

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 21, 2005** **1:30 p.m.**
 Date: 05/03/21
 [The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

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

Hon. members and all those in the galleries, I'm now going to invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. Please participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

Vignettes from Alberta's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, two historical vignettes for today. On March 21, 1930, the Floral Emblem Act was passed in Alberta, making the wild rose the official floral emblem of Alberta.

On March 21, 1940, a general election was held in Alberta. Of 57 MLAs elected, 36 were Social Credit, 19 were Independents, one was Liberal, and one was Labour. There were 309,000 votes cast provincially.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the House three guests who are seated in your gallery. They're representatives of Pacific Northwest Economic Region, PNWER as it's better known. They're in Alberta meeting with members of government and Members of the Legislative Assembly. In fact, we were honoured that they hosted a lunch, and all members of the Assembly were invited. We had a good turnout and discussed a number of very important issues to Albertans over the lunch hour.

Mr. Speaker, if I could introduce to you representative Glenn Anderson, who is from Washington state, and he is a PNWER vice-president; representative George Eskridge, who is from Idaho, also a PNWER vice-president; and also from the state of Idaho representative Max Black, who is a PNWER past president. I see that they are standing. I'd ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of all.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly five very distinguished guests. Three of them are from the Lushoto district, Tanzania, Africa, and they're here visiting

the town of Drayton Valley on an international partnership exchange. I will ask them to stand and remain standing as I call out their names: first of all, the district commissioner, Elias G.B. Goroi; the chairman, which is our mayor counterpart, Richard A. Mbughuni; also the district director, which is the counterpart to our town manager, Obed K. Mwasha. Accompanying them today from Drayton Valley are our mayor, Her Worship Diana McQueen, and our town manager, Manny Deol. I'd ask that the Assembly please recognize them.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly members of the Council of Alberta University Students, an advisory group of presidents and vice-presidents of students' unions from universities around the province with whom I had the pleasure of meeting earlier today. The council represents over 80,000 university undergraduate students from the University of Alberta, University of Calgary, University of Lethbridge, and Athabasca University.

I'd ask each of our guests to stand as I call their names and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: Duncan Wojtaszek, executive director of the Council of Alberta University Students; Lisa Priebe, president of the Athabasca University Students' Union; Jordan Blatz, president of the University of Alberta Students' Union; Alex Abboud, vice-president external of the University of Alberta Students' Union; Bryan West, who was recently elected to his second term as president of the University of Calgary Students' Union, and being elected twice as president of the students' union is a relatively unique opportunity; Michael Bosch, vice-president external of the University of Calgary Students' Union; and Jason Rumer, vice-president academic of the University of Lethbridge Students' Union.

These representatives of students from across the province serve their constituents well, and they're here today to talk to members of government and to watch as we serve our constituents well, Mr. Speaker.

The 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 a guest visiting from the Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency. Watching the proceedings today is Kim Heyman, the chief administrative officer of a great staff from the county of St. Paul. She's accompanied by her mother, Pamela Napier, from Victoria. Mrs. Napier is retired and has taken up travelling in her retirement and is originally from England, where she hopes to return as a tourist this year. 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.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. You've often heard me talk about the incredible community of artists that we have in Alberta, and I'm thrilled today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special visual artist, Peter Field. Some of you Edmontonians will remember Peter's work as artistic director for the First Night Festival, designing the huge puppets and the parade icons and

characters like the Big Mamas or the big chairs that sat atop the transit information centre for a number of years or any of the downtown murals that he's done. Peter currently has an exhibit running at the Works Gallery in Commerce Place until April 1. The exhibit is called Chickens, and for anyone with a drop of prairie blood in them, you've got to see these portraits of chickens. You absolutely must. I would ask Peter to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second introduction today is the two people that work in my constituency office. They do all of the work to make me look good, and I'm very appreciative of that. [interjections] And I need a lot of help, yes. All right. The first person is Jane Wisener. Jane is from New Brunswick, and we managed to get her all the way out here as a good Liberal. She graduated with a poli-sci degree from Mount Allison, and she ran a very successful campaign that gave me my colleague in Edmonton-Rutherford. Jane is already standing. Could I ask Jim Draginda to join her? Jim comes from a career at the *Edmonton Journal* for 14 years, United Way for three years, and then went into arts administration. I have managed to scoop him from arts administration to work in my office as the caseworker. Thank you both very much for joining us, and please accept the welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions today as well, actually. The first is a group of seniors from Luther Place, connected to Hosanna Lutheran church. I met with them earlier in the rotunda. There are 22 of them, and they are led by Mr. Walter Adolph. I think they are in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of all members.

I would also like to introduce some of our staff, who are seated in the public gallery, four altogether. The first one is my special assistant, Susie Sykes. Susie has been working with me since last summer and has a degree in communications from Ryerson, went to high school in Edmonton, and is I think happy to be back here in Edmonton. The second is our senior administrator, Leigh Anne McCrowe. She joined our caucus after working at the University of Alberta and, before that, several years in the private sector. She grew up in Newfoundland, so we're representing all provinces here, just about. Third, I'd like Yolande Cole to stand. She works in our media liaison group. She's a recent grad of journalism from Mount Royal College in Calgary. And last, Vivienne Kostiuik, if she could rise. She's also an assistant to me. She grew up in Lloydminster and, after living and working overseas for 13 years, has returned to join our team.

Mr. Speaker, if I'm not organized after the help of these four women, I am helpless. I ask all members to give them a warm welcome, and I hope they enjoy their stay with us. Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of this Assembly residents of Ottewell Place seniors' lodge, which is very well run by the Greater Edmonton Foundation – it is located in the south end of the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar – and also two residents of Virginia Park seniors' lodge, who are together today on a tour of the Alberta Legislature. They are accompanied by Kristi Getz, their recreational co-ordinator; volunteer Wilma Nerenberg; and their bus driver, Mrs. Vicki Noël.

I would ask them now to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly 35 grade 6 students and three supervisors from the Polish bilingual arts program at St. Basil school in Edmonton. They are attending the School at the Leg. this week. They are led by Vice-Principal Teresa Kiryluk, Mr. Luke Wasik, Mr. Roman Kalinowski. Could you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature?

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

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you 24 members of our outstanding public service, who are here for the public service orientation tour of the Legislature. We have one from Advanced Education, six from Education, one from Finance, one from Government Services, two from Health and Wellness, one from HR and E, eight from my Department of Infrastructure and Transportation, one from IIR, one from PAO, one from Restructuring and Government Efficiency, and one from Sustainable Resource Development. We couldn't be here today if it wasn't for these people, and I'd ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've got two sets of introductions today. Just to remind the House that today is World Poetry Day, and on this very important day we have three poets visiting with us. The first one is Christina Grant. She's the interim executive director of the Writers' Guild of Alberta. The Writers' Guild of Alberta was formed in 1980 to provide a meeting ground and collective for the writers of this province. The guild acts as a strong representative voice with the public and with every level of government. Ms Grant strongly believes that the province of Alberta will benefit greatly by having a provincial poet laureate. I ask Ms Grant to rise and wait for me to introduce the other two members of her group.

Andrew Thompson is a poet and the president of the Stroll of Poets Society, which operates in my constituency of Edmonton-Strathcona. The Stroll of Poets Society was founded in 1991 to address the need to promote poetry as a popular art form. Stroll stages two annual poetry festivals, publishes an annual anthology, and offers other programs such as a reading series and workshops. Mr. Thompson has been involved in Edmonton's local poetry scene since 1980 and was a founding member of the Stroll of Poets Society.

My third guest, Mr. Thomas Trofimuk, is a member of the Raving Poets, a group who read and perform Tuesday nights at a pub in my constituency. Mr. Trofimuk is the author of a book called *The 52nd Poem* and will be launching his newest novel, *Doubting Yourself to the Bone*, in September. Now I would ask these three guests if they are not standing already to stand and please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second set of guests, Mr. Speaker, represents the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations, called NAARR. Ms Charlene Hay is the program manager and head researcher of this organiza-

tion. She is a former teacher who has taught in Africa and with aboriginal children in Alberta. Charlene received her MEd in educational foundations in 1989, and I had the pleasure of being her supervisor. She also happens to be my constituent, and during the past several years she has managed the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations. With her today is NAARR's youth organizer, Mr. Oliver Kamau. Mr. Kamau conducts outreach to youth on behalf of NAARR and leads such efforts within the organization as the peace ambassadors' initiative, which uses everything from games to drama to help youth to recognize and help eliminate racism. I'd ask both of these guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to the Assembly three gentlemen who are seated in the public gallery. They are Mr. Paul Moist, the president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees. CUPE represents 535,000 public-sector workers across Canada, including hospital workers, school workers, child care workers, and municipal workers. Mr. Moist became a CUPE member at age 19 in 1975 and was elected president of CUPE Manitoba in 1997 and elected president of CUPE national in October of 2003.

Mr. D'Arcy Lanovaz, president of CUPE Alberta, has been active in the labour movement for over a decade now, first with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees and now with CUPE.

Finally, Mr. Alex Grimaldi, who is currently the president of CUPE local 30, representing city of Edmonton outside workers. He is also the former president of the Edmonton & District Labour Council. I joined these three gentlemen today at the multicultural luncheon sponsored by CUPE local 1158 in honour of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. I'm very pleased that they were able to take time out of their very busy schedules to be with us today, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Definition of Marriage

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The line between the PC Party and the government gets blurred more every day. After announcing last Wednesday that a fight against federal civil marriage legislation is completely unwinnable, this government has now decided to waste taxpayer money to appease the right wing of the PC Party and fight a costly legal battle it is guaranteed to lose. Once again the interests of the taxpayer come after the interests of the Tory party. To the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency: how does this minister justify wasting taxpayers' dollars on a legal battle that the Premier and the Justice minister have admitted they cannot win?

1:50

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, that's a good question, and I think I will have the hon. Deputy Premier answer that question.

Mrs. McClellan: And that was a good answer, too, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there is no question that the government caucus and the people that we represent in our constituencies feel very strongly about the traditional definition of marriage. However, having said

that, I will let the Leader of the Official Opposition know that we are considering all of our options at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, back to the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency, who presumably is interested in cost-benefit analyses: can that minister explain the cost-benefit analysis of fighting civil marriage?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only thing I want to explain is we try to do everything we possibly can for our constituents and all Albertans. I believe that the hon. Deputy Premier did a very good job answering that question with her first answer.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, perhaps then to the Deputy Premier: will she elucidate the House on what the other options are that are being considered?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, at this point that's a bit hypothetical. But what I will tell the hon. leader is that when we have reviewed our options and have made a determination as to which options we will choose, I will be happy to elucidate the House.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're not getting much elucidation so far, so let's try the Minister of Community Development. What will be the role of the Alberta Human Rights Commission in the government's strategy to fight same-sex marriage?

Mr. Mar: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Community Development responsible for the Human Rights Commission, obviously I'm at the table as these things are discussed. I would certainly bring forward any perspective that the Human Rights Commission feels is appropriate.

Dr. Taft: Well, then, to the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency: given that the Premier and the Justice minister have both admitted that they cannot win the legal battle over same-sex marriage, will the minister be investigating why the government is throwing away taxpayer dollars on this issue?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I don't think that this government has spent any money or thrown any money away on anything at this point in time. The hon. Deputy Premier has said that we are looking at all different avenues on anything we can do to protect marriage between one man and one woman.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, again to the same Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency: given that the government is wasting taxpayer money on this issue to shore up support for the PC Party, will this minister ask that the legal fees for this action be paid out of the PC Party bank account?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I think we've answered the question once already, that we're not wasting any taxpayers' money. Absolutely not will I be going to the party for anything.

Thank you.

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

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no shortage of skilled industrial trades labour in Alberta; there's just a shortage of cheap labour. Government has just approved an application for the first 680 temporary foreign construction workers to work in the oil sands. To the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: why has this government not done its duty to ensure employment for Albertans and Canadians first or offered training for these positions to unemployed aboriginals, unemployed youth, underemployed landed immigrants, or displaced farmers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To start with, I want to clarify that there is no cheap labour. These workers that come in will have to follow all the standards and policies laid out in Alberta. Again, I'd like to stress the fact that the issue of a labour shortage or the issue of a strong economy should not be looked at as a negative thing for Alberta. It's a challenge that most jurisdictions in North America would love to have: a strong, diversified economy and lots of jobs for everybody.

Now, when an industry wants to hire people, the first thing they have to do, number one, is hire local people, hire Albertans, hire aboriginal people, hire Canadians first. Yes, Mr. Speaker, if that is exhausted, the next step is the employer then applies to the federal Liberals for approval of the process to bring in workers.

Mr. Backs: A supplementary, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: understanding that this minister in this Legislature has said that there would be no temporary foreign workers approved for the oil sands until Albertan and Canadian labour sources were exhausted, why has this government teamed up with the federal government to approve this first group of 680 temporary foreign workers?

Mr. Cardinal: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I stress the fact that our priority is to hire local people first. Our priority is to hire Albertans, aboriginal people, persons with development disabilities, and Canadians. Until that is exhausted, then nothing else happens.

Mr. Backs: A third supplementary, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: why is this government providing huge royalty breaks to large oil sands firms while Albertans are denied access to the good jobs there?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are not denied access. We have more job openings than we have people right now, and the challenges we have are to ensure that the proper training and programs are in place. I'll give you some examples of some of the communities we're dealing with in northern Alberta. Wabasca, which used to be in my constituency, 5,000 population, still underemployed and unemployed in some cases. They are interested in these jobs. It's a matter of putting in the infrastructure, the training, the road network in that region so these local people can

work in these jobs, and they're not given that opportunity. That is our priority.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the ND opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Southeast Edmonton Ring Road

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government misled Albertans in claiming that building the southeast Edmonton ring road by conventional means would cost \$4 million more than if a P3 public/private partnership was used. Last Thursday the infrastructure minister admitted that the cost of conventional financing had been deliberately inflated by 10 per cent to make the P3 look better in comparison. In other words, the P3 model preferred by this government will cost Albertans \$41 million more than it should. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Will the minister commit here and now to table immediately all documents relating to the financing of the southeast Edmonton ring road by conventional means?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First off, I would like to say, through the Speaker to the hon. member, that the facts that he has basically stated are completely, 100 per cent false. What we did is we put out what is called a public-sector comparator, which is a potential estimate of what that road would cost. Included in the P3 process is the agreement that it could cost 10 per cent either way. It could be 10 per cent higher or 10 per cent lower. There was a private-sector panel who looked at this every step of the way. The Auditor General looked at this every step of the way.

I would ask the hon. member to be honourable and withdraw that question.

2:00

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, will the minister admit that the government issued the number, the 10 per cent, rounded up when they told the public about the full price of this project by conventional means?

Dr. Oberg: Absolutely not.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that this answer completely contradicts the answer that the minister gave on Thursday, will the government now admit that this southeast Edmonton ring road project, like the Calgary courthouse and the southeast Calgary hospital, will cost more as a P3, and will this government also consign this project to the P3 graveyard and get on with building a proper road?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the P3 project on the Anthony Henday has several huge advantages. I recognize that the hon. member is from Edmonton, but, for example, it will be built two years sooner doing it this way. The private-sector component, the P3 component, of this particular road will assume all responsibility for cost overages. There is a warranty for 30 years – 3-0 years – on this particular road. While that is extremely, extremely valuable to us, if I was a MLA for Edmonton, I would be extremely happy that we get the road early and get it on time. It's wonderful for the city of Edmonton.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

B.C. Ports Strategy

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The importance of transportation links for our products moving to the Pacific Rim cannot be understated or overstated or stated at all. The recent announcement of the opening of a rail link from Alberta to Prince Rupert gives rise to a question. It is my understanding that the Alberta government has endorsed the British Columbia ports strategy at the B.C./Alberta joint cabinet meeting held March 18 and 19. What does this endorsement mean for the province of Alberta?

