? Is it going to be on the basis of strengths so that those that are already doing really well get more money, get to be stronger, a sort of Darwinian theory of tourism? You know, if you have a going concern in the Rocky Mountains between Jasper and Banff, you're going to continue to get good money, but if you're somewhere out there in rural central Alberta, you're not? Will the money be allocated on that base, working from a basis of strength so those that are strong get more marketing money, or would it be based on some other kind of strategic plan? You know, is it going to be allocated equally across all of the tourism marketing – oh, they have all those marketing groups across Alberta. Is it going to be divided equally amongst them, or are we going to say that only new ventures or new products are going to get attention? What's the concept behind this?

We're being asked to invest in something, approve of something, and I agree with approving of it, but I'm not getting a lot of details about what's coming after that. It's hard, as always, for me to sort of buy into something that isn't very well articulated. So I'm looking for the sponsor of the bill or the minister to get up and fill in some of those blanks.

I'm wondering if there is any kind of a plan for money to go into the physical development support for marketing or not. I note that with that Strategic Tourism Marketing Council there are a number of vacancies on that council right now. That's supposed to be coming from the sector, from the industry, so I'm wondering why there are vacancies there. If the sector is really involved and really interested, usually people would be lining up to put their name forward to sit on the council. Has it run its time? Is the industry withdrawing from it or hesitating for some reason? That was the advisory council to the minister, so has the minister got the recommendations on his desk and he just hasn't gotten around to giving the rubber stamp to everybody? What's the deal there?

The last thing that I want to talk about is that the minister, when he spoke this afternoon, got me thinking in this direction with his flight of poetic fancy about southern Alberta, which I admit is God's country. It's where my father comes from. It's also prime film land, and we have had a setback in Alberta around our film industry. It's rebuilding. The government listened to sense, listened to the film industry and did start to reinvest in it. We're coming back certainly, but we could come a lot further. For example, right now there's the Jesse James film that is casting about looking for where they're going to film, and it could be in southern Alberta.

Now, could that marketing tourism dollar, some of the criteria, be allocated towards enticing a film like that to come to southern Alberta and shoot their scenes there? Would that be part of the consideration? I think that depends on who's making the decision and who's setting the criteria because I'll bet you some people that are involved in this like Tourism Alberta wouldn't consider that money going to entice a film group to come and shoot in southern Alberta. But maybe they should be considering it, and if somebody else is in control like the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council, maybe that is something that could be considered by them.

I'm interested to hear, because we have no criteria, what the expectation is. Where is this money expected to go? Would it be a wide enough mandate? Would the criteria include targeting film

development? I mean, we've got a film commissioner that's operating out of Alberta. Can they be given additional resources to sell the province? It sure brings a lot of money in. It brings local money in. We at one point had a lot of trained technical and artistic people to work in the film and television industry.

Now, because we withdrew support for that when Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation shut down and in that period before the employment credit was put into place, we lost a lot of business. Those technicians packed up their very, very expensive specialty trucks and went off to Saskatchewan, who was offering a lot of incentives, and Manitoba and B.C. So we don't have them living here anymore just down the block, where they can fire up that truck and be on set in a couple of hours. We've got to bring them back from those other provinces, and frankly those other provinces are offering some darn good incentives. So is there a possibility that this fund could be used to augment those incentives or to bring us up to an equal bargaining position with some of the other provinces that we're competing against or competing with locations in the States, for example?

8:20

That's really what I'm looking for, Mr. Chairman. I'm looking for answers about: where is the money going to go where it is definitively protected and it can't just disappear into the general revenue fund? Who's making the decisions on how the money would be distributed and some details about that? What's the criteria that's going to be used for the allocation of that money, including, you know, how widely would they consider or what things would they consider as part of that? That's what I'm looking to have nailed down. If I can get somebody opposite to stand up and answer some of these questions, I may well be willing to support this at this point in time and vote it through Committee of the Whole. So I look forward to hearing from the members opposite.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Does any other member of the Assembly wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I noticed that there's no one on the government side of the House ready to speak, so I thought I'd take advantage and make a few observations.

Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to speak on Bill 21, the hotel room tax – that will be called a tourism levy, I guess, from now on – amendment act, 2005. I was listening to the Minister of Economic Development this afternoon when he spoke to this bill. There was a bit of bragging going on, as I noticed in the minister's comments, that this administration always likes to reduce taxes, and this is just another instance of how it goes about doing it.

Well, I just want to underline that it was this Tory government that brought in this hotel room tax in 1987 at 5 per cent or whatever, and the current government has continued with it until today. It took over from the previous Premier and cabinet in December 1992, and it's taken us 13 years for this new administration, as the Minister of Economic Development referred to the government that he represents, to reduce this tax come the year 2005.

Having said that, I think a reduction in this tax from 5 per cent to 4 per cent is something that will be welcomed by Albertans. Albertans are also among the people who use tourism facilities in this province. This government, as part of its last year's budget, brought in some – we counted I think about 70 different indirect service fees and indirect taxes which weren't there before. So in talking about this government's own record about reducing taxes, I think one needs to be a little more modest if one is on the govern-

ment side speaking to that issue. That's not always the case. That's not been the case. But in this case a reduction from 5 per cent to 4 per cent I think would be welcomed by Albertans. The question, as my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre has raised, is: how is this money going to be used? Who is going to receive it? Who is going to account for the way the money is used and given out?

The other question, of course, is also one that needs to be addressed. When some of the funds from this tourism levy, which this tax will be now called, will be used for promotion of tourism, what kind of promotion will take place? On the TV? Certainly, we see other provinces doing intensive advertising through all kinds of media, including TV, to expand tourism, to direct tourists from outside to their provincial jurisdictions. I see from south of the border various states, North Carolina and others, doing that exact same thing. So the question then is: why is it that in this province, where the minister this afternoon was talking about how important tourism is and how he would like to see it expanded, there hasn't been that much of an emphasis on advertising and marketing the tourist attractions? Plenty of it exists in this province, but it certainly needs to be marketed rather aggressively and vigorously in places where we think we can attract tourists.

The last point, Mr. Chairman, that I very quickly want to make at this stage of the debate on this bill is that as we aspire to further increase tourism in this province and hope that tourist facilities will expand as a result – as demand grows, supply will increase – I think we also need, although there's no space on this bill for it. I guess that from the funds that will be generated from the tourism levy, some of them perhaps could be spent also to address the question of the working conditions of lots of people, Albertans, young Albertans mostly, who work to provide hospitality facilities in tourism locations and facilities. So the whole issue of health and safety of workers, most of them if not all of them being Albertans, who work in the tourist industry is an issue that needs to be addressed.

