

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 25, 2005**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 05/04/25

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Hon. members and to all of our guests in the various galleries today, please join in the singing of our national anthem in the language of your choice. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau.

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.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Dunford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The islands of Indonesia and landlocked Alberta have much in common, especially a healthy reciprocal trade, growing economies fuelled by energy, and a wish to further our relationship. It is my great privilege to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly representatives of Alberta's 14th largest trading partner. We have the consul general of Indonesia, Mr. Saptomo; the consul, Mr. Djundjungan; and vice-consul, Mr. Pringgau. The consul general is on his first official visit to our province. He was appointed just this January and has made Alberta one of his first stops. We welcome this opportunity to say in person that our thoughts are with the Indonesian people as they rebuild. I would now ask the three gentlemen from Indonesia to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

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

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What an honour it is today to introduce some amazing and enthusiastic students from my constituency of Sherwood Park. They are from Madonna school, and they are going to spend almost a week here at the Legislature learning about various parts of our government. Their group leaders, of course, are teacher Pat Rykes and education assistant Don Ireland. They have parent helpers Francine Jans, Lynnette Kaminski, and Annette Bunnin. Please join me in welcoming almost 40 in the delegation from Madonna: 32 wonderful students plus their five helpers.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 48 grade 10 students from Tofield school who are seated in the public gallery. They are accompanied today by teachers/group leaders Mr. Fred Yachimec, Mr. Rick Bobier, and Mrs. Anne Digout. As I say, they're from Tofield school visiting our Legislature today, and I would ask that everybody welcome them with a very warm, enthusiastic applause.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to inform the Assembly today that we have some RAP-ers in the House. No, it's not what you think. With us today are seven guests who play important roles in the apprenticeship and industry training system and, more specifically, in the registered apprenticeship program, or RAP, as it's commonly referred to.

The government has announced that the number of available RAP scholarships will increase significantly from 50 to 500. Mr. Speaker, this is outstanding news for the 1,200 high school students who are currently enrolled in RAP as it gives them an even greater opportunity to receive a scholarship that will help them continue their apprenticeship training after graduation. And it's great news for industry in Alberta, that is experiencing or expecting an increase in demand for skilled labour. I met with these guests earlier today to discuss the exciting announcement and was very impressed with their dedication to apprenticeship and industry training in Alberta.

With us today are two past recipients of a RAP scholarship, Scott McManus – I hope he's been able to join us – and Brad Olynyk. Scott is a second-year plumber and gas fitter second class apprentice, and Bradley has completed his apprenticeship and is now a certified journeyman welder. In talking with him earlier today, I learned that because of the amount of time that he was able to put in while still in high school, he achieved that status before or upon the age of 20, which is remarkable. We also have two current RAP students from Edmonton, Nicole Diogo and Jacob Pelletier. Nicole is a structural steel and plate fitter apprentice, and Jacob is a cook apprentice, both of them remarkable role models for students in their schools.

Also joining us today is Don Oborowsky, CEO and co-owner of Waiward Steel Fabricators. Don has been hiring and training apprentices for many years and is a great example of why Alberta's system is one of the best in the world. Also with us to celebrate this announcement is Deb Meraw from St. Joseph high school in Edmonton. Deb is the RAP co-ordinator, working very hard to promote the trades to young people and get them set up in the program.

We also have Rod Moore, board member of the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board. The board played a key role in making these 450 new scholarships a reality, and they work continuously with industry and government to make our system better. And last but certainly not least, the Assistant Deputy Minister of Advanced Education responsible for apprenticeship and industry training, Shirley Dul. I'd ask that all guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly two constituents from my riding of Dunvegan-Central Peace. It's not very often that I get to introduce individuals from the

Peace, so I look at it as a real privilege. The first is Mr. Walter Doll, reeve of the MD of Fairview, and the second individual is Mr. Robert Jorgensen, chief administrator for the same MD. They were here earlier meeting with the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Both are standing in the members' gallery, and I would ask that we extend the traditional warm welcome.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like my hon. colleague across the table it is certainly my honour and the first time that I've had this opportunity to introduce someone from Lethbridge. It is a group of grades 7 and 8 students from the Gilbert Paterson community school. They're not only bright students, but they also are a band that has been here performing in Edmonton at the canto band concerts. They're accompanied by their teachers, Doug Scales and Tom Spackman. The parent chaperones are Wendy Funk, Evelyn Dreilich, Laurie Haig, and their bus driver is Franklin Kuehn. I would ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