The Speaker: I gather it's directed to a particular minister?

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Dunford: You know what happens now, Mr. Speaker. I'm now under some suspicion that I might have actually written the question. It ain't so.

Mr. Speaker, I was there. I was in Cranbrook on Thursday and Friday, when we had a joint cabinet meeting with colleagues from the British Columbia government. Yes, in fact, on the agenda was the B.C. ports strategy. We recognize in Alberta from an economic development standpoint just the urgency and the strategic advantage, of course, that as Albertans we would have not only in the further development of the port of Vancouver but, probably even more importantly, in the importance and the strategic opportunity of developing the port of Prince Rupert.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For clarification, the minister didn't write the question. However, I will make it clear that the supplemental question is to the Minister of Economic Development. Does Alberta's endorsement of the B.C. ports strategy commit our province to funding or partnering in any funding of any project or program?

Mr. Dunford: No, it won't, but we will still play a critical role. I think it's important that British Columbia and Alberta on the B.C. ports strategy try to speak with one voice wherever we can. I believe that we will go to Ottawa with British Columbia in some type of format, then, to not only present the economic business case for this particular strategy but, I think, to once again point out to the rest of Canadians that there are a lot of things that are happening on the west coast and in the western part of this country. That, of course, is an important message that we have to get out to all Canadians.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Game Farming

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Health Canada's risk assessment for transmissible spongiform encephalopathies, including chronic wasting disease, Report 2000, concluded, and I quote: the highest risk ranking of Canadian domestic products were pharmaceuticals containing high-risk tissues and elk antler food supplements. The report further states, quote: the possibility of BSE risk to humans must now be acknowledged. To the Minister of Health: given the profound impact of BSE and its impact on human health and the economy, will the minister acknowledge the potential risk to humans of this prion disease?

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

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member did me the service of advising me by note this afternoon that he had forwarded the information that he is referencing to our medical health officer. We'll be pleased to review that information. As of a few minutes ago it had not yet arrived.

I would like to comment that in conjunction with the Minister of Agriculture we have been part of a study – Health has supported a study – that is going to do Alberta-based research into issues surrounding BSE, and I look forward to that. Presently, I have no further comment other than to say that I appreciate the notice, and I look forward to reading the information.

Dr. Swann: Again to the Minister of Health: will the government work with Health Canada to immediately ban the use of elk antler velvet?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would have to say no. At this point I have no further information to base my comments on other than the hon. member's question, which I have committed to undertake a review of.

Dr. Swann: That was reported five years ago, the high risk of elk antler velvet.

Given the Premier's promise since 1992 to hold a public inquiry, will this government now hold a public review of the game ranching industry in Alberta?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to invite the hon. minister of agriculture to respond to the hon. member, please.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to respond to the question. We are constantly reviewing all of the industries in the province and, as such, have been reviewing game farming and hunt ranching, as the Premier answered last week in answer to the question. We are working diligently with the elk industry and with the other ruminant industries in the province to ensure that not only are they safe but that they are going to be viable into the future.

I think, Mr. Speaker, to compare the CWD risk to human health risk when science is telling us – and I've not had the pleasure of reviewing anything that the hon. member has brought forward – that to link it to health risk and to compare it to BSE health risk is akin to what a group of ranchers in Montana right now are trying to do by suggesting Canadian beef is unsafe because of BSE. I believe that to be irresponsible fearmongering, and I just think it's a direct shot at those producers who are working very hard.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton McClung.

Student Loans

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a most shameful manner the Prime Minister snubbed postsecondary students along with the media and most Albertans during his visit to Alberta last week. I know many students who would have liked to ask him about the recently announced increase of the federal student loan limit by his government as they're very concerned about how this impacts their student loan debt limits. My first question is to the Minister of

Advanced Education. Is there anything that the Alberta government can do to assist students in dealing with this increase in federal loan limits?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government has indicated that it will increase the combined provincial/federal student loan limit by \$540 for the 2005-06 academic year, bringing it up to \$12,140. On one hand, this is good news because it will assist the students getting the financial resources they need to complete their education. On the other hand, it will allow students to graduate with more federal debt.

Alberta has no power over the federal government's approach to their student loan limits. What I can indicate to the hon. member is that we do have a remission policy in this province, which allows us to remit provincial debt that students incur over the course of the debt load. That remission policy actually works very well to forgive almost all, in many cases, of the provincial debt load that's there. So we'll have to work with the federal government to encourage them to follow suit with their student loan program to allow student loan remissions on the federally granted loans side.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the minister. Is Alberta's approach to increasing the student loan limit different from the federal government's?

Mr. Hancock: Well, our process is considerably different. In the first case, this is the first time, I think, in 10 years that the federal government has increased their student loan limit, and so it's done sort of on a one-off basis, with a massive period in time. We increase ours on a regular basis to keep pace with inflation. Our student loan limits increase with respect to the cost of living, with respect to mandatory fees and other learning costs to recognize the increases, yes, in tuition fees, those other things. So we've urged the federal government to take a similar approach, to do it on a continual basis rather than to do it periodically and sporadically.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: what is the Alberta government doing overall to increase the affordability of postsecondary education?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier announced in his conversation with the province at the beginning of February of this year, first of all, that the province would pay the increase in tuition fee for students this year. So that gives us an opportunity to hold the line for a year on the increases while we look at our tuition fee policy but, more broadly than that, look at affordability because finances cannot be a barrier to a student getting an education.

We need all Albertans to have the opportunity to access education so that we can deal with some of the skills-shortage issues. We can maximize the human potential in this province. So we will be taking a very careful look over the course of this year involving the institutions, involving students, involving the community in talking about how we make sure that getting a postsecondary education is

affordable, that there's a proper balance between the amount that the student and their family pays and the amount that society pays for the benefit that society gets, and making sure that everyone knows that they can get that postsecondary education. We will make sure that their finances are affordable.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

SuperNet

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency, RAGE, agreed last week that the SuperNet project was long overdue. My question is to the hon. minister. Why did this government not accept the bid from Telus when, in fact, Telus had 75 per cent of the infrastructure already in place?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I wasn't here at the time when Telus was around or when that bid actually went, but I do know that I'm sure whoever was in charge at the time did what was responsible and looked at all the bids and made sure they picked the very best bid that came in. I would like to let the — ah, that's enough information for him for today.

Mr. Elsalhy: Again to the same minister: please share with us why the penalties and provisions stipulated in the contract with Bell were not enforced to hold this private-sector company accountable. That's probably another fine example of a successful P3.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I want the hon. member across to know that the SuperNet has been moving along very, very well lately. I explained to him last week how many new ISP readies were coming on stream, and I just got another note passed to me this morning before I came to the House that we had 29 more come on this week. We had Barons, Bassano, Blue Ridge, Cardston, Carmangay, Champion, Duffield, Elnora, Entwistle, Evansburg . . .

Mr. Elsalhy: To the same minister: given that the ministry will not reimburse communities and public agencies for the upgrades and interoperability costs, how do you propose that these public agencies make their networks compatible with Bell SuperNet without your government's support?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the \$193 million that this government committed to the SuperNet program includes all the hookups of all the municipalities, the schools, the libraries.

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

Electronic Health Record

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In January our Premier announced that this government would be fast-tracking the provincial electronic health record. My question is to the Minister of Alberta Health and Wellness. Would the minister please tell us where this province is today with the rollout of the electronic health record?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since October 2003 we have trained 9,000 health care providers in the use of the electronic record. We are currently looking at the three strategies that have

been in place with Calgary, with Capital, and with the rural providers, developing a plan to embrace in a formal fashion the co-ordination of all of the strategies for the electronic health record to ensure better patient care and a number of other obvious benefits to the health care system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. How will the electronic health record address some of our real issues we're facing in our health system like improving access and patient safety?

Ms Evans: The opportunity to co-ordinate the system to better schedule when we have patient transfers, the opportunity to avoid adverse events by understanding the legibility of the record.

Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence I want to just ask the hon. member and others present to imagine a bank where you're told you can get your money at only one branch because it's where your records are. You can use your bank card only in bank machines at your own bank, if at all, your balance is incorrect because the teller's handwriting is illegible, you're told to wait for two hours while your money is being sent by taxi from head office, and you do not have Internet access to your accounts. What the electronic record will do is put us even further ahead. We're already number one in Canada, and we lead many places in the nation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Big Lake Natural Area

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tonight in St. Albert a proposal is being presented by the city of St. Albert, the city of Edmonton, Parkland county, and Sturgeon county to initiate application to the government of Alberta to have the Big Lake area designated as a provincial park. Big Lake is an important area for the sustainability of wetlands that support many plant and animal species. My question to the Minister of Community Development: will this government commit to changing the status of Big Lake from a natural area to the more protected designation of a provincial park?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, Big Lake's natural area is an internationally renowned area for nesting and migrating of waterfowl and shorebirds. We are willing to work with the four municipalities as partners. The area in question already is under provincial Crown lands, so the proposal, at least in its current iteration, is that the current boundaries remain the same and that, as the hon. member said, the level of protection would be higher. I don't anticipate any great challenges in this at this point, but that's the reason why we're waiting for the municipalities to come back to us with a plan for proposal that we can consider. If there are challenges that are presented by moving it to a provincial park designation, I can assure the hon. member that we'll make whatever efforts we can in order to try and resolve those difficulties.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Environment: will this government commit to developing a more integrated approach to managing water resources which will guarantee the sustainability of the water from the Big Lake basin?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, and a very good point raised by the hon. member. I want to assure all Albertans that our government, through the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development, the Ministry of Environment, and the Ministry of Energy, is working on what we refer to as an IRM, integrated resource management, approach for the exact points that the hon. member has raised.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Community Development: will this government commit to honouring the memory of the late the Honourable Dr. Lois E. Hole by designating Big Lake as the Lois Hole/Big Lake provincial park?

Mr. Mar: We cannot make a commitment to that at this time, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Temporary Foreign Workers (continued)

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A follow-up on the Ledcor Industries Limited approval to bring in 684 temporary tradespeople over the next year to work in oil sands projects under the banner of the Christian Labour Association of Canada, and of course they're the favourite big oil union. The decision to bring in these foreign workers is being made despite a 6 per cent unemployment rate in the construction industry, according to this government's own figures. My question to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: why is the government prepared to allow temporary foreign workers to build oil sands projects at the expense of skilled Canadian tradespeople when there is already a 6 per cent unemployment rate in the construction industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:20

Mr. Cardinal: Yeah, Mr. Speaker. I just want to mention again that that's very similar to the question I answered already, but I just want to mention that this member is talking about what may happen a year from now. That's part of his question. He's projecting that this will happen a year from now. At the same time, again, I want to stress the fact to these members – and I'm going to file this document that shows exactly what an employer has to do – that the employer here in Alberta has to exhaust all avenues available before any foreign workers are brought in. You've got to hire local people. You've got to hire Albertans first. You've got to hire aboriginal people, persons with development disabilities. Then you go beyond that, go outside anywhere in Canada to try and bring in the labour force that's required.

It's not an easy job, but again it's a good problem to have. Most jurisdictions in North America would love to have that problem and that challenge, Mr. Speaker. We are in a good position to be able to meet those challenges. My department alone spends \$280 million a year in training for 4,000 apprentices, and we're trying our best to fill those jobs.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, this is not hypothetical. This has been approved by the federal government.

My question is: why is this government going along with bringing these people in – and I'll repeat it again – when there's already a 6

per cent unemployment rate in the construction industry? Why are they doing it?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, there are lots of jobs for all Albertans. In fact, the question wouldn't come up if there weren't any jobs. There are lots of jobs for all Albertans. You can be assured that when everything is exhausted here to hire local people in Alberta, then the federal government does the approval process. I will file this document because step-by-step it shows you exactly what the employer has to do. It shows you exactly what Human Resources and Skills Development of Canada has to do in order to bring the foreign workers into Alberta.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, this is already occurring.

At least would this government be honest in that the real reason that they're encouraging foreign workers to come into Alberta is to give their big oil company friends cheaper labour costs? This is what it's all about.

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, the opposition member again is not right by saying that we're bringing in cheap labour. Any employee that gets hired – Albertans, Canadians, aboriginal people, and employees from across Canada – has to meet the labour standards in Alberta. I'll give you an example. CNRL projected that during the construction the average salary will be \$95,000 a year. I don't class that as cheap labour. I don't call that starvation wages.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Film Development Program

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta film development program was established in 1998 to try and encourage Alberta-based film production. Since then, other provinces have increased and expanded their tax credit based programs to entice more foreign production to their jurisdictions. Most recently, in response to similar moves south of the border, both B.C. and Ontario have increased their tax credits to 20 per cent of all eligible labour cost in their provinces to try and retain their current level of production. Could the Minister of Community Development please tell the House what impact these increased credits are having on our Alberta-based production?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, it's very difficult to identify it this early in the year. I can give some background information, sir, on the total expenditures for Alberta-based productions and coproductions that were supported under the film program under the Department of Community Development. This year the total for that is about \$133 million, and of that, \$64 million was spent directly here in the province of Alberta. The result is that there were 3,000 people involved in this industry, including 450 directly involved in acting and performing.

We do know, Mr. Speaker, from the industry that our system of grants is much less complicated and cumbersome than the system of tax credits that's used in many other jurisdictions in Canada. We do know also that increasing the tax credits in places like British Columbia and Ontario does reduce production costs of film, so we know that this may have some impact on our film industry. To what extent it's too early to tell, and I can tell you that the department is currently involved in discussions with the industry on possible improvements to our film production grant program.

Ms Haley: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that our program is oversubscribed every year and that we are still losing production to our neighbouring provinces, could the Minister of Community Development tell me what steps he is taking to try and expand film production in Alberta?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, our department's film development program currently has a budget of monies in the amount of \$13.5 million. It has resulted in a very strong resident industry in the province of Alberta. This is one of the great advantages of having the grant program as opposed to film credits, which do not require that the work actually be done in the province. So, for example, there may be a \$50 million project done in the province of Ontario that takes advantage of film credits but does not in fact result in \$50 million worth of economic activity in the province of Ontario.

So we are working at trying to improve our program. We're in ongoing discussions with the industry to determine how best we can improve our program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Haley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is for the Minister of Economic Development. I would ask if it's possible for him to tell us what steps he and the film commissioner are recommending that we make in Alberta to make it an attractive location not only for Alberta-based production but also for foreign or guest production?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Dunford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have the Film Commission Advisory Council, and they have made representations to the minister colleague and myself. There seem to be two areas that we need to focus on. The first one has a bit of a tourism bent. We can employ, I think, Travel Alberta with their marketing expertise as we go out into the world, not only to the United States but also into Asia and Europe, and talk about Alberta not only from a tourist-type perspective but also from film location, and we of course plan to do that. The other one would be in the area of human capital in the sense that we also can attract film to the province by making sure that we have the artists, the technicians, the administrative-type people that are available so that we can have an effective and an efficient film industry here in the province. Of course, we'll work with the Minister of Advanced Education on that as well.