I hope that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed's Bill 201 will proceed without too much tampering with it so that at least it does address some of those conditions under which hospitality workers are working or will be working and providing the users of tourist facilities in this province the services that they need.

The government has moved and I hope that it implements this undertaking to increase the minimum wage because many of the people who work in the tourist industry unfortunately also work close to the minimum wage level. So after a long wait of many years the government has finally undertaken to increase that wage to \$7. I hope that that will be implemented and brought into force forthwith in order to strengthen the tourism industry, the hospitality industry. The benefits of that expansion should go to tourists, to this government by way of revenues generated through the tourism levy, and also to people who provide those services, most of whom are Albertans and are young Albertans.

That said, Mr. Chairman, I just want to say that in general the NDP opposition is supportive of what this bill is proposing to do, but I did want to put on record some of the concerns that we hear from Albertans with respect to the conditions under which they work and what they would like to see done to the tourism sector and the economy in general.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Are there other members wishing to speak on this bill?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was just waiting to see if we had other speakers as well. I'll make some concluding remarks

if I may. I do want to express my appreciation for the support of those who have spoken both this afternoon and this evening, and I appreciate all of the comments.

To reiterate, this act does include technical improvements, clarifications, administrative issues that needed to be addressed since it was implemented back in 1987. It will benefit administration of the hotel room tax, tourism levy, and bring it into line with other tax programs that we currently administer. Yes, you've heard the projection. It will be an increase in funding by an estimated 75 per cent for tourism and development in Alberta. Yes, there's a change of name from tax to levy, and it is a reduction from 5 to 4 per cent.

8:30

It was stated earlier today that the revenue that is 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. There is no substantial change in the process for operators in the province, and the government has been working for many years with the Alberta Hotel & Lodging Association, Travel Alberta, and a number of others in the industry, so there is a lot of agreement there, and that is very affirming.

I know that further travel will be stimulated in the province during this our centennial year. It will lower the cost of accommodations and improve another avenue – and I say another avenue – for improved funding to promote Alberta in the years to come.

With respect to other concerns raised today, it had been suggested that more money should be spent in this regard. It may be argued that there is never enough, but the stakeholders involved have told us that they believe this is a very good start.

There was a question of whether it's four rooms or eight people, and I guess if we base it on double occupancy, four bedrooms times two persons per bedroom is eight people. The very simple answer to that, ladies and gentlemen of the House, is that the line had to be drawn somewhere, and that's a very workable number for that industry.

There was a point made also, Mr. Chairman, that \$25 as a claim back for filing indicates that there is a lot of work involved in this. Yes, indeed, there is a certain amount of time and paperwork that is required. I know that the stakeholders involved know that that's just the time and cost involved in running a business.

Finally, a couple of the hon. members have brought up the fact that in the act it does not state directly that the tourism levy will be directed to marketing or whatever the case may be. I will say that the government did look at all the options of how to handle this, and in their wisdom decided to leave it as a tax that flows into general revenue. But I know that you can be assured that the agreement is outlined in a number of documents, and I'll refer specifically to the Strategic Tourism Marketing Plan 2003-2006: Navigating Winds of Change. Based on a lot of research, all the stakeholders involved, it will approach provincial, national, and international audiences. So this is consistent with other government policy, handling it this way, and I know that with the amount of agreement we have with all the stakeholders involved, we're in good hands.

Those are my comments, and I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Are there any other members wishing to speak?

[The clauses of Bill 21 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd move that the committee rise and report Bill 21.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 21.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the Assembly concur in this report?

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Opposed? So ordered.

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

**Bill 1**  
**Access to the Future Act**

[Debate adjourned March 15]

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to speak to Bill 1, Access to the Future Act, that's before the House in its second reading. I am pleased to rise and speak to it.

Mr. Speaker, there's no denying the fact that postsecondary education does need some decisive change in direction in this province, and the question is: does this bill signal that direction or not? I say: if at all, only partly. The postsecondary education system in the province is large. There are four universities, 16 or 17 colleges and technical institutes. There are private colleges, for-profit colleges and universities setting up shop and expanding their operations in this provinces. So the system is becoming larger by the year, more diverse, and perhaps expanding in directions which Albertans would consider undesirable if they were consulted and asked for their advice on this.

The bill itself does move toward setting up an endowment fund, Mr. Speaker. Once it's fully financed, it will be \$3 billion, and only 4.5 per cent of this amount, a maximum of \$135 million, will be available for postsecondary institutions to draw on. Then the drawing rights, if you wish to use that term, or the ability to draw on this will depend on various conditions, including the ability of each institution to match the amount of funding they can withdraw from the endowment fund, and those matching funds will come in most cases, perhaps, from the attempt of these institutions to get private donors, including corporate interests, to donate.

When these private donors, particularly big businesses, corporations do give funds to postsecondary institutions, they have strings attached to them. They have special projects. They want special

kinds of developments to take place which may or may not suit the overall plan for operation and expansion and development by the academic communities that each of these institutions represents.

8:40

The whole question of the autonomy of institutions, their ability to set their own research and teaching agendas, is put into question by the conditions attached to the manner in which this fund will be accessible to these 20, 21, 22 institutions. I'm assuming here that this fund will be available, Mr. Speaker, only to nonprofit public institutions and that if there are some private institutions that will qualify to access this fund, these will be nonprofit institutions. I would like the minister of postsecondary education to perhaps speak to that issue.

I notice that in section 2 of the bill – I was looking at it – there's a section there on the access to the future fund. The section previous to that is on accessibility and affordability, and every statement does refer to public postsecondary institutions. But when it comes to this section 4(1), which deals with the access to the future fund, the explicit reference to public postsecondary institutions there is missing, and that causes concern for me. I would like the minister responsible to clarify that.

In my meeting with the minister I did ask him these questions, and he was kind enough to invite me to a meeting where he explained what is likely to go into this bill. It did raise the question of whether or not private, for-profit institutions will have access to this fund in any shape and form. He said to wait for the bill to appear. The bill is before us now, and I'm asking some of these questions that need to be asked on the floor of this House with respect to the ability of private, for-profit colleges or technical institutions or universities to access this fund. If that were the case, then I would have to vote against this one and strongly oppose that provision. So there is some, I think, lack of clarity if not equivocation on that point in this bill. I would like the minister to address it, and I hope he will certainly allay my fears with respect to this particular issue.

A couple of other points, Mr. Speaker, that I want to make. The endowment fund, while it's good in itself, is long overdue. It's not good enough. It's not a substitute for enhanced core funding of Alberta's public universities, colleges, and technical institutes. Even when fully funded at \$3 million, as I said, the amount is small. It's only 10 per cent, \$135 million.