1:40

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two very special guests today: Naomi Mackin, director, Old Strathcona Youth Co-op, and her colleague, Karen Leighton, an outreach worker. The Old Strathcona Youth Co-op is located in my constituency, and my constituency office had some modest role to play about seven years ago in the establishment of this very valuable agency, which provides services for youth in need. I would like to express my appreciation for the work of the co-op and ask Naomi and Karen to please rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to be able to introduce to you today my nephew Mr. Kevin Niddrie. Kevin is just finishing his co-op degree with AGLC as an auditor in the forensic audit department, and he's going to be employed in about a month's time with the accounting department of TransAlta. I would ask Kevin to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased and honoured this afternoon to have the opportunity to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a gentleman who is not only a very valued and experienced campaigner but a trusted adviser and certainly a true friend. Mr. Marion Semaniuk is his name, and he is seated in the public gallery. I would ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Securities Commission

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the same day the Minister of Finance stood in this Assembly and assured me and assured all of us

that there wasn't going to be a witch hunt at the Alberta Securities Commission, going as far as to tell me that I should applaud the forensic computer audit, the first axe dropped on an ASC employee. I'm sorry, but I'm not going to applaud the firing of Alberta workers who stand up for what they believe is right. To the Minister of Finance: will this minister categorically deny that the firing of a senior official of the Securities Commission last week was a result of his coming forward with allegations of wrongdoing at the commission?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can neither deny nor confirm it because the persons who came forward came forward on the basis of anonymity. I do not know whether that person is one that came forward. Newspaper reports might suggest that, but I have absolutely no knowledge of that person or the names or identities of any of the other persons who came forward.

I will stand by what I said last week, and that is that no person who came forward will be penalized for coming forward with concerns. I cannot say that no person will be terminated or rebuked for acts that were unprofessional or perhaps illegal.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Will this minister explain to this Assembly and to all employees of the Securities Commission what she will be doing to finally protect the rights of employees who followed her instructions to come forward with information about wrongdoing at the Securities Commission?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I stand by my last statement: no employee will be terminated or rebuked for coming forward to raise concerns. However, I cannot guarantee that there will be no terminations or rebukes of employees who may have acted in an improper manner.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, given that coming forward with the information she asks may put an employee's job in jeopardy from the chairman and the executive director, how in the world is she standing back to let this whole thing play out?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, one, I don't cast aspersions on people on the basis of rumour. I don't stand anywhere and besmirch a person's good name without a strong foundation for doing that. That would be substantiated information or evidence. The Leader of the Opposition may feel comfortable in that role. I do not.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a significant sector of Alberta's economy and business future is at stake here and at stake in the proper running of the Securities Commission, has the Minister of Finance made any inquiries at all into the dismissal last week of a senior official of the Securities Commission? Has she looked into it at all?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I have had a conversation with persons at the commission. I have been assured that the matter was handled not on the basis of any allegations coming forward because, frankly, the persons who would have brought this action forward don't know the identities of the persons who brought the complaints forward. I don't know them. They don't know them. I have researched the documents entirely, and there is not one identifier in

those documents that I can find that gives the identity of any of the complainants.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why, given all the allegations of enforcement and human resource problems at the Securities Commission, did this minister allow the people at the centre of the controversy, the chairman and the executive director, to be involved in the KPMG e-mail witch hunt?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is making an assumption that, in fact, these people are involved. Maybe he would like to show me his evidence that that is the case because what I have from the part-time commissioners does not indicate that in any way.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why – why? – is this minister opposed to a full forensic audit of the Securities Commission, including an investigation of files where enforcement irregularities are alleged?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have been the one in this House who has supported the investigation. There is a forensic audit going on now. That's the subject of the discussion here today. So if the Leader of the Opposition picks his type of audit, it's okay, but if the commission moves forward with an audit, it is not okay.