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

Software Licences for Schools

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Conservative government continues to claim that it runs a tight ship and provides the best services possible with the taxpayers' dollar. Opposition members are duty bound to hold government accountable, to ask questions and to seek information about the government's activities. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. Is the minister prepared today to provide details of the tendering process regarding the government's \$6.3 million deal with Microsoft for software licences for the educational system?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, in actual fact the Microsoft licensing project was one that benefited both advanced ed

and our K to 12 system, but primarily it was a K to 12 initiative. My understanding is that that was an open competition, there was a list of accredited companies that were invited to bid on that, and in the end the successful bidder was reviewed against the usual criteria and that contract was awarded in that fashion.

Mr. Taylor: Okay, Mr. Speaker. I'll direct my first supplemental question, then, to the Minister of Education. Will the minister commit to ascertaining whether after the government of Ontario signed a similar software deal with Sun Microsystems for next to nothing, Microsoft responded by offering its software to Ontario educators for nothing more than a nominal administrative fee?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a part of our ongoing improvements in technology opportunities for our students. I'm not aware of what the jurisdiction in Ontario may have done. What I am comfortable with is what Alberta did. We did what was right at the time: to enter into an agreement that went through a standard open-competition tendering process. The net result of it is an incredible array of new information and new software for our students to work with. For example, we're very proud that Alberta is the only jurisdiction that has exclusive licensing rights to use all of National Geographic's material, the only jurisdiction to do that. It's through these kinds of initiatives that we're able to move that particular technological advancement forward.

2:30

Mr. Taylor: Well, I'll try my last question, then, to the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. When can this Assembly expect a report on this contract to be tabled?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, in many cases the responsibility of securing contracts remains with the individual ministries. We would be involved in software version upgrades or modifications for licences over \$50,000, and I'm not sure that what he's speaking about is in that range.

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

Municipal Tax Exemptions

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I've recently learned that some Legions in my constituency are completely tax exempt while others pay property tax only on the lounge portion of their facilities. Can the minister explain what the Municipal Government Act says about Alberta Legions paying property tax?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Municipal Government Act does exempt certain properties from taxation, and that would include hostels, not-for-profit organizations, and student dormitories. Section 363 specifically exempts property that's "used in connection with a branch or local unit of the Royal Canadian Legion, the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada or other organization of [any of the] former members of any allied forces." The act also provides for the option for municipalities to exclude themselves from that exemption, and there could be a number of reasons for that. Usually it's the canteen version that the municipality feels is in direct competition with other businesses within the community. They therefore, then, use their ability to opt out.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental to the same minister: given that Legions do such good and charitable work as community halls and churches, who are tax exempt currently, will the minister change section 363 of the MGA to make all Legions in Alberta 100 per cent tax exempt?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, just as the MGA recognizes that not all communities are alike, I would suggest to the hon. member that perhaps not all Legions are alike. This is the kind of decision that really needs to be taken on a case-by-case basis and is best left up to the expertise and the community knowledge of local councils, and I would urge the member to advise his constituent to contact his or her local council with respect to this issue.

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

Métis Hunting Rights

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The uncertainty over the Métis hunting agreement continues to cause a great deal of concern within Alberta's hunting, fishing, and conservation community. With the agreement itself making very little reference to conservation and the Sustainable Resource Development minister admitting that the Métis can hunt protected animals for subsistence, there are still more questions than answers regarding this agreement. To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development: can this minister define subsistence as it is used for the purposes of the Métis harvesting agreement?

Ms Calahasen: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I certainly can. Subsistence means that it's for noncommercial purposes.

Mr. Tougas: To the same minister: given that the Supreme Court decision was in regard to Métis hunting on their traditional lands and keeping in mind that Alberta already provides thousands of acres to Métis settlements, why did this agreement expand beyond Métis settlements?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the Powley case certainly didn't talk about Métis settlements. The Powley case came from, actually, Ontario, where there are no settlements, as a matter of fact. What it talked about was being able to deal with the Métis settlements aboriginal rights to hunt, fish, and trap on unoccupied Crown lands.

Mr. Tougas: To the same minister: can the minister provide a date when a draft version of the Métis harvesting agreement will be available for public scrutiny?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the Powley case of 2003 was actually a case that recognized the aboriginal harvesting rights for the Métis, and that agreement we did with two of the Métis settlements: the Métis Nation of Alberta and the Métis Settlements General Council. Those agreements are between the government and the Métis settlements.

However, having said that, I have indicated to anyone who would like to talk about these agreements to sit down with me in a format where we would be able to address the concerns that have been brought forward by all the different groups. I have had the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to go out and meet with the various groups to be

able to address the concerns, and I have attended a number of public meetings to address those very issues. I think it's really wonderful to have people who are interested in conservation because when we're dealing with the conservation of the natural resources we have, we want to ensure that we continue to do that, and that's what these agreements have done.

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

Southeast Edmonton Ring Road

(continued)

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions will be for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Could he please advise the Assembly about the time frame for the southeast portion of the Anthony Henday?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's an excellent question. Because of the P3 arrangement I'm able to stand here today and say that the 120 lane kilometres and 24 bridges will be open for the citizens of Edmonton in the fall of 2007.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lougheed: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the minister as well: what will be the impact on highways 21 and 14?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, access to highway 14 will be extremely increased. It will be much easier to get onto highway 14, and indeed heading out east of Edmonton will be made a whole lot easier. But probably more important is there will be a lot of traffic that will be redirected off a very busy highway 21 that will be able to be taken in by the new ring road. Mr. Speaker, through to the hon. member, I've had the opportunity of travelling with the hon. member on highway 21, and it is going to alleviate traffic in that heavily congested area to a large, large degree.

Mr. Lougheed: A follow-up question, Mr. Speaker: what would be the estimate of the time saving for members of my constituency to get down to the Calgary Trail or to the International Airport, for example?

Dr. Oberg: Well, Mr. Speaker, my residence tends to be in Sherwood Park, and this morning it took me about an hour to get down to the airport, so I do believe that a ring road is going to make the trip to either highway 2 or to the International Airport much easier for not just your constituents, hon. member, but for everyone in east Edmonton and everyone in northeastern Alberta. This is going to be a huge, huge economic benefit to the people of north-eastern Alberta.

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

Centennial Projects

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has allocated funds for a variety of centennial events. However, it appears that most of the projects described as legacy projects are in

fact required infrastructure maintenance. My question is to the Minister of Community Development. Can this government explain how renovating old buildings can be described as a celebration of Alberta's centennial?

Mr. Mar: Well, Mr. Speaker, there have been a wide variety of projects that have been given centennial legacy funding. Some of them are brand new facilities; for example, the brand new Millennium Place in Sherwood Park was partly funded by centennial legacy funds. In Spruce Grove and other jurisdictions, in Calgary and throughout the province some facilities have been new. It's true, as the hon. member says, that some of the facilities were renovations of existing facilities, facilities that are important parts of the communities they serve. For example, I don't think anybody would suggest that significant amounts of monies that we spent on the two Jubilee auditoria were somehow not an important part of the legacy of the province of Alberta. Those facilities were a gift to the people of the province of Alberta in 1955. Now 50 years later in the year 2005 they will be reopened in the fall to provide again another hundred years of terrific service to the people of the province of Alberta.

2:40

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: can this government explain how all Alberta artists can travel to Ottawa and Atlantic Canada to participate in the Alberta Scene celebrations when they have to pay most of their own costs?

Mr. Mar: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta Scene in Ottawa is a tremendous opportunity for Albertans to demonstrate the gift of their culture and their arts to the rest of the nation. For 10 days, commencing on the 28th of April, some 600 Alberta artists will be at venues including the National Arts Centre and dozens of other venues around the city of Ottawa demonstrating everything from visual arts to performing arts to culinary arts.

Mr. Speaker, the provincial government has put a significant contribution into this project. It is true that artists will be making, no doubt, some out-of-pocket expenditures themselves, but in combination with the federal government and the provincial government this is a tremendous opportunity for Albertans to share the great richness and diversity of their culture with other Canadians.

Mr. Agnihotri: Again to the same minister: can this government provide all Albertans with a breakdown of what percentage of the centennial budget is for bricks and mortar projects?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, that's obvious to anybody that reads Public Accounts. This is what we do.

head:

Recognitions

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of seven.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The United Nations first recognized this day in 1966, designated in memory of anti-apartheid demonstrators killed or injured in Sharpeville, South Africa, in 1960.

Mr. Speaker, this special day reminds us that we all have a responsibility to ensure that fundamental rights and freedoms are

safeguarded for us as human beings and citizens of this world. Let us use this opportunity to remind ourselves to foster greater equality and fairness for all our citizens, who represent a rich mosaic of cultures woven into the strong fabric of our province and our nation. Let us celebrate the uniqueness of each individual and each culture. Let us embrace a vision and shared belief of Alberta that values the dignity and worth of every citizen. We can by working together create an Alberta free of racial discrimination.

As chair of the Advisory Committee on the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Education Fund I encourage all Albertans to join their community and the members of this House in working towards this goal.

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

Brendan Thomas Bellingham

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Sunday, March 13, the aptly named Great Kids of Alberta were recognized during the Premier's excellence awards in Edmonton, and the youngest recipient was from the constituency of Calgary-Lougheed.

Brendan Thomas Bellingham was born two months premature, was resuscitated at birth, and was transferred to a third-level facility to receive intensive treatment. Brendan was diagnosed with cerebral palsy, and he has had numerous surgeries and intense therapies for much of his short life. Brendan is now six years old, and I'm pleased to report that Brendan enjoys grade 1, downhill skiing, swimming, martial arts, and helping other children. He's taken part in community launches and many other charity events, including the Miracle Treat Day for the Children's Miracle Network. Recently Brendan sang live during a radiothon, and his recording was rebroadcast many times in an effort that raised \$880,000 for the Alberta Children's hospital. I can tell you from firsthand experience that Brendan sings like a little angel.

Brendan Bellingham is an intrepid young Albertan who is an inspiration to us all, and I'm proud to have him in my riding. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Parents Empowering Parents

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with pleasure that I ask this Assembly to recognize the group Parents Empowering Parents, or PEP. PEP is a support group for parents whose teenage and young children are abusing alcohol and drugs. These are parents who are feeling helpless as they see their children with addictions. This organization gives somebody to call when in crisis.

PEP also educates and supports parents. It also provides counseling activities and support for teens trying to stay clean and sober. This group meets every second Tuesday in Sherwood Park and is determined to provide support to parents and youth as well as look at what is needed for intervention and do whatever is necessary to have those needs met.

Please join me in congratulating these parents for their initiative.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Fairview College/NAIT Consolidation

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this moment to recognize a significant event in Alberta's postsecondary education system. Saturday, March 12, 2005, commemorated the inaugural graduation ceremony for the self-consolidated Fairview College and Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. First

announced in April 2003, the historic agreement saw NAIT grow to serve over 65,000 full-time, part-time, and apprenticeship students via nine campuses stretching from Edmonton to High Level with a budget of over \$200 million. The consolidation of NAIT and Fairview College along with its six campuses was made official on July 1, 2004.

Mr. Speaker, this successful alliance is a testament to Alberta's commitment to ensuring that all Albertans have access to first-rate, cutting-edge educational opportunities. Not only has this alliance brought NAIT to the true north, but it has brought northern Alberta closer to the province's urban centres, which have customarily offered the educational opportunities we are now seeing in rural Alberta.

I want to congratulate the NAIT Fairview campus graduating class of 2005.

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

Lord Beaverbrook Lords Basketball Team

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm so very proud to recognize the Lord Beaverbrook Lords basketball team for winning the Alberta 4A high school basketball championship Saturday night in Calgary. Now, the last time that a Calgary team won that title was in the last century, when Bishop Grandin won it back in 1997.

The Lords defeated Edmonton's Ross Sheppard T-Birds 71-62 in a seesaw battle that saw Jeff Price lead the Lord Beaverbrook offence with 15 points, Beau Lawlor with 14 points, and Greg Jobagy with 13 points. Congratulations to head coach Ray Raymond and everyone involved in bringing this championship back to the best high school in my constituency, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to recognize the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This special day is observed annually on March 21 because on this day in 1960 police opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration against apartheid pass laws in Sharpeville, South Africa. The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination was first proclaimed in 1966 by the General Assembly of the United Nations. At that time, the UN called on the international community to step up efforts to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination. Sadly, however, 39 years later discrimination still exists.

Mr. Speaker, as we observe this day, we must each resolve to better ourselves every day of the year so that we neither perpetuate nor tolerate racism no matter what the form, no matter what the venue. People are essentially the same all over the world. We may have different traditions, experiences, languages, cultures, or religions, but that's what makes us worth getting to know. Each individual must be judged based on their own merits, not on the colour of their skin, their place of birth, their culture, or their religion. Imagine all that would be lost if each culture kept to itself. That is reason enough for all of us to promote inclusion instead of discrimination.

Thank you.

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

2:50 **International Day for the Elimination
of Racial Discrimination**

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise today to join my colleagues from Stony Plain and Edmonton-McClung to recognize International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. On this day, of course, over 40 years ago police opened fire on peaceful demonstrators and massacred close to 70 of them. The demonstration was to protest the apartheid pass laws. Proclaiming the day in 1966, the General Assembly of the United Nations called on the international community to redouble its efforts to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination.

This year's theme, Mr. Speaker, is Empowering Youth to Fight Racism. This theme is particularly dear to my heart both as an educator and one who represents a constituency which has a very large number of young Albertans living in it. Too often politicians give lip service to the importance of youth for our collective future. We tend to forget that we must go beyond rhetoric to actually providing young people with the tools, skills, and resources they need to fight racism.

I would call on all hon. members of the House to join me in renewing our collective commitment to work with groups such as the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations in their efforts to eliminate racial discrimination.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I beg leave to present the following petitions that have been received for private bills under Standing Order 93(2):

- (1) the petition of Albert Holthuis, Marvin Phillips, Edward Latvala, Werner Scheidler, Brenda Caston, Richard Hester, and John Davis for The Bow Valley Community Foundation Act;
- (2) the petition of Camrose Lutheran College Corporation for the Camrose Lutheran College Corporation Act;
- (3) the petition of Rodney Wutch, Kathy Mandeville, Walter Sauve, Fred Weinheimer, and Michael Christie for the Medicine Hat Community Foundation Amendment Act, 2005; and
- (4) the petition of Brooklynn Hannah George Rewega, an infant, by her legal guardian and father, Douglas George Rewega, for the Brooklynn Hannah George Regewa Right of Civil Action Act.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition with a hundred-plus signatures on it. The petition urges the government to "prohibit the importation of temporary foreign workers."

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to present a petition from a number of largely Calgarians but also from a number of southern Alberta communities such as Claresholm, Airdrie, Coaldale, Picture Butte, Lethbridge, and a number of other communities calling on this government to prohibit the use and "importation of temporary foreign workers to work on the construction and/or maintenance of oil sands facilities and/or pipelines."

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition with 259 signatures on it. The petition urges the government to

"institute a fair and equitable floor price for cattle," which brings us to 1,217 signatures for this session.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

**Bill 31
Real Estate Amendment Act, 2005**

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce a bill being the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2005.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will ensure that the real estate assurance fund is for consumers. These amendments will prohibit financial institutions and those people that commit fraud in real estate from having access to the fund.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

**Bill 34
Insurance Amendment Act, 2005**

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Insurance Amendment Act, 2005.

With this act the government is following through on its commitment to open an automobile insurance competition to other provinces' Crown insurance corporations. The other amendments in this act will continue the Insurance Act as progressive and contemporary consumer protection legislation.