When that amount becomes available – and we don't even know when this endowment fund will reach the \$3 billion mark, but even when it does reach that point – the maximum amount that we can draw on would be \$135 million, and that will form only about 10 per cent of the overall amount that we spend. Good. Good start, but this money is not available, I think, for meeting the pressing needs of universities and colleges and institutes when it comes to either student services, student tuition fees, and other operating deficits that have resulted because of the chronic underfunding over many years in the past.

As I said, the other pressing needs of postsecondary institutions are being ignored. The need to freeze tuitions beyond the one year announced by the government could have been addressed in this bill, but it's not. I'm disappointed, and students are disappointed. They're expressing concern already. In fact, the government is not even amending the tuition fee policy at all, only giving students a one-year stay of execution, as it were, by paying for tuition increases that would otherwise be charged to students. While the government is providing a one-year stay of execution in terms of tuition increases, nothing is being done to address the problems of skyrocketing student debt.

Bill 1 should have addressed the situation of inadequate living allowances on the student loan system, where they're not keeping up

with inflationary increases in rent, food, transportation, and utility costs. There also needs to be a firm legislative commitment to not raising the ceiling above which student loans are remitted.

Another point. An Access to the Future Act that truly met the multifaceted needs of the public postsecondary sector would have dealt with many other pressing priorities. Such an act would have addressed teaching and learning conditions at our postsecondary institutions. Class sizes of many first- and second-year postsecondary courses, for example, are in the hundreds of students. Imagine a young student coming from a high school with an average class size of 30 students going into a first-year university class of 300 or 400 students. The so-called Access to the Future Act does not address this pressing issue and others like it.

Until now provincial funding support has not kept up with the inflation in enrolment growth. For the past 12 years postsecondary institutions have had to cut programs and restrict enrolments to make ends meet. A true Access to the Future Act would establish an equitable formula for core funding to at least match inflation in enrolment growth.

One of the consequences of provincial underfunding is an increase in the amount of deferred maintenance at universities, colleges, and technical institutes, something the Auditor General has repeatedly pointed out in his reports. Buildings on university and college campuses are aging, and we need to make sure that the dollars are there on a consistent basis to do repairs and keep them in good shape. While there have been significant dollars put into the construction of new buildings at public postsecondary campuses, many of these buildings are for research purposes and do not relieve the crowded lecture halls and labs that students are facing.

For all of the above reasons, perhaps the greatest failing of Bill 1 is its failure to establish a postsecondary learning commission to examine the many challenges facing Alberta's postsecondary system as called for by the Learning Commission itself, a recommendation rejected by this government. My hope was that with the change of the minister who now looks after the portfolio for postsecondary education, that decision of the government to reject the recommendation to establish a postsecondary commission would be reversed. Unfortunately, that has not happened.

There are many major issues, Mr. Speaker, that need to be addressed which bear on the future of the postsecondary system in this province, and I'll just list a few. The question of tuition fees, for example, is one. I think it requires public input before the government comes up with its next steps as to how it's going to deal with ever-increasing tuition fee costs for students. But tuition fee costs are only a part of the overall costs of the students. I think such a commission as I'm proposing would be asked to look at the whole question of costs that go into postsecondary education, including the costs that are attributable to tuition fees.

The question of the role of private, for-profit postsecondary institutions in this system is another big issue, and the minister seems not to be concerned about the growing presence of this for-profit sector. Some of the players, at least, who are coming in have questionable past records, Mr. Speaker, including some convictions for breaking the contracts that they had not been able to deliver on and perhaps more serious infractions of law. Given that, I think that it's important that we look at the whole question of whether or not this province's accessibility goals are served and served well by allowing for-profit institutions to come in and set up shop here. That question is not being addressed and will not be addressed.

The question of governance of institutions is another one. The current postsecondary act in the province centralizes the powers in the hands of the minister. The autonomy of the postsecondary system is very important. Particularly university institutions and

some very promising colleges I think need to be able to enjoy full academic autonomy. What I see in this bill is an effort, in fact, to further concentrate and centralize those powers into the hands of the minister.

I give an example here, Mr. Speaker. In section 2(1), accessibility and affordability, the act reads that “the Minister, in consultation with public post-secondary institutions, shall identify and establish enrolment targets and minimum entrance requirements.” This is something new. Minimum entrance requirements, I think, are the responsibility of each of the institutions to establish. What the minister now is attempting to do by way of this legislation is bring that power under his own direct control. I don’t think that’s a healthy direction in which to move forward.

8:50

Similarly, the minister will be establishing, related to the access fund, a council. All of the members of this council will be appointed by the minister, and the final decisions on how these funds will be distributed will be strictly controlled by and will be in the hands of the minister. Again, I think we need some arm’s-length institutions which make these decisions rather than the minister taking all these powers onto himself. The commission itself, when it is established, if it’s ever established, would have to be an independent commission which holds public hearings and seeks public input and comes forward, then, with the recommendations for the consideration of this government and of this House. That’s unfortunately not the case, so I have very serious concerns about the bill.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I take my seat. Thank you.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but there is a five-minute period of question and comments available for anyone who wishes to speak under Standing Order 29(2)(a). Were you wishing to rise on that?

**Ms Blakeman:** No. I’m wishing to speak.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Anyone else?

Seeing none, I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak in second reading to Bill 1, the flagship bill of the government’s agenda for 2005, the Access to the Future Act. Seeing as this is the first bill the government has brought forward, flowing out of, I’m assuming, the election – and certainly I can say that in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre, postsecondary education, tuition, funding of universities and colleges, the debt load carried by students were all very, very hot topics at the doors. People were really committed to this, not just students – and I have a lot of students that live in the riding that attend the University of Alberta, NAIT, Alberta College, Grant MacEwan, NorQuest – but their families as well and in a lot of cases grandparents, in fact, whose grandchildren were students somewhere else. It was a general topic of real interest and concern.

I think the title of this act is a good one: Access to the Future. I think a lot of people view postsecondary education as access to the future. It’s so important to the Alberta Liberals that it was a major part of our platform, and I know that my colleagues have spoken at length about it. It’s very important to me, and I’m a great supporter of our policy that we would recognize that from any future surplus

we would set aside 35 per cent to a postsecondary education endowment fund. One of the issues that kept being raised for me is: you need that money to keep going. We didn’t put a cap on it. We didn’t say, as this bill does: \$3 billion and that’s good; you can stop there. We felt it was important to continue to endow.

In fact, when we looked for examples across the world, those higher educational institutions that people talk of with awe, you know, the pinnacles, the paragons, have astonishing endowment funds. I mean, Yale and Harvard are up in the billions and billions of dollars of endowment. So we’re looking at pretty small potatoes here. I mean, I’m glad to see that we’re doing it, but we would have a long way to go to set ourselves up in competition with some of those institutions.