Mr. Speaker, I have said consistently that the Alberta Securities Commission is very important to the investment community, the business community in this province. We do need to know if there are improprieties there. We have been assured that the enforcement and regulatory activities are being handled properly, even-handedly. We have been informed that there are human resource issues there. The commissioners have engaged an external company to assist them in dealing with those. I think that to this point that is what we would want to see happen.

The Speaker: The third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Utilities Consumer Advocate

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 23 of this year the Utilities Consumer Advocate released a report indicating that the main thrust of the Department of Energy is the promotion of retail competition without consideration for consumer interests. As is typical practice of this Tory government, any information critical of this government is kept hidden from the public and government critics. My question is to the Minister of Government Services. Will the minister finally make public this report by the Utilities Consumer Advocate of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's pretty important to point out to the member how unfortunate it is that the Liberal researchers don't do their work. The fact is that what they are commenting on and what was in the paper is simply a report by an advisory committee, and it's in response to a paper that was put out for discussion purposes – discussion purposes – by the Department of Energy. I really take offence when it sounds like the advisory

committee is attacking the Department of Energy because that is not true. The fact is that it's a response. The paper that somehow was leaked is a draft. It is not the final paper.

1:50

Mr. Elsalhy: To the same minister: given that this government seems very eager to win the approval of the energy industry and not that of the Alberta public, does the minister have or plan to obtain approval figures from the general public on how electricity deregulation was forced upon all of us?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I think it's really important to point out that there have been a lot of gains made since there was restructuring of the electrical industry. As a matter of fact, the ability to generate electricity has increased dramatically over that short period of time. As far as gathering information to see what the public wants, there's the advisory committee. They've been holding some hearings around the province, and the discussion paper by the Department of Energy is out. They're getting feedback from all the consumers, from the generators, from the transmitters, and from all the people that are involved in the electrical industry.

Mr. Elsalhy: To the same minister: given that the Utilities Consumer Advocate's expenses are fully recovered from utility industry funding, when will the minister fully fund and empower the Utilities Consumer Advocate so that he can operate at arm's length from the government and truly help and advocate for the helpless consumers of this province?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, I think that's just a horrendous leap to ever suggest that because there's funding coming from the Balancing Pool to pay for the work of the advocate that, in fact, the advocate is in some way unable to do his or her work. The fact is that the advocate is there to help protect the consumer. As a matter of fact, the advocate, through the intervention and hearings with other stakeholders, has in fact taken some \$85 million and passed it back to the consumer, rates that would have been increased by the generators. So to ever suggest for one minute that the advocate is not doing their work is absolutely wrong.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government has been consistently wrong in its claim that competition would lead to lower electricity rates when, in fact, the so-called retail electricity contracts are a consumer rip-off that have institutionalized higher electricity rates for residential, farm, and small business customers. Now it seems that government proposals would extend this to all consumers. When the utilities advisory committee issues a report about utility customers getting ripped off by the Tory deregulation scheme, the government suppresses the report. My question is to the Minister of Government Services. Why is the government hiding a report which has been done for the Utilities Consumer Advocate advisory council that has concluded that all future options for residential electricity sales will penalize bill payers and benefit the electricity companies?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is an even worse stretch than the first line of questioning because the fact is that the report that the gentleman is referring to was a draft report and it was in response to questions that were asked through a discussion paper from the Department of Energy. Through the fullness of time the final report

from the committee will be out. It'll become part of the discussion as it relates to the discussion paper put out by the Department of Energy, and in the fullness of time they will see the report. In fact, I hope that they will feel a bit ashamed for the comments that they're making today because that is not a final report.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's the government that should feel ashamed for hiding this report.

Will the minister please tell the house why, in fact, the government is stamping "draft" on this report? Is it so that you can simply change the conclusions before the public sees it?