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 34, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2005, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table with the House five copies of the annual report of the Alberta Teachers' Association for the year 2003, which highlights some of the excellent work the ATA has done for their members with respect to issues relative to government, members' services, professional development, teacher welfare, and administration.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission it is with pleasure that I table today the requisite number of copies of AADAC's 2003-2004 annual report. This document summarizes AADAC's leadership in services with respect to the education, prevention, and treatment programs for Albertans with alcohol, drug and/or gambling problems.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with three tablings. The first is a copy of a letter, tabled with permission, written by a constituent named Peter Verchomin, who raises the idea of a rebate of half the royalties on natural gas for nitrogen fertilizer production.

The second tabling in the appropriate number of copies, written by Ami Brodribb, tabled with permission, a constituent who is writing to express her concern about lack of financial support for midwives in Alberta.

The third is from a Calgarian, Gracie Seto, whom I met last fall and who has asked me here: "Please bring this letter to the legislative assembly to speak on behalf of . . . people with disabilities who desperately need" an increase in AISH funding.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from a very concerned parent. The writer very much wants Strathearn school to stay open for the sake of her community and the children in that community.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first is from a constituent who is a filmmaker, William Becze, who is noting that it's very difficult to get distribution in Alberta and in Canada and asking us to do whatever we can to help with that issue.

The second tabling is a very good letter on seniors' care written by Judy Brown, and she notes that staffing levels in particular are a problem and that "it's time for people in nursing homes to be considered a priority."

The third tabling is a point of view from St. Albert noting that local kids can fall prey to crystal meth addiction and that a primary goal of a safe injection site is harm reduction.

The last tabling, Mr. Speaker, is in support of Bill 202. This is from Mary Talbot, and noting that if this bill had been in effect sooner, it may have given her the tools to help her child.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today, three of which are from University Heights residents expressing outrage at the lack of provincial consultation. Mary Abel is concerned about the widening of 16th Avenue. Sheila Donaldson is concerned about the effect that roadway connections and the Children's hospital are having on community reserve lands. Doug Bonnyman shares the same community reserve concerns. Finally, Don Smith in his letter urges the provincial government to "consult with the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation" prior to naming or renaming provincial parks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings for the house today. The first, in relation to Bill 202, is an article from the *St. Albert Gazette* talking about the training course that a number of St. Albert firefighters have gone through on how to deal with a fire on a property in which a suspected crystal meth lab is discovered.

The other is a report from the University of Alberta called A Case for Investment, which points out the degree to which funding for

postsecondary institutions in this province has fallen behind other jurisdictions and our funding for K to 12 education in this province as well.

3:00

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first one is a document indicating just how big the bonuses were before bankruptcy to some of the senior officials at Enron, including one John Lavorato, who was active in Project Stanley.

The second tabling I have this afternoon is a letter dated March 21, 2005, from myself to the FOIP co-ordinator at Alberta Energy. It indicates that I accept the estimate and am enclosing a deposit of over \$880, which is 50 per cent of the amount, in regard to a freedom of information request I made about Enron.

The third tabling I have is the correct number of copies of a six-page transcript. It is a conversation between a Murray from TransAlta and a Sean from Enron. These are energy traders, and they're discussing the fact of a marriage of convenience between the two companies. This can also be listened to at enrontapes.com, and I would urge all hon. members to have a squint at this.

The last tabling I have is a Markets & Strategic Initiatives report from the Alberta Electric System Operator dated September 2003, and this is further evidence that unfortunately our prices were higher than they should be for electricity in 2001.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table with permission the appropriate number of copies of a letter from a constituent by the name of Shannon Critchley, who has written to me expressing her concern regarding the closing of the RCMP crime lab in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a report with the appropriate number of copies. This report is indicating the process of an addiction from the words of a parent and her addicted child.

I have a second tabling which comes from the October 16 *St. Albert Gazette*. It's entitled Treatment Centres Needed to Help Kids Get Off Meth.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from a constituent named Christine Rogers, who is expressing support for the high school fine arts requirements but also with a reservation about the implementation and the effectiveness in actually achieving the desired results.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table Battling Drugs relative to Bill 202. The author of this position paper is Jac MacDonald of the *Edmonton Journal*. So I table this, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a very good article from the *St. Albert Gazette* on March 5, 2005, about the addiction bill that we are going to be discussing today, that it's finding a great deal of support throughout the province.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The tabling with the appropriate copies is to acknowledge the Alberta Grandparents Association, who wanted to identify and recognize the struggle that grandparents have in access to grandchildren and the "extremely onerous and burdensome" requirement for grandparents to gain access to their grandchildren.

Mr. Tougas: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table the appropriate number of documents of copies of a letter from Mr. Ron Watt, the president of the Southern Alberta Bowhunters Association, a 168-member group, outlining his concerns about the Métis harvesting agreement.

The Speaker: Now, have I missed anyone?

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Documents

The Speaker: Perhaps it's as good a time as any to make a brief comment about tablings. Brevity is very important in our House. It's very different from virtually every other jurisdiction that follows this form of government in the world. There are few parliaments in Canada – the House of Commons does not permit it – that you are allowed to table anything other than statutory requirement tablings.

Now, we've gone into e-mails, cartoons, letters, letters from ourselves to other people, and what have you, and I suspect that – hon. members, this is why I caution you. The only day during the week which is an opportunity for private members to participate in legislation or other activities on their behalf is today. You could conceivably see three hours of tablings, which would be the most devious form of filibuster possible if a private member's bill was coming up, and private members had better understand this very, very carefully. There's a risk in what's going on here.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, March 17, it's my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice also having been given on Thursday, March 17, it's my pleasure to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading**

Bill 202

Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great honour that I begin the debate in second reading for Bill 202, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, 2005, or PCHAD.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 is an extremely important bill for Alberta's children because it gives them a chance to overcome their dangerous drug addictions with the help of their parents and government. It gives them the chance to enter adulthood without criminal records and with renewed opportunities for success. Bill 202, PCHAD, is important to Alberta's parents and families because it gives them a tool for helping their children fight the disease of addiction that has become far too common in our society.

Bill 202 would give provincial authorities and parents the power to place children under the age of 18 into mandatory drug-treatment programs. Instead of considering children who use drugs as a menace, Bill 202 would recognize that children who abuse drugs are victims who are in need of help and protection. An important aspect of this bill is that it allows for parents to be actively involved in their children's recovery by allowing them to initiate the process of addiction treatment.

In fact, the idea for this bill came to me while listening to parents and youth while I was the Youth Secretariat chair for Alberta but especially listening to parents at a methamphetamine conference which took place in Red Deer in 2004. At this conference parents told delegates stories about their children's drug problems. They complained about being helpless while they watched their children destroy their lives.

I would like to take a few minutes to share one of these stories. It's a story about a woman named Audrey Bjornstad, who helped organize the meth conference in Red Deer. She has created an organization called Parents Empowering Parents, and she works tirelessly trying to educate other parents on the crisis facing many of Alberta's children.

Audrey's story begins about two years ago with a normal middle-class family in Sherwood Park. This family consisted of two loving parents and their son, who played hockey, lacrosse, and volleyball. By all standards Audrey's son seemed like a typical child who was well on his way to becoming a productive member of society. One night, however, when Audrey's son was in grade 11, he did not come home. Being a concerned parent, Audrey filed a missing person's report, which prompted a search by the RCMP. That night authorities found Audrey's son at a known meth house. This is how Audrey and her husband found out their son was addicted to crystal meth, even though he denied it vehemently afterwards.

Audrey and her husband tried time and time again to convince their son to go for rehabilitation. He denied having a problem and refused to go. He was so sick that he was not able to help himself, and his parents could do nothing but watch his condition deteriorate. He fell victim to the disease of addiction and was in need of protection and help. Ironically, Audrey's son was too young to buy tobacco and liquor, yet he wasn't too young to refuse treatment for his severe drug addiction. Audrey and her husband were left with nowhere to turn. Their son spent more nights away from home on drugs while they spent more sleepless nights worrying and wondering how they could intervene.

Then they got some good news. Their son had been arrested and was in a youth detention centre. Under normal circumstances

finding out that your child has been arrested is terrible news, but these were not normal circumstances. Their little boy had fallen victim to a deadly drug addiction, and as long as he was in prison, they knew he was not on the streets and not taking drugs.

3:10

Audrey remembers celebrating when her son was selected to play on a hockey team or when her son's school volleyball team got into the playoffs. Today she celebrates the fact that her son is alive. Her son's life had been lost. He is suffering from short- and long-term memory loss and attention deficit disorder. Luckily, he had been chosen to participate in a test treatment program for youth who are addicted to drugs and who have been convicted of a crime. Hopefully, once this program is complete, Audrey's son will be drug free even though his life will never be the same.

Mr. Speaker, Audrey's story is all too common these days. Every community in this province is affected by drugs. This problem is not limited to underprivileged children or children who have only one parent. Having a child who is addicted to drugs does not mean that a parent did a bad job raising that child. The reality is that drugs are very prevalent in our schools and in our communities. Sometimes good children make bad choices. Drugs are not forgiving, and crystal meth and other drugs are extremely addictive and dangerous.

We, as adults, as parents, and as legislators, have a responsibility to help these kids get back on the right path.

Mr. Speaker, there are three complementary ideals that when combined create a healthy society. It is a society in which the vast majority of citizens are encouraged to and helped to accept responsibility for themselves and their families. It is a society where everyone feels that they are responsible members of the community in which they live and work. It is a society where people are inspired to play a part ensuring the well-being of that community. It is a society whose foundation is the family.

Mr. Speaker, parents across this province are asking for our help. They are forming groups, organizing conferences, and taking action. Parents are pulling together and taking responsibility for their families. They are playing their part, ensuring that the well-being of their communities is looked after. Unfortunately, when it comes to making the right decisions for their children, their power is limited.

Bill 202, PCHAD, will give this power back to the parents by allowing parents to make decisions in the best interest of their children, whose judgment is often clouded by the disease of substance addiction. Bill 202 ensures that this process includes the family, which is the foundation of our society.

PCHAD is based on the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, or PCHIP, which considers children who are involved with prostitution as victims who are in need of help and protection. The Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act enables police and child protection workers to apprehend with or without a court order children engaging in or attempting to engage in prostitution. Very often children who are involved with prostitution are also involved with drugs. My great hope is that with Bill 202 we will be able to help our drug-addicted children before they become involved with prostitution, crime, and other dangerous activities.

This is one of the most important aspects of Bill 202. It not only proposes to help children who are addicted to drugs overcome their addictions, but it proposes to do so before they become involved in crime. Currently the only way to force a person into drug rehabilitation is by sentencing them to it as a part of their punishment for being convicted for committing a crime. The premise of Bill 202 is that if a child is forced into rehabilitation because they have committed a crime, it's too late.

The idea of having involuntary addiction treatment is not new. In fact, there are several states in America that have similar legislation.

Washington state is one of these jurisdictions. In that state a person may be involuntarily committed if they either present a likelihood of serious harm to themselves or are gravely disabled by alcohol or drug addiction or the person has threatened or inflicted physical harm on another and is likely to inflict physical harm to another unless they're committed.

Mr. Speaker, children who are abusing drugs are causing serious harm to themselves, and this should be reason enough to intervene. Some people will not like Bill 202 because they believe that it will violate the rights of the child. These people see this bill as an infringement on personal rights and believe that we should be fighting at all costs to protect these rights. I wonder what gives us the right to step back and watch our children fall victim to drug addiction. Children who are addicted to drugs are suffering from a disease, and we have not only a right but an obligation and a duty to help them. This obligation is supported by provincial courts of Alberta, which stated that children, especially young children, are not able to assert their right to life and health. These rights are to be balanced in the child protection context with parental liberty.

Mr. Speaker, we want to be able to help our children. We do not want to be helpless while we watch our children destroy their lives. If we can force our drug-addicted children into rehabilitation programs before they destroy themselves, we can provide them with a variety of life-saving services. First and foremost, we can give them detoxification and drug counselling. In addition to this, however, we can also provide them with mental supports, counselling and psychological services, educational and life supports.

We must remember, Mr. Speaker, that these children are still developing and that we need to do everything in our power to ensure that they develop into healthy and productive members of society. Our children are vulnerable. We as parents raise our children hoping and praying that they become successful. We dream for them, we nurture them, and we teach them. We have the life experience to tell them which choices they should make, but as they grow older, we must allow them to make their own choices. We should, however, be able to help them overcome their bad decisions.

Mr. Speaker, for the sake of our children, our communities, and our futures I strongly urge all members to support Bill 202, PCAD, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a private member's bill, so it will be back and forth with this debate for the remainder of the afternoon.

I'll recognize someone from the Official Opposition. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As critic for Children's Services I urge all members of this Assembly to give this bill careful attention and consideration. I believe that its intent is honourable and that action is needed. This bill, when passed, will set up the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act. Its intent is more focused than this suggests. It is intended as a tool for use against addiction in general, and it is a response to a relatively new and specific type of addiction. While it does not mention crystal meth by name, that is the focus that brought this bill forward.

Why a special act for addiction and especially one agent of addiction? The effects of crystal meth are so potent that they call for special attention. They pose dangers that require rapid assessment and response. Most other addictions do not create the same type of unmistakable blips on the radar screen that this act sets as a minimum standard to intervene. It is for this reason, Mr. Speaker, a high threshold for intervention and a chemical that uniquely meets it, that I believe I can assure my fellow members that this proposal, this act,

will not be used as a catch-all for dealing with other more widespread types of addiction.

The critical factor about crystal meth is that as many as 50 per cent of users can be addicted with the first dose. They can become paranoid and experience chronic hallucinations and mood disorders. This first-time factor is like the warning on bottles that say: if taken internally, seek immediate medical attention. A person who has taken crystal meth does not have the luxury to wait in line or experiment with remedies. They have crossed a line that is critical. They may not be able to go back on that crossing to regain themselves without expert assistance. The effects are too fast and far-reaching for the usual procedures.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Under current legislation an addicted minor can be committed for treatment only through the criminal justice system or the Mental Health Act. One requires that the individual commit a crime and the other that they be found a danger to themselves or to others. Families of crystal meth-addicted minors should not have to wait to reach this point before they access the needed assessment and treatment.

3:20

The medical community is concerned with the implications of a wave of addictions. It is limited in its response by the current intervention models of delinquency and mental breakdown. A model that is more integrated with the medical one provides a broader basis for diagnosis.

Addiction is an illness as well as a behaviour pattern, a biological problem as well as a psychological and social one. It needs to be recognized and treated as such. It does not meet criminal or mental health standards unless we leave it to fester. On a basis of discussion with both parents and medical personnel, I feel I need to say this again: addiction is an illness. Crystal meth addiction is an illness. It is the result of a foreign agent in the body, an agent with its own agenda that can be eliminated only by rapid response measures. The body has been breached, the individual invaded.

What is needed, Mr. Speaker, is the means to enter a critical situation before the damage becomes widespread and the ravages irreversible. Therefore, I support this bill permitting a parent to admit an addicted child for treatment. I support it as a parent myself and as a liberal democrat who recognizes that our society is imperfect.

This is a measure which some may be reluctant to take, and I want to admit that at the outset. Any approach to health that entails holding against one's will is offensive to many in a democratic society for the freedom to come and go without hindrance is one of our most cherished values. We cannot escape this dilemma by claiming that this bill applies only to persons who are underage, as if there was some magical point at which a youth becomes a responsible adult and the problem might disappear. Responsibility is something that must be learned gradually, and the need to substitute external discipline for self-discipline is one that can only be taken with deep reservations and regret.