Mr. Speaker, that disappointed me a bit because when I did my Speech from the Throne I talked about how Alberta was good, that it was even great in some areas but that it could be extraordinary. We had such an opportunity to just blow people’s minds with how exceptional we could be, how much leadership we could provide. This is one of the areas that I was really hoping we could come out of the gate on and just blow people away. We would be so impressive with it. And that’s not quite happening with this bill. It’s nice, and it’s a good idea, and it’s got some money in it, but it wasn’t quite moving us into the extraordinary place that I felt Alberta could be.

I’m happy to have the government take some of our good Liberal ideas and turn them into this fund. Happy to share that. I think it’s going to move everything forward in the province. I just wish they would have taken a few more things, like not capping it at \$3 billion but allowing it to get larger and also actually having some guaranteed money flowing in there. This one is a little loose on whether the money will actually get there depending on what the year is looking like. For Edmonton-Centre this is an important bill, and I’m certainly considering supporting it in second for the principle of the bill because it is important to my riding.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I tabled a letter from a university student that lives in my riding. He was reacting specifically to the Premier’s comments that the \$180,000 severance package offered to the previous chief of staff was “not a lot.” I think is the direct quote. And this student was saying that, well, it was an awful lot of money to him. Considering how much of his life he’d invested in going to university and how much in debt he was and how many extra jobs he was working, \$180,000 seemed like a lot of money to him. But that’s true for many students not only in my riding but in other places. So they are looking to the government to make access easier, to better fund the infrastructure, and to better fund postsecondary education, including apprenticeship programs. And I think it’s always important to remember that they’re part of the scope that we’re talking about here.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I had talked about general funding, and I think it’s important to realize here that we’re coming from behind the starting post on this one. Essentially, funding for postsecondary education under this government with this particular Premier – we had cuts there of 21 per cent between 1994 and 1997. So we have had money put into this area since then, but I don’t even know if we’re back to where we were in ’94. So we can’t get too cocky about how great we’re doing here because, as I say, I don’t even know if we’ve caught up to where we were in ’94, and it’s now 2005. So given inflation and value of money and all of that, I suspect that we’re still behind where we needed to be.

One of the other issues that is an ongoing concern for me – and I’m not seeing it specifically addressed in this bill, Mr. Speaker, but I’m wondering if I’m not seeing it happen by stealth. You know, sometimes people talk about by design or by default, and I guess I’m

looking for clarification about whether this is design or default. I'm finding that funding for postsecondary education is increasingly targeted. Whether it's going to so-called high-priority programs or certain kinds of research initiatives, they do tend to be streamed into commercial potential. I think this is not the point of higher education, and I think we need to be really careful that we don't have government controlling the activities of postsecondary education institutions. I think we're on the verge of that if we actually haven't started to move down the road.

9:00

You know, anybody receiving funding from the government always looks to the government for signals about where it's going and how to please the government to make sure that funding, if it's coming, keeps coming. I think what they're seeing are signals that commercial initiatives get the nod of approval but others not so much.

Postsecondary institutions aren't stupid. They will figure out how they're going to secure more funding or even secure, stable, predictable funding by playing into those expressed or indicated preferences of the government. I see government's control reorienting the activities of what these institutions are doing and tying them to short- and medium-term private sector economic endeavours. I think Bill 1 is continuing this trend, but I would love to be proved wrong on that one, so please prove me wrong.

The second issue I've touched on briefly, and I'm going to expand a bit on that now, is the amount of deferred maintenance that the postsecondary institutions are dealing with. Now, we've often heard members on this side talk about the infrastructure deficit that was created. So, yes, the government paid off the cash debt and deficit that we had, but in doing so, they stole from Peter to pay Paul and created an infrastructure deficit, and some would also argue – and I'm one of them – that there was a human, social deficit that was also created as part of that.

Specific to the infrastructure deficit, the fact sheets that I've looked at indicate that the U of A and the U of C alone, not counting all the rest of the postsecondary education institutions in Alberta, have a deferred maintenance of a billion dollars. Now, I'm just going to refer back here to my earlier comments about capping this fund at \$3 billion. That's only going to give us a hundred and thirty five mil to play with extra every year, and we have no idea when we're going to attain that full level of \$3 billion. Here we are with a billion dollars today in deferred infrastructure maintenance. So I think that's an issue that we need to be looking at outside and inside of what's being talked about and contemplated in this bill.

Tuition is another area, and I know others have talked about the increase in tuition. Yearly tuition as a percentage of the Alberta student loan program maximum in '92-93 used to be about 20 per cent, and now it's almost 40 per cent. That difference is being made up by the students working part-time and full-time.

I always find it interesting that when we went to university, that was not the norm so much, yet when we all safely have degrees and are well on in our working lives, we're more than happy to turn around and make it much more difficult for the next generation. I argue, in fact, that this government transferred that intergenerational debt in less than a generation because they moved it onto the shoulders of the students in particular. I think that we've now got the numbers to show that, that the students ended up picking up a huge debt load that came to them as a result of choices made by the government.

If we look at, for example, information from ACTISEC, they note that student debt has risen substantially, and university students

graduate with an average debt – there are some lower, but there's also some substantially higher – of \$21,000. Twenty-one thousand dollars. If you could manage to put a thousand dollars into your loan payment, it would still take you almost two years to pay that off and more if you've got interest payments as part of that. College students with \$19,000. I mean, they're not going to be able to pay off a thousand bucks a month. Let's face it; it's much less than that. They're looking at years and years and years of this. Well, we didn't have to do that. How come we're willing to do it to somebody else? It doesn't redress overall the level of tuition that students are paying.

I'm interested very much in what the criteria are that the minister contemplates using as performance measurements to judge the success of this program, and I'd like to see these laid out now. I don't want to see opinion polls used as performance measurements. I want to see what the criteria are now. They should be part of this bill. I mean, if we're to judge this – the Public Accounts Committee, the public at large, the members of the Assembly – we need to know what we're judging against. What's the benchmark? What are the criteria we're supposed to be using to decide whether or not this program is successful? And that stuff needs to come out at the beginning. You can't invent it as you go along, or you're not playing the game fairly. So that is a question that I have of what the criteria and performance measurements would be.

I continue to be concerned by bills I see coming forward from the government which are essentially shell bills. They outline a bunch of stuff with no details in it, and the details are to come later. Well, they come through regulations and orders in council, Mr. Speaker, and that's much more difficult for people to track. I mean, even in this day of electronic scrutiny – e-government, if you will, and that's a good thing – it's very difficult for people to find out things like orders in council and how things got changed.