Mr. Lund: That's so interesting, Mr. Speaker, because when that draft report came through, the government didn't put "draft" on it. That was a report that came from the committee, and it's a draft because they're still working on it. They're still holding public meetings, and there's one coming up at Bonnyville – I believe it's on May 12 – and I would encourage people in that area or I would encourage the hon. member to go out and see what happens at that meeting.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Is the government simply trying to hide bad news about its failed electricity deregulation scheme and keep such information out of the hands of Albertans, or will the minister table that report immediately?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, we're not hiding anything. Draft reports are just draft reports. The fact is that there's been in excess of 3,000 megawatts of power generation that has happened since the restructuring of the industry. Someday if the member cares to have a 101 on electricity and how the whole system works, I'd only be too happy to provide it to the member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The two previous questions kind of lead up to my question except that I'll be looking for some facts and asking a sensible question. In 2003-2004 I sat on the advisory committee that recommended that we have a Utilities Consumer Advocate made up of everyday Albertans, and you know, the government responded, and we got that body that's getting all this criticism right now. I'd like the Minister of Government Services to tell me and all Albertans: who are the members that sit on this committee?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, we're extremely fortunate to have 10 people that are very clear-thinking average Albertans. As a matter of fact, the composition is made up of three farmers, three people that are just residents, and then four people who are business/residents. So we have a broad range of people that are in the category of under 250,000 kilowatt hours per year, and those are the ones that are currently under the regulated rate option. Certainly, I think this advisory committee does an excellent job of representing those people.

Mr. VanderBurg: Again, Mr. Speaker, given that these advisory members don't get their information out of the newspaper, I'd like to know: other than Bonnyville where do these members travel to, and where do they get their information from?

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, they've held three other meetings: one in Hinton, one in Vauxhall, and I'm sorry, but it slips my mind where the other one was held. What I've asked them to do is to make sure that they hold one or two hearings in all of the service areas where we have the different generators and the different systems and operations so that they'll get a broad cross-section from all corners of the province.

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

Horse-racing Industry

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and ask some real questions now. Last week in the Legislature it was established that the government leaves behind 66.6 per cent of the revenue from gambling machines at racetracks that goes to Horse Racing Alberta and to the facilities that host the gambling machines. My question is for the Minister of Gaming. Can the minister tell us exactly what percentage of those funds go to Horse Racing Alberta and what percentage goes to the facility operators?

Mr. Graydon: Well, Mr. Speaker, another week, another day, and another attack on the horse-racing industry, one of our proud agricultural industries in the province, but I am pleased to answer his question. As noted, 33 per cent goes to the Alberta lottery fund, 15 per cent goes to the facility, whether that be Northlands, Stampede Park, or whatever, and the balance, if he cares to do the math, would go to Horse Racing Alberta.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister give us some actual dollar figures, rather than just percentages, based on last year's numbers?

Mr. Graydon: Well, we have a number in the budget, but it's not a firm number because it's based on revenue generated. So the number in the budget, which they bring up daily, is \$45 million, I believe, to Horse Racing Alberta. That is not a firm number. It could be much less than that if the activity is less at the race tracks.

Mr. Tougas: Well, in that Edmonton Northlands and Stampede Park are in line to receive more than \$10 million each from the lottery fund on top of their take from the gambling machines, is this not a case of double-dipping into the lottery jackpot?

Mr. Graydon: Well, both Northlands and Stampede Park, again, while their primary focus, I would say, is agricultural activities, they certainly provide a broad range of activities. There are many user groups there every single day of the year at those two facilities providing entertainment, education to groups all the way from 4-H clubs, youth groups, to lots of seniors' groups. They're very well-used facilities, and they deserve the support of this government.

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

Funding for Regional Health Authorities

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Health care remains a very important topic to all Albertans, and in our recent budget a very large increase was devoted to health care. However, it also showed

a difference in how the money is allocated to the different regions in Alberta. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could she explain or help us to understand how the regions that received a 4.2 per cent increase, as opposed to a region like Calgary that got a 12 per cent increase, can be expected to deliver the same services or continue operating in the same system?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, one of the other facts that I should point out is that this year with the allocation to the health authorities, on average East Central is funded on a per capita rate at \$1,652 per person, which is higher than the provincial average of \$1,276. The population-based formula is adjusted for age, for income, and for the capacity each region has. Simply put, in the smaller regions in the outlying areas there is not the capacity, because there's not the population, to deliver the same kinds of services.