This is not an ideal route or recourse to an addiction problem. It is not a solution but an admission of failure, a last resort when other measures have failed. To pretend that it is a remedy would be dishonest, yet in the relatively recent experience of crystal meth addiction we can say that other measures have failed. In an imperfect world often the best we can manage is an imperfect measure, and this is one to be used in case of breakdown.

There is a parallel in another type of breakdown where the state intervenes. Divorce legislation is an attempt to limit the damage in

a breakdown between two people. It imposes waiting periods, requires an attempt at mediation or counselling, and tries to act in the best interest of children of the failed relationship.

The situation that this bill addresses is also one of breakdown, a breakdown within oneself. It, too, provides for counselling, a space in which a young person can be shielded from further damage and given an opportunity in which he or she may decide to come home to herself. There is no guarantee that she or he will, but this offers a chance. This offers hope. This is a case where liberal democratic values allow for reluctant intervention in people's and families' lives in the hope of giving them time and opportunity to regroup and make their own wise choices. In a broader perspective of human values, this measure is intended to ultimately further a person's choice rather than to take it away.

I answer the concern about violating a young person's autonomy in this way. Addiction is an abdication of one's autonomy. By being addicted, one has already surrendered control over his or her own life to someone or something else, in this case a chemical substance and the people who provide it or urge the use of it. The intervention proposed by this bill is not a further act of overriding or violating but a countermeasure to a violation of self by drugs that has already taken place. It is not a case of two wrongs making a right but of attempting to limit a wrong that should not be left unchecked.

Mr. Speaker, I conclude my remarks in support of this bill with two points of secondary importance. One is to note what I see as an omission in its content, and the other is to observe and commend the process by which we are dealing with this issue in this Assembly. The bill mandates assessment that may lead to treatment, but it deliberately does not specify the type of treatment.

I agree that as legislators it is not our competence to prescribe medical matters, yet I am concerned that any treatment prescribed pursuant to this act be the best for the condition this bill is seeking to deal with. Specifically, I wish to commend what is described as the wraparound approach where clients are assessed and monitored regularly to determine their level of risk, medical impairment, and progress. Individualized treatment plans, intervisitation, and treatment strategies must be comprehensive. Given the social context in which addiction occurs, an appropriate response to the medical condition needs to include all areas of the youth's life. Activating hope and strengths in youth is essential.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I see as significant that this issue involving children and youth is one that we are dealing with on a nonpartisan basis. I hope that this will become a precedent. Young people's lives are affected by what we decide here in many ways. Many of these do not fall under the rubric of Children's Services. They are implicit in our approaches to health, education, ethics, environment, and law enforcement. It is right that we look at the issue in this bill and these other issues from a perspective of our common humanity, unblurred by artificial lines of demarcation.

This bill is important not only for what it contains but in the way we are dealing with it. We do not have to change our institutions to begin to change the way politics is done. The private member's bill is a measure that is available to us. All we have to do is use it. I commend the sponsor of this bill, the hon. Member for Red Deer-North, for choosing to proceed in this manner of inviting the participation from all sides of this House. I thank all members for their contributions and the government for permitting discussion to run unfettered.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that I'm not alone when I say that I share the public's concerns and my colleagues' concerns about the harm associated with drug use amongst youth. Serving the needs of our youth in our province is certainly amongst the most important of our callings as government members.

To place my comments about Bill 202 into context, I must first report that my remarks are made as chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. AADAC provides a range of addictions information, prevention and treatment services for youth and families, and they're available widely across Alberta in 49 communities as well as through mobile outreach services, satellite sites, and two specialized youth centres.

In 2003-2004 the number of young people and their families who turned to AADAC for help was approximately 6,500, a 75 per cent increase in the last five years. Of these, 358 required intensive treatment. I find this troubling both because 6,500 is a large number and because addictions problems have very serious implications. But I think it may also be a hopeful sign because it shows that youth and families are accessing our treatment services in considerable numbers.

What are the characteristics of these youth who attend AADAC's treatment programs? Well, first of all, they tend to be multidrug users, often dependent on more than one substance. They're typically under the age of 12 when they first start using drugs, and many have a history of criminal involvement, abuse, suicidal ideation, school failure, and/or mental diagnosis.

AADAC treatment clients are comprised of voluntary – I'll repeat that: voluntary – admissions and also those who are ordered by the courts to attend treatment. The commission is unable to hold clients for treatment under its mandate. AADAC is, however, currently piloting Bridges, a residential addiction and mental health treatment program in Edmonton designed for adolescent male offenders transitioning from closed custody to open custody.

3:30

Now, while AADAC services for youth are extensive in scope and reach, there remains a significant gap. AADAC does not currently provide separate youth detoxification or residential treatment as part of its continuum of services. This is something that AADAC and other ministries involved with children or youth are working on right now to address. Generally, AADAC supports legislation and regulations that promote health and well-being and discourages illicit substance use. These legislative and regulatory measures should be sensitive to changing community needs and values and should not result in more harm to the individual or to society than would occur from the actual use of the illicit substances.

Bill 202 provides us with an opportunity to consider an additional avenue open to us to help youth. However, youth addiction is complex and difficult, and it often has no easy solutions. The fundamental principle of Bill 202 is that it would give provincial authorities and parents the power to place children under 18 into mandatory drug treatment programs. There are definitely compelling arguments – I've heard them first-hand myself – that are in favour of compulsory treatment. I should mention that research I've seen regarding effectiveness is somewhat inconclusive. There's little evidence it works for intensive drug and alcohol addiction treatments since the most effective treatments are based on individual commitment to stopping drug use. Positive effects appear to last only as long as the clients are supervised and to the extent required by the courts.

In my consideration of Bill 202 I'm pleased to give it support in principle because it's intent to act in the best interests of young Albertans is clearly evident, and the hon. member presenting it has wonderful, wonderful motivations in doing so.

At the same time, there are certain concerns in the bill that I will just draw your attention to. Number one, any legislation that permits involuntary detention of persons in treatment without that person's consent raises Charter concerns, and this is an important issue that will be reviewed by the Minister of Justice. Number two, the act does not provide mechanisms for appeal or review of the involuntary treatment order. Number three, without community-based supports children leaving an involuntary treatment program will be at very high risk of not maintaining the gains made in compulsory treatment programs. Number four, significant increases in resources will be required if large numbers of children are confined in safe protection houses and require compulsory treatment. It's worthy of note that these houses would have to be provided by someone other than AADAC at this time. While I have made these four concerns known, I do expect that the hon. member bringing forth this bill will be able to answer to each of these in turn.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, effectively addressing substance use by youth requires comprehensive, effective action, including the availability of a range of information, prevention, and treatment services. Legislation such as Bill 202 should be entered into after due consideration of evidence regarding the efficacy of such an approach and consideration of the rights of the individual. Please note that should government choose to implement legislation that compels youth into treatment, AADAC will definitely continue to work with key stakeholders such as the Minister of Children's Services, the Solicitor General, and others in meeting the needs of youth. AADAC's role would be to provide addictions treatment consistent with its mandate while working with other key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Children's Services, who would provide the protective safe houses.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to address this issue.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity over the next 10 minutes to speak on Bill 202, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, in its second reading.

As I understand it, Bill 202 would allow a parent or a legal guardian to go to a court to order mandatory treatment for their child if the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission has determined that the child is abusing alcohol and/or drugs. The problem of minors abusing drugs or alcohol is a serious one. The intentions of Bill 202 as expressed in the preamble are certainly admirable and sound. Children who abuse alcohol or drugs are a danger to themselves and sometimes to others. As legislators we have a responsibility to take whatever action we can to help.

As legislators, Mr. Speaker, we also have a responsibility to consider what the most effective way is to address the problem of substance abuse among children and youth. In considering whether Bill 202 is an effective way to address this problem, the first question I ask is: how widespread is the problem among Alberta youth?

The most recent study I've been able to find was an AADAC survey of adolescent substance and gambling abuse done in the fall of 2002 among high school and junior high school students. That survey found that the most widely used substances were alcohol and marijuana. In fact, the survey found that a larger percentage of high school students had used marijuana, about 41 per cent, than had used tobacco, which was about 25 per cent. Of harder, more highly addictive drugs 7.6 per cent had tried club drugs like Ecstasy and crystal meth, 6.1 per cent had tried hallucinogenics like LSD, 5 per cent cocaine, and 4.5 per cent crack. These are the percentages of young people who tried the above drugs at least once in the last year. Now, the percentage addicted to these drugs is likely much lower.

The AADAC survey also noted that most youth drug users did so at relatively low frequencies, particularly in the case of softer drugs like cannabis or alcohol. While in no way diminishing the seriousness of the problem of drug addiction among youth, the fact is that most youth, like most adults, are not abusing drugs and do not have a substance abuse problem.

Has the drug abuse problem gotten worse among youth since the fall 2002 AADAC survey? As the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed indicated, it perhaps has. I know that this is no comfort to parents with children struggling with serious addictions. For those parents and for society as a whole this is a very tragic situation.

Communicating or trying to get through to adolescents is a challenge at the best of times. Adolescents are trying to find their own way in the world outside of the boundaries of even the most loving homes, and often the influence of peers can be more powerful than that of parents or legal guardians. Children and youth with addictions, especially to highly addictive drugs such as crystal meth or cocaine, are very vulnerable, and we must do everything we can to assist them. It can be extremely difficult for parents and guardians to reach out and convince their child to seek treatment especially if peer influences are keeping them trapped in an unhealthy lifestyle.

To support their addictions, these children are also vulnerable to other negative influences such as prostitution or committing crimes to feed their habits. These are tragic situations. Solutions are not easy to come by. The situation is complex. It is important to ask the question as to whether we are doing everything that can be done to provide the services and supports to youth facing addictions.

In talking to parents, educators, and social work professionals, I find that this province is a very long way from providing the required specialized services and supports to young people struggling with addictions. In most of the province drug treatment programs specifically targeted at children and youth struggling with addictions are either nonexistent or woefully inadequate. Shouldn't we be putting necessary treatment options into place before we adopt the approach proposed either in this bill or in other legislative actions?

I remain to be convinced that Bill 202, compelling young people into drug treatment, is the correct approach especially when we have not done everything we can to provide the necessary supports to youth who are ready to confront their addictions and seek treatment. It is our duty as legislators to carefully examine the consequences that flow from the legislation passed in this Assembly. For example, Bill 202 could be used to force into treatment not only youth addicted to hard drugs but also softer drugs such as marijuana and alcohol. I'm not entirely sure if tobacco addiction, for example, would also fall into the very broad application of the proposed legislation.

Bill 202 would also significantly change the mandate of AADAC. Instead of being strictly a helping agency, AADAC would take on certain enforcement powers that could lead to the involuntary detention of minors. This could well taint the perception that youth have of AADAC and its services, possibly compromising its ability to reach out and educate youth about the dangers of drugs, tobacco, and alcohol. In researching this bill, I asked our staff to contact AADAC and ask them for their views on mandatory youth drug treatment. Our efforts to contact AADAC as to their views have not been successful, and I believe it is very important to hear from them.

3:40

Bill 202 also has significant implications for police officers, for the courts, as well as for those involved in child protection. While

I appreciate the fact that the motivation behind Bill 202 is protection, not punishment, I'm concerned that this may not be a perception shared by some of those that this bill is trying to help.

Bill 202 also sets up a process of apprehending youth that parallels existing provisions of division 4 of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, Mr. Speaker. Under division 4 if there are reasonable grounds to believe that a child or youth poses a danger to themselves or others, that child or youth can be confined in a secure services facility. Why is separate legislation needed when it seems that legislation exists that could be used to accomplish what the Member for Red Deer-North is trying to do through Bill 202?

Moreover, I'm not convinced that commingling youth who are voluntarily in treatment programs with youth who are in compulsory treatment is a good idea. Similarly, it may not be advisable to mix young offenders in protective safe houses or later on in treatment programs with other youth not currently involved with the criminal justice system.

My NDP opposition colleagues and I strongly support the need for more and better drug treatment services, including residential treatment programs for youth caught up in addiction. Bill 202 does not add a single bed for a highly addicted youth needing treatment in a residential facility. Bill 202 provides no needed counselling services for the youth or for their families. We need to make sure that these services are in place. Why do we need legislation compelling treatment when the appropriate services for those wanting treatment are not in place? That's putting the cart before the horse, Mr. Speaker.

So for all these reasons and despite the most admirable motivations of the Member for Red Deer-North, who is sponsoring Bill 202, at this stage I find myself harbouring serious concerns and reservations about whether or not to support this bill. With this, Mr. Speaker, I conclude my remarks, and thank you very much for this opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the opportunity to address Bill 202. While I think that the bill will likely pass and eventually become law in our province, I want to put on the record that I have serious concerns, many of them just said by my colleague across the way.

I want to start my comments by citing three different parts from the Charter of rights, Mr. Speaker. They're called "legal rights." They have three specific provisions.

8. Everyone has the right to be secure against unreasonable search or seizure.
9. Everyone has the right not to be arbitrarily detained or imprisoned.
10. Everyone has the right on arrest or detention
 - (a) to be informed promptly of the reasons therefor;
 - (b) to retain and instruct counsel without delay and to be informed of that right; and
 - (c) to have the validity of the detention determined by way of habeas corpus and to be released if the detention is not lawful.

This bill would confine a child for up to 90 days against their will. This is not a voluntary treatment bill, Mr. Speaker, and that's what concerns me. This bill could be triggered by a wide variety of people, from guardians, physicians, relatives, teachers, or spiritual advisors.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, to talk about adults, when I was on the board for the Calgary General hospital, we had a psychiatric ward on-site in that facility. From time to time the court would mandate someone into our custody for up to 28 days for assessment.

A person could voluntarily commit themselves for short periods of time, and when deemed necessary, a person could be committed for up to seven days. There was a mental health advocate on-site that could and did review each individual case, and if he deemed that a person should not be held against their will, they were in fact released.

I had a friend, Mr. Speaker, who was having serious mental health issues. Her family wanted her to get help, and she declined. They tried to have her institutionalized and failed. My point is simply to point out the difficulties when trying to detain an adult. We need to be very careful here. We're talking about mandatory treatment for children and holding them for 90 days, which brings me to my second point, which is that if government members and opposition members were to pass a law like this, people would anticipate that we must in fact have facilities and staff to deal with this problem.

I worked very hard just to get a drug counsellor in Airdrie for our youth. I have been fighting for years to get a 24-hour medical clinic for Airdrie. There's not enough money to do everything that everybody asks us to do, yet with no dollars attached we talk about passing this bill. It would indicate to many people, parents and guardians alike, that not only do we have facilities, but we in fact have staff to treat young people who may not want to be treated. I'm trying to tread a really fine line, Mr. Speaker, between my desire to never have a child hurt by drugs or alcohol and my desire not to have them incarcerated or put into a treatment program against their will.

Twelve years ago, Mr. Speaker, I knew that we had a drug problem in Alberta. Today it is crystal meth, and it's a very serious drug. It is and was then cocaine, LSD, pot, Ecstasy, ice, and dozens of other designer drugs. It is sold on playgrounds, in schools, and a thousand other places in both rural and urban Alberta. There are grow ops and drug dens throughout our province and, sadly, even in my riding. One estimate just on marijuana grow ops between British Columbia and Alberta is that it is an over \$7 billion business. I have no idea what it really is for all of the illegal drugs that are sold in our province or in British Columbia or in Canada, but just from that one estimate, it's a huge problem.

I as a legislator want to make a difference, Mr. Speaker. I want Albertans and especially our children to be safe. I am concerned about how this law will work and what it really means to lock children up in mandatory treatment programs. It has been my experience that unless an addict actually wants to enter a program, it won't work. Even if they want to quit, there's still a high recidivism rate, and I'm not sure how this bill addresses that kind of issue.