There's no public discussion around that. It doesn't come back through this Assembly and get debated openly. We don't get to consult with our constituents and bring forward issues they're concerned about. It's just quietly done as a regulation change. An order in council comes out in the *Gazette*, if you know where that is or how to find it, and that's it, and people don't know what's happened. They don't know how it's changed. It's a bit of a surprise to them. May not even be a press release that they changed something.

So I continue to push the government to lay out their plan and the specifics of it in the legislation and not hide behind this, "We'll do everything behind closed doors later and get back to you." What are they fond of saying? "Stay tuned." Well, that radio station is a bit staticky, Mr. Speaker. It's not giving us very much information.

There are a number of other issues that I would like to bring up around this, but I know my time is running out. I'm glad that I got a chance to raise some of these issues during second reading. I am supportive of the bill overall, but I think it could be better, and I'm always going to be pushing the government to be better. I look forward to continued debate on this and some additional suggestions in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you very much for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does anyone wish to rise under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, could we have permission for the Assembly to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A lonesome soul in the members' gallery. You must be wondering why she's there. Well, definitely not to listen to the debate. One option could be seeking shelter from the snowfall outside, but there's actually a better reason. I would ask to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Ms Nejjolla Korris, who is a proud mother looking down on her son, our page Mr. Taddes Korris, working with us tonight. Would she please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Bill 1**  
**Access to the Future Act**  
(continued)

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to comment on Bill 1, Access to the Future Act, and tell you that in St. Albert there's a lot of interest in this bill. I'd like to also talk about it in terms of my past background as a person that started school late at the university level, when I was 21, and also from the perspective of needing information in offices.

I think it's important that when we talk of a bill, we should look at the students' focus. Therefore, I'd like to just briefly talk about the need for a solid student services outlet in postsecondary institutions because they play, in my mind, three major functions. The student services' role is outreach activities to the community – and I think especially of a number of seniors in St. Albert who take advantage of this service and get updated – and access to programs and services and financial assistance available to students while they're on campus. I think it's also crucial in terms of student services that we look at the whole business of support services. Now, student services, as I understand it to be – and I think, again, it's so important – is what is going on in terms of counselling, guidance, careers, courses, housing, health, outreach, and also key information on scholarships and loans.

**9:10**

It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that there's so much information, and I know that this government spends a lot of time on the whole issue of communication. I think that when we have a bill of this importance and this amount of endeavour, we want to make sure that it's well communicated to the constituents and to the citizens of Alberta as to what is available in the institutions and continuing education and so on. Also, I think it's very important that we have good high school information getting out and to interface with high schools across the province.

I think also, Mr. Speaker, it's important that when we have postsecondary institutions, it is crucial that we keep government departments updated. I'm thinking particularly of social services, workmen's compensation, these kinds of services where we need to work on and improve the interface so that we have people in these services advising people that may go on to postsecondary education. They must be well informed.

Also, in the student services function at a university or college level you'll see that many, many student services are directed to

serious problems of students. This is all fine and good, but I think there must be much more evidence of service to careers, career planning, alternate programs available, housing needs, financial, and academic upgrading in terms of what's going on.

The other aspect that I think is important in postsecondary institutions is that we see now many of our larger institutions such as Grant MacEwan, Mount Royal, have been moving away from the kinds of programs they've had and will be moving away from diploma students and into more university-oriented programs. It's very, very important to have a plan when we do this for counselling these students that may be left who have to go into other institutions such as NorQuest, Bow Valley, Portage, and those kinds of institutions across the province.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I think there's a good endeavour through this bill. There are some issues here that I hope are looked at. I hope, and truly mean this, that there is a focus on student services to get the right information out and help students with better decision-making when they move on from high school education.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the University of Calgary located in the heart of my Calgary-Varsity constituency, I have great concerns about the government's abandonment of postsecondary institutions. Whether you refer to external evaluations such as *Maclean's* magazine or internal student evaluations, satisfaction has declined considerably. Each year the *Maclean's* survey lists the U of C near the bottom based on a variety of categories. U of C student dissatisfaction rated the university at 47 out of 48, with 1 being a top grade.

Bill 1 does not address a number of issues, the first issue being infrastructure. Bill 1 ignores the decade of disrepair into which the physical structure has fallen. One of the worst buildings, as one might expect, is one of the first built. This is the administration building in which President Dr. Harvey Weingarten's office is located.

On a recent tour of the university I could not help but note the slope of the floor which leaned to the east. What also stood out in a rather ironic fashion were the institutional hospital-green hallways and doors reminiscent of one of B.F. Skinner's rat mazes, which housed a number of behavioural psychology labs. I almost expected to see large rats wearing lab coats scurrying about the decaying dungeon in the building's basement. While this building is one of the extreme examples, other more modern buildings have their facades propped up by external scaffolding to keep them from crumbling on the students trying to enter the building.

In other academic offices buckets have been placed to catch the errant drops from aging plumbing, reminiscent of a *Ma & Pa Kettle* or *Beverly Hillsbillies* movie prior to the "up from the ground came a bubbling crude." This analogy was chosen to show how ludicrous it is, given our oil and gas revenues, that students and professors are forced to work under Third World infrastructure conditions. Students have to sit in the aisles or stand in the back of lecture halls, which sport very few left-handed desks, hoping that a fire marshal doesn't show up to shut down the class.

Another key factor of the infrastructure problem is that only a skeletal crew exists to repair whatever problems appear. For example, the number of electricians required to maintain a campus of the size of the U of C is 43. Over the years with cutbacks, its staff alone has been reduced to 8. Other such support staff deficiencies are notable in the number of custodians. Instead of doing the research, meeting with students, marking papers, or planning



lectures, professors are emptying their leak-catching buckets or vacuuming their offices. Secretarial staff as well are stretched well past the stress point trying to cover the requirements of several professors within their departments.

Issue number two: campus cannibalizing. In an effort to keep the cuts as far away from the students as possible, all support staff have been cut back. The most dramatic cutback has come in the form of the soon-to-occur layoff of 250 food support worker members of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. Many of these workers have been employees of the U of C for many years. Over 100 of the part-time workers are students themselves trying to cover their constantly rising tuition with the one notable exception of the proposed fall of 2005 saving of approximately \$55 thanks to the one-time magnanimous covering by this year's 5 per cent increase. Thank you, government, for your generosity.

Another form of campus cannibalizing which directly affects the quality of academic instruction and which this bill doesn't address is the growing class sizes. What was once considered acceptable only for first-year introductory classes in large theatres capable of . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** On a point of order?