Mr. Speaker, I hope the sponsor of this bill will help me to understand how the Charter impacts this bill. Also, I would like assurance that, if passed, it would not mean that the taxpayers have to provide facilities and programs that we currently don't have but, rather, that it is enabling legislation that would in fact allow parents to choose a location for their child and pay those costs, that as well the children's advocate and the courts would have the ability to overturn an order remanding a child into custody.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that we have a very complex situation, and it's going to require a great deal of thought as to how the whole issue of drug and drug abuse is dealt with, from children to adults. I don't think that we can be precipitous by passing a law like this without having carefully understood all of the ramifications of it, and I for one would feel a great deal better if we took the time, had our minister of health and representatives from AADAC do a little bit more work for us, tell us what it is we really need, what we have, what is available in a comprehensive way, what parents can do now

versus this. While this bill is done with the best of intentions, I am a little concerned that it's maybe a little sweeping and perhaps a lot further ahead of where we truly are when dealing with this issue.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to participate in this debate, and I look forward to hearing other speakers.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night I attended a support group meeting in St. Albert on crystal meth, and I'd just like to start off today by sharing with the members of the Assembly some of the characteristics of this drug.

It is a colourless, odourless, powerful, and highly addictive synthetic stimulant. It is as toxic to the environment as it is to users, producing five gallons of toxic water per ounce. This is often dumped into the water table. Crystal meth is abused because of the long-lasting euphoric effects it produces. Crystal meth, however, typically has a higher purity level and may produce even longer lasting and more intense physiological effects than the powdered form of the drug. Crystal meth typically is smoked using a glass pipe similar to pipes used to smoke crack cocaine, and crystal meth also may be injected. A user who smokes or injects the drug immediately experiences an intense sensation followed by a high that may last more than 12 hours. Quite devastating to the individual, Mr. Speaker.

3:50

Now, a number of parents in St. Albert – and I share some of the concerns of the member who just spoke – who have children with crystal meth feel that they are supportive of the mandated treatment that is necessary. They support a clause in all mental health confidentiality agreements that states that in order for confidentiality and privacy to be assured, the person cannot be present with symptoms of either suicidal or homicidal problems. In plain terminology, a person who poses a risk to himself or herself or to others is no longer protected by their individual rights to privacy and confidentiality.

While civil liberties dictate that a person who refuses treatment should be respected, they also provide for the instance when that very treatment will promote the person's safety as well as the safety of other innocent people in the community. It is well known that a minor who uses crystal meth is putting himself or herself in deadly peril. Crystal meth use is associated with numerous serious physical problems. One of the things that parents in the St. Albert constituency who have had children involved in crystal meth feel very strongly about is that this incarceration mandate, or taking into care, is very, very important.

Risk to self. Let me just look at some of these for a moment, Mr. Speaker. The drug can cause a rapid heart rate, increased blood pressure, damage the small blood vessels. Chronic use of the drug may result in the inflammation of the heart lining, long-term damage to the brain cells similar to that caused by strokes or Alzheimer disease. Overdoses can cause hypothermia, elevated body temperature, convulsions, and death.

The other thing I'd like to look at, Mr. Speaker: what are the risks to others relative to crystal meth? It can augment episodes of violent behaviour, paranoia, anxiety, confusion, insomnia on the part of the person taking the drug, and psychotic symptoms. Crystal meth users who inject the drug expose themselves to additional risks including contracting HIV, hepatitis B and C, and other bloodborne viruses. So we see the impact in terms of other people, in terms of our

citizenry. Chronic users who inject crystal meth also risk scarred or collapsed veins, infections of the heart lining and valves, abscesses, pneumonia, tuberculosis, and liver or kidney disease.

Crystal meth is a man-made stimulant. The vast bulk currently on the streets has been illegally manufactured. There is an increasing number of small-scale labs being set up in rural areas of the mid-eastern states such as Missouri and Kansas and Iowa and also, I think, in parts of rural Alberta if not in the cities. The chemicals used in manufacturing processes can be corrosive, explosive, flammable, toxic, and possibly radioactive. For every pound of finished product five or six pounds of chemical waste are left at the illicit lab site. Possible ingredients include brick and driveway cleaner, drain cleaner, starting fluid, and Vicks nasal inhalers. I think my colleague will talk about some of this later on. Crystal meth is typically used on a regular daily basis, and users tend to integrate their drug use into many other daily activities.

Now, the one thing that's really concerning me as the Member for St. Albert is in terms of the mandatory taking of the person into care. I think it's very important that we look at treatment, and that is the one major consideration that I have. Crystal meth treatment consists mainly of addressing damaging emotional and behavioural patterns. No pharmaceutical treatment is particularly effective for crystal meth, although in some cases antidepressants are administered if necessary. The most effective crystal meth treatments are therapeutic, cognitive, behavioural interventions. A support community is essential after the first detox and second treatment stages are completed.

One of the things that I am not sure about in this bill is what is out there in terms of treatment, and this is of grave concern to me. Also in terms of treatment is the follow-up after the treatment. If we're able to get it, do we have the staffing in order to do this? I think it's very crucial that we have a look at this. It seems to me that if you're just incarcerating and you don't have the right treatment and facilities in order to provide the program, we have a major problem. So those are some of the reservations that I have.

Just taking a look for a moment in terms of St. Albert, we did a survey of 13 agencies in St. Albert. Most of them – this is under the FCSS banner – are doing preventative work with young people. The one area that we don't have in St. Albert is the intervention services or treatment services and, for that matter, lodging, which again focuses on some of the reservations that I have regarding the bill. I'm not clear in terms of: do we have the power with a private member's bill to make amendments to the bill? I would sleep a lot easier, for example, if it was a lot clearer to me how treatment was going to be done.

I do believe that it's very important to have the medical profession involved. Right now, if I understand the mandate of AADAC, we do not have – and I stand to be corrected on this, Mr. Speaker – services delivered to youth that are under 18. Maybe somebody can clarify that for me. So I think this is very crucial, and in terms of St. Albert it is very crucial that we look at the whole business of treatment and have a look at, again, the facilities where this service will be provided.

Let me, then, just come to this and conclude. A person under the influence of crystal meth meets the criteria in the mental health clause of being a danger to themselves and to others. Under these criteria it is essential that minors who are addicted be assisted in obtaining safety and self-control. If a person cannot present clear judgment and self-direction and poses a risk to self and others, this person becomes incapable of making appropriate choices for themselves and is then a risk to other members of the community.

The treatment of crystal meth is slow and costly and requires the assistance of well-trained mental health professionals, a support

community, and the availability of long-term resources such as halfway houses or appropriate facilities. Still, as a community – and I'm talking about St. Albert here – our best bet is to educate our children and prevent them from starting to abuse this lethal drug in the first place. Going back to St. Albert, we have approximately 13 agencies that are doing prevention. We're not coping with this particular problem as well as we should. An aggressive education campaign that involves more than road signs must be added to the school curriculum. These classes must be mandatory and be made available to every student as early as grade 5. Only empowered with this knowledge, future generations might avoid this and other drug perils.

For the hundreds of minors in the community who are addicted and for their desperate families, the solution for speed is paradoxically very slow. Mandatory treatment should not be seen as an infringement on civil rights and, I would say, in terms of the need of a particular parent. But, again, the whole question of treatment and facilities is important, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for letting me talk to this.

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

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to make a few comments with respect to Bill 202, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act. At the outset what I would like to do is congratulate the hon. Member for Red Deer-North on this initiative. I think it's a very important issue in today's society. I think it's one that all members of this Assembly will recognize as addressing from a topic perspective a plague that is running through all of our communities, and that is this pervasiveness of illegal addictive drug use.

I do however rise this afternoon as Minister of Justice and Attorney General to make a few comments regarding the bill. Because it is a private member's bill, it is introduced in this House and really sees the light of day, if you will, when it is introduced. It is not something that I as a minister have an opportunity to see beforehand, so the comments that I can make are based on a review since its introduction. The comments I make this afternoon are in no fashion comprehensive but simply to underscore some of the preliminary issues that we have been able to identify.

Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that the intent behind the bill is a good one, and that is to establish a process whereby children who are abusing drugs or alcohol can be placed in treatment programs, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. The bill appears to be similar in nature to the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act. It gives parents and provincial authorities the ability to place children under 18 years of age into mandatory drug treatment programs. The basis of this appears to be that children are victims in need of help and protection. The bill also recognizes that families should be actively involved in ensuring the safety of their children, especially when it relates to drug abuse. It apparently will cover a wide variety of drugs and include alcohol in that definition.

4:00

This, however, is not the same situation as children involved in prostitution in some material ways. It's intended in this bill to give not only provincial authorities, such as police, the power to act but also parents. There are far more children who are involved in substance abuse situations than children involved in prostitution, and this gives rise to the issue: if a very large number of children were taken into custody, what facilities would be available to deal with the caseload?

It should be noted, Mr. Speaker, that the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act was challenged on a variety of constitutional grounds, and significant evidence was introduced through Children's Services about the background and purpose of the legislation to support it as child protection legislation.

What's notable about private members' bills is, of course, that these are initiatives taken on by the private member, and the resources of government in terms of developing the policy, the evidence, the drafting are not available to the private member. So some of these very, very important causes simply do not have the resources available to them when they become before the Legislature in this fashion.

Therefore, it ought not to be a surprise that evidence may well be lacking in this instance because government departments that should be involved—namely, Children's Services, Justice, and the Attorney General, Health and Wellness, and so on and so forth—have not, just simply because of the way we do business around here, had an opportunity to participate in the matter.

It should be anticipated, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, that if the bill is passed, it will be challenged on several constitutional grounds. It's unknown whether Justice will be able to successfully defend against these challenges because we haven't had participation to date, and that is a fundamental problem of many of these types of bills that come before the House. But the fact is that they raise important issues. We can have that discussion, and if in fact we do see that there are fundamental problems, then it can be, with the will of government, with the will of the members of this House, addressed at a later time, recognizing it is something that we want to do. I think that there is absolutely no doubt that this is something that we want to do; namely, giving assistance to our children who have drug dependency.

I thought that with the time available what I would do is just give a little bit of more detailed flavour as to some of the problems that may be anticipated with respect to this bill. For example, on legislative intent: under the PCHIP legislation it provides for the apprehension and confinement of a child for the purpose of removing the child from the abusive environment and ensuring the child's safety. Bill 202 provides for the apprehension and confinement of a child for the purpose of imposing involuntary treatment. This involuntary treatment component of Bill 202 makes the legislation fundamentally different from PCHIP and raises a number of jurisdictional, Charter, and procedural issues.

On the issue of jurisdictional authority PCHIP establishes child prostitution as a child protection issue within the jurisdiction of the province. Under Bill 202 it provides a definition of drug and alcohol abuse, but it does not clearly establish the activity as a child protection issue. As a result of that, Bill 202 deals with illegal drug use and utilizes confinement as a consequence, meaning the legislation could be interpreted as criminal legislation and challenged as being beyond the jurisdiction of the province.

Just a couple more, Mr. Speaker. When an order is granted, what provisions are applicable for review of the order? Under PCHIP a child may apply to the court for review of the confinement order. The court may confirm, vary, or terminate that order. Under Bill 202 while the child may apply to the court for review of the period of confinement, there is no ability for the child to apply for review of the compulsory care order, and therefore the lack of review process for the child or the child's guardian raises Charter concerns.

One last point, Mr. Speaker, on the issue of notice to guardian. Under PCHIP if a child has been apprehended and confined, the director is required to notify the child's guardian. Under Bill 202 there is no such requirement, and that lack of notification to the guardian raises Charter issues.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, my comments are not intended to be comprehensive. I applaud the hon. member for this initiative, but I advise you and through you to other Members of the Legislative Assembly that as this bill is currently structured, there are significant constitutional and Charter and other legal issues that in my view ought to be addressed if it is to become law. Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a physician in the system for a number of years I'm familiar with the challenge of addictions and particularly concerned about the early onset addictions and addictions with young people. Let me say at the outset that we know a lot about some of the precursors of addiction now, and there should be a resurgence, I should say, of investment in getting at root causes and preventing some of the addiction that is increasing in our society.

Some of the precursors I allude to relate to social conditions, families in poverty, family violence, mental problems that can be identified within family constellations and in individual children themselves, learning disorders, emotional and behavioural problems. Part of our challenge in the health system and definitely in the educational system is to identify early some of the signs and symptoms of young people and older people who are starting to move toward abnormal and serious problems such as these addictions.

This points to the vital importance of social and economic supports for people, particularly those at a disadvantage. It points to the need for a cadre of individuals who have the skills to identify early some of the signs and symptoms and for appropriate early intervention programs, both in the school system and in the health care system. I'm pleased to hear in the discussions so far the allusion here to the need for strengthening our prevention and early intervention programs. This indeed is a last resort where we're intervening to the point where we take away an individual's rights. It has a mixed blessing for the individual and the family system and can indeed go awry, as the hon. Minister of Justice has alluded to.

We need to also have a strong research component. I don't think we understand as well as we should some of the precursors, some of the issues relating to early identification of symptoms. What are the results of intervening in certain areas in the family with individuals and in the schools? I don't think we know as much as we need to about this addiction and, indeed, addictions in general.

Crystal methamphetamine addiction is a very serious condition, and rightly it's been identified as not only a risk to the individual but to those around the individual. I think we do have to take it very seriously. I'm pleased that the hon. member has raised this as it is an emerging problem that is unique and different among the addictions, both its serious rapid addiction and its impact on the individuals and the society that is emerging.

What we are recognizing in modern medicine is that diseases have to be identified as diseases if we're going to get the appropriate holistic approach to these problems and recognize that these are not simply social or psychological aberrations. They have a biochemical basis in some instances, a biochemical tendency, a genetic tendency, and they are therefore much more resistant than a lot of diseases that modern medicine has treated. But at the same time if we treat them only as social or psychological quirks, they will not be addressed in a comprehensive and effective manner.

It's obviously an increasing concern across this province and across the country. With the increasing signs of youth violence and the conjunction of drug use, alcohol use, sexual problems, and

violence we need to address this in a very serious way. This is one step that has to be seen in a context of a broader approach to early identification, indeed prevention, and a comprehensive treatment that includes not only medical but social, family dynamics, and spiritual supports.

I think that's been identified also in the AADAC mandate, and they have been doing very worthwhile work in terms of education and early intervention, but they clearly don't have the resources that they need to be as effective as we want them to be, particularly in this new realm for which we still need a lot of research, Mr. Speaker.

4:10

I want to say of the recognition by AADAC through the hon. member that they simply don't have the resources and that this would require a new cadre of workers and new centres, indeed a significant involvement of the court system, and raises questions about the cost. I think we would need in this House to hear a little more about what some of the expected costs might look like so that we can make a responsible decision and sustain the important interventions that we identify here.

Secure residential treatment I think is an appropriate way to deal with some of those who particularly are in the extremes and are significant threats to themselves and to others around them, and I certainly would support that in unique cases. Again, it raises the question that the Justice Minister made about: how far can we intervene in taking away the rights of individuals, and is there an appeal process for young people in that instance? There's a lot that needs to be reviewed, then, in the human rights and Charter issues as indicated.

I have several questions that I don't know the answers to and perhaps will emerge in the further discussions. What defences are in place to make sure that children that don't require treatment will not be forced into treatment? In other words, will there be an objective panel that reviews the allegations and the evidence of family members that particularly are forcing this issue? Secondly, what role does the child's advocate play on this bill? Thirdly, what facilities are presently available such that we will not have to build new ones? Is there going to be an added police service cost that we have not considered so far?

That, Mr. Speaker, deals with most of my concerns. I support the bill and its intention. I have questions, as I've indicated, that I would like to learn more about. I wanted to recognize particularly that this is the extreme end of a growing problem in our culture, and we need to look at root causes and more research on early intervention.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to contribute to the debate surrounding Bill 202, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act. I'd like to commend the Member for Red Deer-North, first of all, for sponsoring this piece of legislation designed to alleviate a very serious drug problem that we have in our society. I also want to thank the previous speakers who have all acknowledged and stressed the seriousness of this problem that we have and the problem that Bill 202 addresses.

My time spent as chair of AADAC from 1999 to 2003 gave me insight into the breadth and scope of addictions in our province. Substance abuse is a problem in all jurisdictions across North America, and Alberta is no different. Abuse of alcohol, prescription drugs, illegal narcotics, and other substances presents a problem throughout this province as previous speakers have indicated. This

disease does not discriminate based on age, gender, geographic location, or income bracket. People from all walks of life are affected by this problem. The introduction of new superdrugs compound the problems that we are facing because the rate of addiction is high. Drugs such as methamphetamine have such potency that I'm told it is possible for a person to become hooked even after one use. Drugs such as this can turn a momentary lapse in judgment into a lifelong battle with addiction.

The cost of substance abuse in both human and financial terms is very high. Those caught in the spiral of addictions are often unable to break free, and their dependence affects every aspect of their lives. There is a negative impact on careers, on schooling, and on family life. In extreme cases a substance abuse problem can lead to a total loss of financial stability and the initiation of criminal acts in order to feed the addiction.

Mr. Speaker, the devastation that addiction can cause in a life becomes especially pointed when the person affected is a minor. Young Albertans are some of the most vulnerable in our society, and I believe that we have a duty to offer protection and support in any way that we can. One of the great strengths of Bill 202 is that it recognizes the fact that minors who have a substance abuse problem need help. These kids are not likely criminals, though that may change if the addiction is not broken. They have merely made some wrong choices in life, and with support and encouragement it is possible that these minors can beat their addiction and take control of their lives again. However, making the decision to quit using drugs, especially while in the grip of that drug, can be very, very difficult.

Bill 202 would give parents the opportunity to help their children by placing them in a mandatory drug treatment program. This would give the minor in question a chance to break their addiction and begin making healthier lifestyle choices once again. While the cost of such a program is high, the cost of an addiction over the long term is even higher. The course of action laid out in Bill 202 would have a beneficial effect not only on the person struggling with an addiction and their family but also on the province of Alberta as a whole in both financial and economic terms.

In light of these factors I fully support this idea, the motivation behind it, and the bill itself. However, as legislators we have a responsibility to ensure that the laws of Alberta will benefit the citizens of this province and that this law is necessary. At times we find that there is existing legislation that will allow the minister responsible to create the desired outcome through a change in regulations or through a new interpretation of an existing act. If this is the case, the creation of another law becomes redundant and, therefore, unnecessary.

In the case of enforced drug treatment there are currently only two avenues: either by getting in trouble with the law or through the use of the Mental Health Act. In the first scenario the child must be involved in criminal action before it is possible for the justice system to order them into a drug treatment program. In this case the addicted individual has already come to the point in their addiction where crime becomes a factor. This could be early, this could be late, but the fact is that if that child does not commit a crime or is not caught committing a crime, it is next to impossible for the parent of the child or the proper authorities to help them.

Additionally, the need to brand the person as a criminal is not congruent with the philosophy of Bill 202. The present pathway to drug treatment does not recognize the fact that minors addicted to drugs are in need of our help and protection. In fact, it does somewhat the opposite: labelling the minor as a criminal. This can have a detrimental effect on the child, possibly making the treatment even less effective.

This brings us to the possibility of adapting the Mental Health Act or its regulations to deal with the placement of minors in mandatory drug treatment programs. Under the current Mental Health Act it is conceivable that this legislation could be used to place an addicted individual into a mandatory drug rehabilitation program. A physician has the power to issue an admission certificate if they have examined a person and feel that the person, among other requirements, is in a condition that is likely to present a danger to themselves or to other people. It can be argued that an individual using drugs presents a danger to themselves, and therefore they could qualify under this section of the act.

However, just because one is able to use a tool for a purpose doesn't mean that they should. To illustrate, it is not wise to use a knife where a screwdriver is required to adjust a screw. I can see the use of the Mental Health Act to deal with mandatory drug treatment in the same way. It may work, but it is the wrong tool for the task at hand, and eventually this is going to cause difficulties. The Mental Health Act was not originally designed to deal with this type of situation, nor are the facilities which fall under its jurisdiction necessarily equipped to deal with this type of program.

4:20

It would be possible to attempt to retailor the Mental Health Act, its regulations, and the associated facilities to accommodate this new program, but that could prove to be detrimental not only to the program which we are discussing but also the programs which currently fall under the jurisdiction of the Mental Health Act.

The best course of action to take is the one set out in Bill 202, I believe. This piece of legislation will give parents a possible way to help their children, where previously there was none. I believe that this program, acting as a possible solution of last resort, will be beneficial to Alberta's youth who are struggling with an addiction.

I fully support Bill 202, and I urge other members to support it as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to talk about this Bill 202.

The Deputy Speaker: Perhaps before you get started, I'd like to remind all members that we have to have our own spots occupied; we're not in committee.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with most of the speakers that the intent of Bill 202, Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, is laudable, but there are lots of questions to raise about it.

I want to start with the big picture because the big picture is not very encouraging. Illegal drugs are the world's largest illicit market, and though its products are quite simple – agricultural products and chemical compounds – because of the huge jump from import price to retail price when the products come to North America, there's a huge, huge cost in the production and consumption of drugs. So the estimates recently are that the illicit drug trade is an industry between \$200 billion and \$400 billion, which certainly surpasses the tobacco industry and alcohol.

Of course, there is moral outrage about illicit drugs. There's no question about that. No matter who you talk to, whether you know somebody that's a part of your family who is involved with drugs or not, there's a tremendous moral outrage in our society, but as many commentators point out, moral outrage does not necessarily lead to

good social policy. A good example of that is the United States. The United States' war on drugs has been going on for quite some time, and it seems to be a repetition of the 1920s prohibition against alcohol. But the war on drugs in the United States has simply created a huge black market for drugs and the involvement of organized crime, yet the level of drug usage amongst people in the United States has not diminished.

That is quite challenging for us in Canada, and we have to ask the question whether Canada just follows the United States as an example. In the United States prisons are overflowing with convicted drug offenders, over 2 million in prison because of drug offences. The United States has a quarter of the world's prison population but less than 5 per cent of the world's population, and it's partly because of the emphasis on punishment of those who possess drugs.

So in Canada what is the direction that we should follow? We have been following that same direction. Historically, beginning with MacKenzie King's 1908 Opium Act, Canada has been emphasizing that drug prohibition is the way to go, so for decades we followed that emphasis, but the usage of drugs has not diminished.

I think the moral question – and I'm taking this from not exactly a leftist magazine, the *Economist* magazine, which had an excellent article on July 16, 2001, on the big picture in terms of drug usage. The heart of the issue for the *Economist* magazine was that it's a moral question: what duty does the state have to protect individual citizens from harming themselves? Now, that gets to the tradition of libertarianism, which has been the basis of much of our politics in the modern world.

In fact, John Stuart Mill in the 19th century wrote a famous, famous essay called *On Liberty*, in which he stated, "The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others." Here we're talking about intervening and preventing harm to oneself. When is that warranted? When a person is about to harm themselves, you can try to persuade them to act otherwise, you can argue with them, you can try to prevail upon them through your own moral discourse, whatever, but you can't bring force to bear upon their action. John Stuart Mill says, "Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign."

Of course, Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with children, so this is where the issue becomes difficult. I would be a champion of individual human rights. I would champion a person's ability to make choices, whether they harmed themselves or not, but here we're dealing with children. Even John Stuart Mill acknowledged that children might indeed need our special protection. Of course, it can be argued – and I know this from experience – that children who are hooked on drugs not only harm themselves but harm others because it destroys the family, it destroys friendships, and it has a tremendous effect on society, especially when drugs seem to always lead to crime. It's not always the case but in many examples. I can speak from personal experience about this. Because children who are on drugs don't think rationally, they don't make the right choices. They don't hang around with the right kind of crowd, and they get into trouble and end up committing crimes.

Still, I'm nervous about this bill because of its tendency to see children involved with drugs as a criminal activity. I'd say that it may lead to criminal actions. But the actual use of drugs itself: is that a criminal activity? The government of Canada's 1982 statement of principles, called *The Criminal Law in Canadian Society*, argued that "the criminal law should be employed to deal only with that conduct for which other means of social control are inadequate or inappropriate." Those are nice words, but we don't follow that very often because we so quickly turn to a Criminal Code

solution, some legal solution, some solution of imposing force before really dealing with the issue in other ways.

Mr. Speaker, I think this should give us pause because surely we must first think of all that we can do in the name of compassion and justice before we turn to the criminal law. We need an honest, open debate about the harm that drugs bring to young people and to adults in our society. We need that debate in our schools, in our churches, in our community halls. We need to be openly debating and talking about this issue before we become draconian and start passing laws that take away human freedoms. Of course, I've heard the expression already that this bill is a bill of last resort, but I'm nervous about going ahead with a bill of last resort when we don't do the other. We don't have the kind of educational supports everywhere throughout our province to properly educate our children.

You know, a week ago I spoke with a group of ex-cons and addicts. I asked them about this bill, and of course, predictably, they said: "This won't work because this bill suggests that you force a person into a treatment centre. It never works because if they don't volunteer, if they don't decide and make the choice themselves that they need help, then there's not much hope for success in their treatment." So they volunteered themselves to go into schools and go to a young offenders' centre and talk to young people about the harm that drugs can have on people, and they would give their own testimony about how drugs often lead to crime. They would do that. Of course, Mr. Speaker, they probably wouldn't pass a police check and be able to do that. But I find that quite interesting. I think that's an important question. To what extent is there success if a person is not led to actually voluntarily enter a treatment program?

4:30

I agree with all of the other speakers about the need for more treatment centres. I can speak from personal experience that in my own family there was a problem with a drug addiction, and my son was not able to find a treatment centre in Alberta. He had to go to Yorkton, Saskatchewan, and it was very difficult for us as a family to travel right across the prairies to visit him. Thankfully, my son has been clean for many years, and he's a great success story, but there were not at that time any residential treatment centres in Alberta. So, Mr. Speaker, I agree with the others that we can't pass a bill like this and not have the proper treatment centres here in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to address the Assembly today regarding Bill 202, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Red Deer-North for bringing forward this important legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I'm a very blessed man. I have an amazing wife and three wonderful children. I live in what I consider to be Alberta's single best constituency, Drayton Valley-Calmar. [interjections] Thank you. We attend church on Sundays. We spend a lot of quality time together as a family. I would consider us to be a fairly average middle-class Alberta family.

Now, while I consider myself to be blessed, I'm also a little scared, Mr. Speaker. I'm scared when I think about the dangers that are out there that my children are going to have to face, dangers that I never had to face. When I was growing up in rural Alberta, drug abuse was something that you heard was happening in big cities like New York or Los Angeles: drug addicts living on the streets, robbing people to pay for their habit, terrorizing neighbourhoods. It wasn't something that people in rural Alberta could even fathom. However,

today nearly every community in Alberta is dealing with drugs. Some communities that I'd never even heard of until a few years ago are seeing their youth become drug addicts sometimes even before they reach junior high school.

In fact, drug use across Canada by all ages is increasing. Last year Health Canada released their Canadian Addiction Survey. It showed that across Canada drug use has greatly increased during the last decade. In 1994 28.5 per cent of all people surveyed indicated that they had used drugs at some time in their life. In 2004, just 10 years later, that number was now 45 per cent of Canadians. In 1994 3.8 per cent of Canadians indicated that they had used cocaine or crack, and in 2004 that number had increased to 10.6 per cent of Canadians.

Drug use in Canada is getting even more prevalent, and the drugs are getting harder and more addictive. In 2002 AADAC did a survey of youth in Alberta on their drug use: 41.9 per cent of students in grades 10 through 12 indicated that they had used cannabis in the last 12 months; 7.6 per cent of grade 10 to 12 students indicated that they used club drugs like crystal meth or Ecstasy in the past 12 months.

Mr. Speaker, these are absolutely staggering numbers, and these aren't just troubled teens living in inner-city Edmonton or Calgary. These are kids living in Drayton Valley, Fort Saskatchewan, Camrose, and many other rural communities. This isn't an Edmonton or Calgary problem. It's an Alberta problem, and it's all of our problem.

In my constituency crystal meth is particularly rampant. Sadly, Drayton Valley has become a hotbed for crystal meth producers and pushers. In fact, our town has hired three more police officers to deal with enforcement as well as a community officer to conduct prevention programs in schools. Now, these are good initiatives, but they're not enough. Part of the problem is that crystal meth is so easy to make. Meth can be cooked up in bathrooms and kitchen sinks with precursors obtained from the local drug mart or even found beneath some of these same kitchen sinks. It's being pushed in our schools and in all of our communities.

Children coming from good, loving families are becoming addicted to crystal meth at exponential rates. I've had countless parents come into my constituency office pleading for help. Often they've been battling with their child's meth addiction for months, and they don't know what else they can do. Their child isn't eating or going to school. They're either up all night or asleep for days on end. In most cases when they confront their child about their problem, the child runs away. Mr. Speaker, I can't even imagine what these parents are going through, not knowing where their child is when they go to bed at night, thinking that they might be strung out on meth, and wondering what they're doing to afford these drugs.

As their MLA and as a parent I often feel helpless. I don't know what I would do if I was in their situation, and I pray that I never have to make these hard decisions. But my children are getting to that age where the pressure to try drugs is mounting. My eldest son, Taylor, is 13 years old. What really scares me is that I've talked to parents whose children his age and sometimes even younger are already addicted to drugs. That's one reason why I attend the Drayton Valley parent-to-parent support group, in my constituency. I wanted to educate myself as a parent and as an MLA as to what other parents are going through so that I can help my child manoeuvre through the pitfalls that await his every step. I also wanted to provide what support I can to those parents as they struggle with this problem.

For many of these parents who are dealing with drug-addicted children, there are currently only two options, Mr. Speaker. They can try to convince their child to come in voluntarily and voluntarily

ask for treatment, or they can try to have their child arrested and put into a young offender facility. Now, even if the parents can track down their children, very few of them can convince their addicted child to accept voluntary treatment. Sometimes even for those who can convince their child to go into treatment, it's only voluntary treatment, and many of them leave after a few weeks and return to a life of drug use.

I know for a fact that many of us here have had to suggest to constituents that their only option might be to try to have their own child arrested. Now, if that alone isn't enough to convince us that Bill 202 is needed, I don't know what is. But arrest is, unfortunately, one of the only options available to parents right now. Having arrest as an only option is not satisfactory for Albertans. Arresting a child puts an unnecessary strain on our police and on our court system. It also puts a child in a young offender facility where they may or may not get the addiction treatment they need. Furthermore, their child ends up being branded a criminal when all they really needed was help for their addiction.

I can understand why a parent may take this option. Their child gets taken off the streets, put into a safe, secure environment. They get a bed to sleep in and three meals a day. I imagine for these parents simply knowing that their child is safe and not on the streets is a huge relief.