**Mr. Herard:** Yes, point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**Point of Order  
Relevance**

**Mr. Herard:** You know, it's understandable . . .

**Ms Blakeman:** Citation?

**Mr. Herard:** Relevance, 23.

I appreciate the fact that the hon. member is here, he's new, but there has to be some relevance to the bill at second reading. We can't just be listening to a speech that has absolutely no relevance with the bill that we're trying to discuss.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would ask you to please enforce the relevancy rules.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on the point of order.

**Ms Blakeman:** Yes, indeed. Thank you very much. Well, relevance is always an interesting point to be raised as a point of order because I think you have to listen to everything in context. Seeing as the member is a newly elected member from an area that, in fact, has a university in it, and he's obviously done a great deal of consultation, and he is bringing forward the issues that were raised by the university around funding and future support by the government, I would argue that his comments have been very relevant and key to what is in fact being brought forward by this bill. He has talked about infrastructure, and the bill certainly talks about infrastructure. He's talked about funding. It talks about funding in the bill. He's talked about tuition. It talks about tuition in the bill. He's talked about access. It talks about access in the bill.

So I think, in fact, Mr. Speaker, he has been very relevant.

**Mr. Herard:** I give up. I give up.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you so much for the opportunity.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I would allow the hon. member to continue. I would not rule that there is a point of order.

There have been numerous interruptions from all sides of the House, and I would remind everyone that it is the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity that has the floor. Perhaps if we give him the opportunity to state his case, we would be able to tie all his comments in, and it would sound more relevant.

**Ms Blakeman:** Mr. Speaker, if I can just confirm that the clock was stopped and it restarts when the member starts to speak again. Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Speaker:** That's right.

9:20

**Debate Continued**

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to the hon. government members, while I was a language arts teacher and some of my analogies may seem to be somewhat literary, I have been up to the university a number of times. I have spoken with groups from the students' union. I have spoken with faculty representatives. I have spoken three times with Dr. Harvey Weingarten. I've done the research.

What was once considered acceptable only for first-year introductory classes in large theatres capable of holding up to 600 students has now expanded into second- and third-year classes. There aren't enough grad students to fill in the instructional gaps. Students, therefore, feel abandoned. It is therefore not surprising that Alberta on a per capita basis has the lowest percentage of postsecondary graduates. Contributing, of course, to the lack of graduates is the lack of available seats for those students who have reached the constantly rising grade point entrance requirements.

This past fall over 25 per cent of eligible students who could afford what has become the latest tuition rates were turned away due to lack of space. As is the case with public education, portables and ATCO-style trailers rather than permanent structures have become the norm. The government with their Bill 1, Access to the Future Act, has committed to providing 15,000 new seats within the next two years. Given how long it has taken to build the new children's hospital, which is also located in Calgary-Varsity, this leads me to believe that the U of C will start to look like a carnival or trailer park. Possibly we could convert some of the old school buses into mobile classrooms linked together in trainlike fashion, pulled by retired Fort McMurray gigantic dump trucks.

Bill 1 doesn't address the fact that the U of C has been forced to cut back all their departments by 5 per cent over each of the next four years. While the government has covered the debt of health care regions, it hasn't shown the same generosity or foresight when it comes to covering either school board or postsecondary debt. Possibly it is this government's intention to create virtual university spaces for virtual students with virtual dollars like some kind of Xbox virtual reality game in which once you've passed through the various levels and obstacles, you'll be granted a virtual degree.

When you look, then, at the other future seat increase targets, especially the 60,000 new seats by 2020, which is only 15 years away, you have to wonder when the necessary construction will begin. The promised southeast hospital completion date keeps getting pushed farther and farther back with still no clue as to how or when half of the \$500 million will come from. The most recent suggested date is now set back from 2008 to 2010.

The difference between the government plan and the opposition plan is that the government plan is limited to a one-time \$3.5 billion infusion whereas the opposition plan, the Alberta legacy fund, carries on annually with a guaranteed 35 per cent funding from each year's surplus. In addition, it offers a guaranteed potential of

infrastructure, 25 per cent. Obviously, all of that money wouldn't go into postsecondary students.

I would like now, Mr. Speaker, if possible, to adjourn debate on Bill 1.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Clerk of Journals:** Government Bills and Orders for Second Reading. Bill 2, Alberta Centennial Medal Act, hon. Mr. Mar.

**Mr. Hancock:** Might we move to Bill 3 for the moment?

**The Deputy Speaker:** Is it agreeable to the House that we move to Bill 3? Say aye.

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Opposed, say no. Okay.

### Bill 3 City of Lloydminster Act

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to bring into debate the second reading of Bill 3, the City of Lloydminster Act.

The goal of Bill 3 is to update and enhance the legislative framework for the governance of the City of Lloydminster. The City of Lloydminster Act will clarify the process by which both the government of Alberta and the government of Saskatchewan can amend regulations and approve new regulations, including the approval of a new Lloydminster charter. The City of Lloydminster Act will replace and rescind the Lloydminster Municipal Amalgamation Act, which was originally approved in 1930 and is out of date relative to the current requirements for the city of Lloydminster.

The City of Lloydminster Act will contain modernized language, and the act will recognize the current city status of Lloydminster. The City of Lloydminster Act removes the legal requirement in the Lloydminster Municipal Amalgamation Act requiring the establishment of a commission in order to redraft any regulations, including a new Lloydminster charter. As the province of Saskatchewan has already passed its version of the City of Lloydminster Act, approval of the City of Lloydminster Act in Alberta will ensure that the city council and administration are not subject to two separate acts.

Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 3.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

### Bill 2 Alberta Centennial Medal Act

**Mr. Mar:** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 2, the Alberta Centennial Medal Act.

This legislation will create the Alberta centennial medal. This award will commemorate our province's centennial by honouring some of our most talented and dedicated residents. Just about any Albertan that's made a significant contribution to the province would be considered eligible for this medal. The criteria as outlined in Bill 2 have been kept deliberately broad to allow us to recognize a wide spectrum of achievements. Albertans are contributing to their province in many different ways, but, Mr. Speaker, Bill 2 recognizes exactly that fact.

This bill also recognizes the importance of involving Albertans in honouring one another and in their own communities. The Alberta centennial medal will be awarded to nominees submitted by representatives from provincial organizations and various levels of government. The exact list will be contained in the regulations for the act.

The groups that nominate will be able to also award the medals to recipients that they select, and I anticipate, Mr. Speaker, that we will see some unique award ceremonies taking place in communities across the province throughout the centennial year. The Department of Alberta Community Development will co-ordinate the program to ensure that the same person is not nominated more than once and to see that the nominees in fact meet the program's minimal criteria.

Besides having made a significant contribution to the province, recipients must also be Canadian citizens that reside in or have resided in Alberta and are living at the time of awarding. This medal is for Albertans who are making a difference right now in helping our province start its next century strong. It's important that we pay tribute to these individuals and give their stories a chance to inspire others. The Alberta centennial medal would be a fittingly prestigious award.

It is important, Mr. Speaker, not to confuse this program with the Alberta centennial medallion. The Alberta centennial medallion is a keepsake that will be presented to all Alberta schoolchildren, centenarians, officials, and visiting dignitaries in the year 2005. Bill 2, the Alberta Centennial Medal Act, will designate the medal as an official honour of the Crown in the right of Alberta. Once the bill is passed, the government of Alberta will pursue national status for this award. A medal with national status is included in Canada's order of precedence.

Bill 2, the Alberta Centennial Medal Act, creates a recognition program that is inclusive, that involves communities in honouring their own, and pays a fitting tribute to Albertans that have given so much of themselves to others and to their province. It is a meaningful thing to do for our centennial. After all, the province is only as great as its people.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure again to move second reading of Bill 2, the Alberta Centennial Medal Act.

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

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in the Legislature to speak to Bill 2. I think it's entirely appropriate that this bill, Bill 2, is being introduced today in the Legislature. This bill provides tribute to Albertans who have made significant contributions to make our province a better place to live in, to raise our families in, and to work in. In this our centennial year, honouring current and former Albertans who have made our province so prosperous, so culturally diverse, and so special is a fantastic way to celebrate our 100-year birthday.

9:30

Mr. Speaker, Albertan people are known for their spirit, their innovation, and their generosity. In the past 100 years there have been so many special Albertans who have contributed to our society in such a profound way that honouring them with this special award of merit is entirely appropriate in our centennial. The awarding of the Alberta centennial medal will recognize and honour the important role individuals have played in the development of Alberta as the most prosperous province in Canada.

We need to honour these special people in our centennial year. Alberta is full of special individuals who have made contributions that have had a profound impact on the development of our society,

from community leaders to volunteers to those who have dedicated themselves to public service and achieved outstanding results. These are the people we are honouring with these medals, and I stand in support of the principle of this bill that guides this bill as well. It is entirely appropriate in our centennial year.

There is one area of this bill, section 4, that needs further clarification. It is the part that speaks to individuals and organizations designated in the regulations who may nominate individuals to be recipients of the centennial medal. I think further clarification is needed as to what criteria will be used in determining who these individuals and organizations will be. How will the government determine who can make nominations? My concern is that certain organizations may be excluded from being able to nominate an individual to be a recipient of this award. So can the hon. minister provide some clarification as to what process will be used to designate individuals or organizations who can nominate recipients? Also, what steps will be taken to ensure that worthy individuals are not excluded from being able to be nominated because the process for nomination was flawed?

My second concern with Bill 2 is clarification of the clause “the Minister shall approve.” Could this allow for political considerations to enter into decisions?

My final concern is surely about revocation, section 6. On what grounds?

Mr. Speaker, other than these concerns about potentially omitting worthy recipients of this medal, I fully support the spirit behind this bill, and I commend the hon. minister for sponsoring it. This prestigious award provides us with the opportunity to celebrate the contributions made to Alberta by exceptional individuals who have played a role in making our province prosperous. The special men, women, and youth who will receive this award will no doubt be worthy of this special tribute. I am pleased to support this bill, sir.

Thank you very much.

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I looked at this bill on the basis of two principles: transparency and responsibility. I believe there should be a panel of distinguished Albertans set up to develop the exact criteria in determining what worthy individuals or organizations may be eligible to receive an Alberta centennial medal, and by doing this, the government will be transparent and responsible and not be accused of playing politics with what I consider a wonderful idea.

To move from the above recommendations places the government in a bit of a pickle if they don't look at my recommendations. Organizations and associations and municipalities across the province will see right through this nominating process. I think it is flawed, and I think it should be changed in light of the panel concept.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone that wishes a question or comment.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This bill is a one-time commemorative medal that will recognize and honour the extraordinary accomplishments of nominated Albertans during the province's centennial year. The medal would be awarded to any Canadian citizen who has resided in Alberta and has made a significant contribution to this province. Criteria to be considered in the

awarding of this model are a broad range of contributions to the community and to the province through leadership, volunteerism, community involvement, and outstanding personal achievement.

Bill 2 is specifically awarded for exemplary personal contribution by nomination. The Alberta government has announced that plans are under way to have representatives from provincial associations, governments, and other organizations make the nominations with the awarding of the medals to be done at presentations throughout the centennial year. It is expected that 8,000 Alberta men, women, and youth will receive this award during the centennial year. It seeks to award deserving Albertans who have contributed to our province in areas such as community involvement, leadership, volunteerism, and outstanding personal achievements.

I support this bill. I think it's a wonderful opportunity for us to recognize the strength of this province, and that is its people. The only question that I believe should be raised here is surrounding section 4 of the bill. This section states that “individuals and organizations designated in the regulations may nominate individuals to be awarded the Alberta Centennial Medal.” What exactly are the criteria in determining who these individuals and organizations are? Specifically, how will the government determine which associations and other organizations will be designated as having the ability to nominate recipients, and then how will the government determine which individuals can nominate potential recipients, and what is the process for this?

Other than further clarification around those issues, I believe that this is a commendable bill. Albertan people are known for their spirit, their innovation, and their generosity. This medal provides us with an opportunity to celebrate these qualities and the people who exemplify them. I support the Alberta Centennial Medal Act. I believe it is the mark of a civil society to honour its people. In this first year of a new century I see opportunity for this government to emphasize our people and that we are here to serve our citizens. The centennial medal will recognize and acknowledge outstanding achievements of Albertans of all ages because we understand that each individual's achievement and success contributes to the health, wealth, and spirit of this great province.

Regulations for designating individuals and organizations for the purpose of nominations are not specified. It is my hope that regulations will support wide-sweeping consideration across the province, including all ethnic and religious groups. This will be another way of recognizing that our diversity is a strength and our strength is our people.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Anyone wishing to rise on 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief. I rise to speak to Bill 2, the Alberta Centennial Medal Act. I want to thank the minister for his remarks introducing the bill and for clarifying the distinction between the medal and the medallion. I think it's an important distinction to keep in mind.

That said, I am speaking in support of the bill. I think it's a laudable decision on the part of the minister to recognize the individuals who have made significant contributions. It's obviously a very, very broad sort of criterion that the minister suggests here, but I suppose that if some mechanism could be found to make the judgments with respect to the selection of individuals who will be recipients of this award, that will certainly help. Particularly, section 4(2), which says that “the Minister shall approve the individuals nominated under subsection (1) to be awarded the Alberta Centen-

nial Medal,” has raised some questions already in the minds of some hon. members who have spoken.