Mr. Speaker, parents shouldn't need to have their child arrested to be able to get them into a safe place. That is why I support Bill 202, brought forward by my hon. colleague from Red Deer-North. Bill 202 will give parents another option. It will take drug-addicted children off the streets and put them into a safe, secure facility where they can dry out and start to receive proper treatment for their addictions. Bill 202 will empower parents again. I can tell you right now that many of them feel helpless. Bill 202 will allow parents to help their children when for so long they have been helpless.

As many of you here know, I strongly believe that governments must not dictate how each of us should live. Most Albertans don't need the government telling them how to live their lives, but I also strongly believe that as a society and as a government we need to help those who cannot help themselves. I'm not talking only about those people that are homeless or that are living in poverty. I'm also talking about those who have a mental illness and those who are addicted to drugs and alcohol. If we don't act now and give parents with drug-addicted children another avenue for help, we will have failed. We will have missed a chance to try to stem the tide.

4:40

Now, I'm very optimistic that we're going to see a great number of children taken out of harm's way as a result of this bill. I also believe that if it is successful as I think it will be, it will lay the groundwork for us to look at expansion to other types of interventions. This bill will allow parents to force an intervention upon their own child, but it does not allow for a community to enact an intervention upon an adult. There are many drug addicts out there today who would probably benefit if their family or friends or even their community were able to take their case in front of a judge and force them into treatment such as the community treatment orders like we see in other provinces. The community would also benefit, especially if it's suffering due to a person's drug addiction.

In most cases it is simple economics. A drug addict needs money to feed their addiction. To get this money, members of a community tend to suffer from increased thefts, break-ins, prostitution, or a proliferation of drug dealing. A community should be able to protect itself from harm as well as have the ability to help one of their members who so greatly needs help. In fact, the state of Washington has had legislation in place since the '70s where a person, not just a child, can be involuntarily committed to a

treatment facility if they are, "gravely disabled by alcohol or drug addiction."

As I have mentioned before, Mr. Speaker, I believe it is about more than protecting the individual. We also must protect the community from some of these individuals. I also believe we should consider extending this to people who have a severe mental illness. In Saskatchewan they have the community treatment order program, as I mentioned earlier. An order for mandatory treatment can be obtained for those people deemed by a psychiatrist as likely to cause harm to themselves or others.

As I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, I believe that Bill 202 is a great start. It's a good first step. In fact, it's a necessary start. If we don't act now, parents of drug-addicted children will continue to struggle. We must give them help. We must give them options. We must give them hope. So I urge all members to join me in supporting Bill 202.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to give my response to Bill 202, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, and I rise not only as an elected official but also as a parent and as a health care practitioner.

Bill 202 proposes that the way we apprehend these children who are under the influence or who are addicted is the same as stipulated in the protection for children in prostitution legislation, and I think this is a positive step. The one thing we all have to remember is that children are vulnerable. These young guys don't know what they're getting themselves into. They're surrounded by temptation, and we've heard on numerous occasions how boys would resort to stealing or get on the wrong side of the law to feed their addictions and then how girls would also resort to prostitution to feed their addictions.

I can't imagine what I would do as a parent, myself, if one of my two children were addicted to a substance or to an illicit drug. I would probably be devastated. I could probably lose my mind. My hon. colleague for Edmonton-Glenora indicated that the illicit drug industry runs into the billions of dollars, and I can probably add to that that it's probably the second worst and dirtiest industry to arms dealing.

The threshold for the decision whether a child or a youth is incarcerated would probably be made by AADAC. AADAC is qualified. They have the medical staff, and they have the knowledge and the expertise to render a scientifically based decision that would help the court in making that judgment. So I think AADAC is a suitable agency to ask for expert advice. However, I don't think AADAC itself is qualified or empowered enough to handle the treatment of these children. If they do and if they're asked to play that role, we'd probably have to empower them and fund them more so they can actually have more beds open for treatment. They can probably offer all the different angles of treatment, which is not only chemical.

I have a little concern with this proposed bill. The government and the courts will have to exercise extreme caution in the use of this new law to ensure that the rights of children are not violated. Many of my colleagues indicated that it's a multifaceted problem. The situation has two sides. You have the parents, on the one hand, who are helpless. They're at the end of the road. They don't know where to turn or who to go to. You also have the children who might not voluntarily agree to being placed in a secured facility for treatment. There's also the third side with society, and, yes, we do have to protect society from the crime that is perpetrated and the ill effects of a spiralling drug trade.

There is also the other concern that treatment facilities are not adequate and that they're few in Alberta. Government cannot just simply legislate a solution and say: yup, once this is on paper and it's available, we hope that everything works and that everything will miraculously fall in place. If they legislate a solution, they probably have to look at ways to implement the solution and empower the individual agencies to fulfill that role.

Children's rights are paramount. We have to respect a child's rights. However, under the influence or when these guys are addicted or hooked on a substance, they're impaired. They cannot make these decisions for themselves. So a parent in their right capacity as a guardian or as the caregiver to that child probably is in the best position to make that request of the court.

There's also the concern with regard to the safe house, the proposed treatment facility. Safe houses are not meant to be holding cells or jails. I think they're meant to provide a safe and healthy environment for a person to cope and to recover. The chemical treatment is the main thing. It's the main angle of treatment. However, we have to conduct more research and look for ways to help these kids recover from their addictions. As it stands now, the treatments that we have are not successful and they're inferior. They're not useful enough.

Also the angle of behaviour and psychological counselling. These kids have to know that, yes, we're fighting the physical dependence, but you have to want to quit. You have to want to recover.

Also their education or schooling component. When they're incarcerated or held in those treatment facilities, they're not attending class, they're not studying, they're not doing their homework. So we have to minimize the impact on these children's development and allow them to receive some sort of schooling or some sort of education while they're in the treatment facility.

We also have to encourage the development of support groups. Peer support is probably the most useful because it's kids advising other kids about the detriments and the potential side effects of the addiction, telling them how to identify the temptation and how to fight it, how to resist it, and maybe looking at empowering those children to become ambassadors in their communities once they're released from those facilities. They can go back and talk to their same age group and tell them, you know, what's involved, what got them hooked, how they fought it, and now how they're planning to continue to stay clean. So I think we should empower them to become ambassadors in their own communities and their own schools to distribute and spread the word that you can fight it and that you can probably resist it at the beginning too.

Two days ago I met with 250 high school kids with my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Decore, and we spent 90 minutes surveying these children with regard to Bill 202. We wanted to go to both the source and the target of the issue. Ninety per cent of those 250-plus students indicated that they're in favour of Bill 202. They had questions about their rights as individuals, most of whom are almost 18. They said: okay; what happens if I'm 18 or if I turn 18? They identified with the risk to society, and they identified with the escalating danger, and they recognized that some of their peers are either drug traders themselves – they're trafficking in the drug to feed their own addictions – or they're profiting from it, and they didn't like either of the two situations. They said: this has to stop.

Ten years ago they hadn't heard of crystal meth. Now we have it. Who knows what we will have 10 years from now. It gets more potent, it gets easier to make, and it gets deadlier. So they said that, yes, intervention is necessary.

4:50

They also indicated that education was not adequate. They commented on the DARE program, and they said that it wasn't

enough. They say that even parents don't identify the signs of addiction. With crystal meth, for example, early on the kid actually excels. They do better, they're more energetic, and they look brighter. A month after that, they start the downhill dive. They lose weight, they lose sleep, they cannot study, they cannot function, they resort to crime, and then they leave the house. So we probably have to educate the kids, but we also have to educate the parents what to look for, what signs to watch for.

Interestingly, the children and the youths that I actually spoke to had a parallel concern where maybe one or both of the parents are drug addicts themselves. The children said: what recourse do we have if we identify one of the parents as a potential threat? They're faced with a temptation in the house. "What can we do to alleviate that temptation, that risk? What can we do as children if the parents have all this power now? What do we do if we realize the threat and we want to do something about it?"

So, to close, Mr. Speaker, I support this bill and so do many of my constituents who came into the office and indicated their support, some of whom were actually young adults. They weren't just parents who came and said: yes, we agree. Some young adults themselves came in and said: yes, we agree. I applaud the hon. Member for Red Deer-North for sponsoring this bill, and I would hope that she listens to my concerns and those made by the other colleagues because really the intention here is to make this bill foolproof, basically. We want something that works, and we want something that is useful, that is empathetic, and that is courtproof. So I applaud you and God bless you and thank you.

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

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and join the debate on Bill 202, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North. Bill 202 has provided the opportunity for the House to debate an issue that affects all Albertans. Some Albertans may choose to believe that drug abuse doesn't affect them. They would be mistaken. Every Albertan pays for drug abuse, whether it's through policing and court costs, adding stress to the emergency medical system, or the loss of a friend or a loved one. Those are just a few broad examples.

The truth is that drug abuse is like a pebble that is dropped in a pool of water. The initial result is confined, but in time the ripple effect spreads, the result of one small pebble, across the entire pool of water. I would like to commend the Member for Red Deer-North for introducing Bill 202. It is revolutionary and it is necessary. I see this as a ripple effect that can ultimately destroy families, cripple communities, and weaken a province.

In discussing this issue with families and constituents, you can often hear the word "assume" used to describe people's thoughts on drug abuse. They assume that their community and schools are drug free. They assume that their child's friends have positive intentions. They assume that their children assume the pressures involved with using drugs. Mostly importantly – I alluded to this before – they assume that consequences of drug abuse in our province don't affect them.

Drug abuse is a serious problem in Alberta. Statistics from 2001 show that Alberta has the lowest number of drug offences in Canada at 7,211. That includes possession, trafficking, and importation offences. Cannabis possessions account for half of all drug offences in Alberta. That was in 2001, Mr. Speaker, and that was just those who were caught and charged. As we all know, we are facing a new problem in our province and across the country: methamphetamines, a word we are going to hear a lot of during our debates in the House. As all MLAs, especially rural ones, we'll be working hard to lessen the effects of drug abuse on Albertans.

There is a reason for real concern on these issues when in one year's time span over 1.5 million needles were exchanged at needle exchange programs in Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, and Lethbridge. This statistic only highlights the drug abusers that are exchanging their needles. It does not take into account the drug abusers who do not use the needle exchange program. There are real problems with real consequences, some of which I alluded to earlier, such as health risks and death.

In 2002 39 per cent of all positive HIV serological tests in Alberta listed injection drug use as a reported risk factor. In 2000 the chief medical officer in Alberta investigated 205 deaths that were drug related and 49 that were drug and alcohol related. These included suicides resulting from overdoses or poisoning, accidental deaths involving the use of drugs and/or alcohol, deaths directly caused by substance abuse, and deaths where drugs and/or alcohol were contributing factors.

Mr. Speaker, we live in a province where the only way we can get help with drug abuse is to voluntarily seek help or by being charged with a criminal offence and being sentenced to a mandatory drug treatment program. There need to be other options available, especially for children and teenagers of this province.

The statistics I have been using have been generic ones that take into account all Alberta, but ultimately Bill 202 is for Alberta's children. However, as I alluded to earlier in my remarks, I see Bill 202 as a permissive stake to circumvent the inevitable should we allow drug abuse to spiral out of control against Alberta's children, resulting in criminal charges, court appearances, health issues, and death.

Just so we can get a grasp on exactly what we are dealing with when it comes to children and drug abuse, I would like to share some specific statistics dealing with the youth in Alberta. The number of children under the age of 18 charged with possession of drugs in 2002-03 was 204, while the number charged with trafficking was 132. In 2002 persons between the ages of 12 and 17 years of age had the second-highest rate of drug-related violations, only to be outdone by individuals between the ages of 18 and 24. I think the most pertinent stat to this legislation was in 2002: 27 per cent of junior and senior high school students in Alberta had used cannabis, and 14 per cent reported using one or more drugs such as magic mushrooms, club drugs, or cocaine in previous years. They are real statistics that highlight a real problem.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Alberta families have to be our first line of defence against teen-aged drug abuse. Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 recognizes that children who abuse drugs are in fact victims that need help and protection. Their families should be involved in ensuring the safety of their children, and Bill 202 would allow them the right to do so.

Going through some documents on the legislation, I found an interesting quote from a Supreme Court of Canada justice that was made during a ruling concerning a children's charter of rights that I'd like to share with the House.

Children, especially young children . . . are unable to assert their rights to life and health. These rights are to be balanced in the child protection context, with parental liberty . . .

Where parents, for what ever reasons, do not exercise their rights vis-à-vis their children, or do not exercise them in the best interests of their children, the state has assumed the duty and role to intervene to protect children's welfare.

5:00

The government of Alberta introduced Alberta's Promise, which promises all of Alberta's children that the government will champion their future. I see Bill 202 as yet another positive step in this

direction. I am sure you are all familiar with the little red wagon that symbolizes America's Promise. This symbol is derived from a speech given by Colin Powell when he launched America's Promise in 1997.

Every child should have a Little Red Wagon . . . A Little Red Wagon to pull around the heavy load of life . . . A Little Red Wagon to pull around his or her dreams. The Little Red Wagon also has a very long handle so that an adult can come along and help when the road is particularly difficult or rocky.

Through this legislation we have an opportunity to further strengthen our resolve in providing Alberta's children a safe place to grow, learn, and develop positive life skills. Those children that abuse drugs need the help and protection of their families and friends.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 has been in the media for some time now. If any of us were to walk into a coffee shop in rural or urban Alberta and sit down next to a family or an individual and ask them about it, they would likely know what we were talking about. Most surprisingly, the majority of individuals you talk to would have a story to share with you involving a family member or a friend. The story would likely be one about the overwhelming feeling of helplessness as they watch their son, daughter, sister, brother, best friend, neighbour, cousin, niece, or nephew fall to the devastating effects of drug abuse.

Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased if everybody would support Bill 202. Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That certainly cuts it down to one page, doesn't it?

I just will say the one thing that I wanted to perhaps give as an idea to the Solicitor General. We have treatment centres up and running now, but I'm not sure that AADAC is the only answer. They could be utilized under a contract basis. This government contracts out to private-care-delivery firms for the elderly. Bricks and mortar, big buildings are great, but a secure room with a trained and compassionate worker will do the trick just as well. For instance, in Lethbridge as in other parts of this province the government has shut down the youth remand centres. These buildings sit there with all the security fences, the locks, and the cameras, ready for these victim children to move into. All of society will say thank you for the dollars saved in the long run because these victims would not end up on social assistance.

I distinctly recall back in the early '80s a family that had to remortgage their home and use their savings. The mother lost her job just to pay for the rescue of their son from a cult. The consequential time and effort to help him rejoin society as a productive, balanced, and more importantly a happy and content human being – did that son say thank you that he was helped in spite of himself? Yes, he did, and they were lucky that their son made it.

There is a parallel with that story with crystal meth. Parents can't wait and must help their victim children in spite of themselves, especially when the problem is developed before the parents know what's going on. I recall comments made by Rod Stewart and Jamie Foxx when they received their Academy awards, that they were very thankful, Rod Stewart to his mother for making him practise his piano and Jamie Foxx for his grandmother.

I would just like to thank the minister for bringing this forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Actually, it's a member. This is a private member's bill.

Hon. members, under Standing Order 8(5)(a)(i) five minutes is now provided for the sponsor of the private member's public bill to

close the debate. I invite the hon. Member for Red Deer-North to close debate on Bill 202.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that this is a very important bill. I see that we will need some strengthening of the bill, and I look forward to answering all the questions that I heard today in the debate in Committee of the Whole. In the meantime I would ask that everyone support Bill 202 in second reading, and I would call for the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a second time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that in view of the hour now we call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:06 p.m.]