9:40

This may not be the time to propose any concrete changes to the act, but if there were some sort of all-party committee that the minister would seek advice from in making his final approvals, I think that would allay some of the concerns that have been expressed around that issue.

The revocation of awards did get my attention. I wonder what conditions, what circumstances would lead the government to revoke the awarding of this medal. If appropriate scrutiny is done to start with, if the minister seeks advice from an all-party committee, as I said, and the organization and individuals who have nominated people for receiving this award have done their work, then it seems to me the revocation section in the bill would seem to be redundant. It's not needed. It really casts some sort of shadow over what's otherwise a very nice and optimistic gesture on the part of the government.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will close my remarks. Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Anyone else wish to speak on the bill?

Does the hon. Minister of Community Development wish to close?

**Mr. Mar:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. I wish to do so. I'd like to thank hon. members for the comments that they made this evening.

In answer to a specific question referred to by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona with respect to why there's a revocation provision in the bill, this is a requirement by Rideau Hall in order to allow this medal to be recognized by the Order of Precedence. That's the reason why the revocation provision is contained within here.

With respect to the other concerns raised by many other hon. members, I can assure you that the regulations are being drafted now, and those regulations are being drafted pursuant to section 7 of the act and will include the issues raised by section 4, which a number of you referenced. My undertaking to you is that I will provide transcripts of the Blues or *Hansard* to the drafters of the regulations so that they might take your comments into consideration while preparing the regulations.

With that, I wish to call the question on Bill 2, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a second time]

### Bill 7

#### Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2005

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to request leave tonight to bring forward second reading of Bill 7, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2005.

Bill 7 proposes to make technical amendments to the Public Health Act, the Government Organization Act, and the Health Professions Act. The minor amendments address issues related to health professionals. These issues have been brought forward by the respective professional associations and colleges in Alberta. Currently the Public Health Act provides authority for nurse practitioners to practise. These sections will be repealed by Bill 7 when nurse practitioners become regulated under the registered nurses schedule of the Health Professions Act. This change is targeted to come into effect in the fall of this year.

Bill 7 also proposes amendments to the Health Professions Act. These amendments are required to protect the term “specialist” and limit the use of the term. Colleges would make regulations about how their members can use the specialist designation.

Amendments are also proposed to several schedules in the Health Professions Act. These include revising the names of certain colleges and amending the protected titles for regulated health professionals. For instance, the “College of Physicians and Surgeons of the Province of Alberta” will become the “College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta.” Another example is the title “emergency medical technologist-paramedic (critical care paramedic),” a new protected title which will be added by the amendments. A schedule amendment is also necessary in order to allow the Alberta Podiatry Association to continue as a nonregulated body with the same name once podiatrists become regulated under the Health Professions Act with physicians, surgeons, and osteopaths.

Bill 7 proposes amendment also, Mr. Speaker, to the Government Organization Act. The Government Organization Act restricts certain medical activities to health professionals who are authorized to perform these activities by legislation or by the minister. The proposed amendments are intended to more clearly define certain restricted activities. For example, there is a definition for dispensing a drug which specifically excludes the administration of a drug. However, there is no current definition of administration of a drug.

Proposed amendments to Bill 7 add a definition of administration of a drug and also clarify the definition for “compound” and “dispense.” “Administration of a drug” will mean “the supplying of a dose of a drug to a person for the purpose of immediate ingestion, application, inhalation, insertion, installation or injection.” The definition of compounding clarifies that reconstituting a drug with water does not fall within the definition of compounding, which would make it a restricted activity. The definition of “dispense” will be amended to clarify that when a drug is dispensed, it is provided to a person through a prescription and clearly does not mean to administer the drug. Associated redundancies and wording in the Government Organization Act will also be addressed through Bill 7.

I ask support of the House for the second reading of Bill 7.

Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

### Bill 9

#### Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2005

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I rise to move Bill 9, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2005, for second reading.

A little bit of time has passed, not much but a little, since the Post-secondary Learning Act was passed, and in practice it's been determined that it would be appropriate to make a few small changes for the purposes of clarification and housekeeping and deleting some unnecessary sections. Bill 9 will help to clarify board membership regulations for technical institutes and colleges, correct some things that were unintentionally done when the legislation was drafted which could lead to unintended restrictions.

It also proposes to delete the section of the act that lists not-for-profit institutions eligible for funding from the government since funding for these institutions is provided through a regulation. Now, the purpose of removing them from the act. Basically, there are, I think, four specific not-for-profit institutions listed in the act. There are an additional four not-for-profit institutions which are not listed

in the act which have the same criteria and qualifications as those that are listed in the act, and one of the institutions listed in the act has now been merged with a public institution. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, having the specificity in the act listing these institutions is not an appropriate way to go, so we're proposing to delete the section. It's not required. The same matter can be dealt with under the regulations.

Now, I know that we've heard in the House tonight different views about framework legislation and the work being done under regulation, but I would suggest that surely that criticism, if it was ever valid, isn't valid with respect to this point. There needs to be the flexibility to add a not-for-profit postsecondary institution to the list when it's appropriate to do so. So that's the intention there.

**9:50**

Bill 9 also clarifies terminology relating to tuition, as requested by the Auditor General.

There's a housekeeping amendment for sections that relate to student associations. The Campus Alberta Quality Council has assumed, as well, a role of reviewing degree proposals, work that was previously done by the Private Colleges Accreditation Board. Thus the work of the Private Colleges Accreditation Board is now done, and that section can be deleted.

There is a change being made to the section relating to the collection of information. Right now the minister can only access information regarding current students. However, in order to ensure that good policies are being developed for advanced education in Alberta, we need to be able to access information for those who apply but do not enrol in an institution as well as alumni information for various surveys. It's something that we will be obviously

consulting and working with the Privacy Commissioner about to make sure that the information collected is used appropriately. Revising the section does allow us to collect information that may include personal information about an identifiable student, applicant, or alumni of a postsecondary institution providing that the information relates directly to and is necessary for the operation of the program or activity.

The minister also needs authority to be able to conduct surveys relating to postsecondary education with applicants and with graduates of institutions to ensure that policy directions are supporting the needs of Albertans. We have consulted with the Alberta privacy branch and the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner to ensure that the wording provided is appropriate.

Finally, there are some housekeeping changes to ensure consistency in the use of the terms "private college" and "private institution" throughout the act.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that the House would see the benefits of these amendments and would approve Bill 9.

With that, I would move that we adjourn Bill 9.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

**Mr. Stevens:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn the Assembly until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 9:53 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