So, Mr. Speaker, health care has been organized so that province-wide services are delivered largely in two centres, like the Calgary health authority and Capital health, but we do try to pay attention to the innovative projects from various regions who come forward with niche markets, which they can use to support their own health care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question. The import/export dollars that the regions use are taken from the budgets of the smaller regional health authorities, and we are very appreciative of the services we get in the larger regions. My question is to the minister. What innovation or what policies is she bringing forward that might allow these regions to deliver the services in their areas?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. The chair for East Central has discussed with me a number of the initiatives, including working to make sure that MRI services can be available, working to make sure that there's a plan, if necessary, to provide mobilized services, and to recognize some of the other kinds of supports we can offer the community. In this year's budget the capital for East Central will include a 48-bed long-term care facility in Vermilion, 2 and a half million dollars in Vegreville for their care centre.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member makes a very good point, and that is that we have to continually examine the capacity of the import/export formula to deliver the services and work to unleash innovation in the regions so that where they can increase their performance, it will be done.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

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

Arts Funding

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a fact of life in Alberta that the funding for organizations through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts is simply not enough. Alberta is floundering behind other provinces when it comes to funding for the arts and for the book publishers. This is a sad reality given our vast resources. My questions are to the Minister of Community Development. Given that per capita cultural expenditures by Alberta are the second lowest in Canada, can the minister inform us if there are any plans to address this funding inequity and strengthen the arts in Alberta?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, the arts are a very, very important part of

the culture and the fabric of the province of Alberta. The reality is that they are a very important part of an economic driver in this province. Albertans themselves are among the best attenders of theatrical performances, cultural festivals, and other such elements of the arts life of the province of Alberta. They're very supportive. They're very strong supporters of the arts. People are voting with their feet, and they're going to these things in record numbers.

So to suggest that we're not doing enough for the arts I think is wrong. We have done much for the arts that has allowed it to flourish over the last 20 years. As an example, in 1982 there was just a handful of cultural festivals in the province of Alberta. Now, some 20 years later, there are over 500. Mr. Speaker, we can always do more for the arts, and clearly the arts community themselves would argue in favour of greater support. I can say in answer to the question that we have done much to work with Community Development through the budget process to do much for certain elements of the department like . . .

The Speaker: Thank you. We'll just go on to the next question.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: can the minister tell us why the funding for the book publishing industry in Alberta lags behind that in other provinces in Canada?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, as I was concluding my first answer, I'd like to say that what we have done in the area of Community Development's budget has been dramatic in terms of increases in the budget for certain elements of the department.

To have 10 priorities is to have none at all, and in this department we have focused, in particular, in this budget cycle on our parks. Our parks are like embassies. They're like signatures of the quality of life in the province of Alberta. I don't discount the importance of the arts and the role that it plays in the quality of life in the province of Alberta, but we have quadrupled our funding for parks. This was a very important area, the highest priority within the Department of Community Development.

Mr. Agnihotri: Again to the same minister: couldn't this government use some of the \$45 million given to horse racing to support book publishers and struggling Alberta artists?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, I think clearly this question falls within the difficulty of a non sequitur. It had nothing to do with the original question and, furthermore, contrary to the rules of this House, calls for an opinion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Class Sizes

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. About 18 months ago the Alberta Commission on Learning released its report regarding basic education in Alberta. One of these recommendations covered class size. Last September, in 2004, approximately 1,250 new teachers were hired to reduce class size. In my constituency I've certainly seen that in the kindergarten through grade 3 sizes. My questions are for the minister of learning. In this year are we going to see more teachers hired, and would we see those class sizes reduced, say, in grades 4, 5, 6, maybe up through junior high?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the class size reduction initiative has been one of the most successful programs ever in the former

ministry of learning and even today in the Ministry of Education. The reason is because the school boards have been given the flexibility to employ those dollars – in this year's budget alone it's about \$110 million – in whatever way they wish.

Flexibility is the key to the success of this particular program. We have neither placed specific directions nor any restrictions on it other than to endorse what the Learning Commission had said, and that was to please look at the K to 3 system first, and if you're okay at that level go to the next, then go to the next. School boards have the entire flexibility of working with their own superintendents and school principals to make those kinds of decisions, and when they're made, school boards do report back to us annually. So we have a pretty good handle on it. We're pretty comfortable with the success and the future direction of the small class size reduction initiatives.

2:10

Mrs. Ady: To the same minister: in some of the schools in my constituency those buildings are just full, so when it comes to trying to meet class-size targets, as well, must students bus out to other schools within the jurisdiction when they face challenges in classroom space in order to meet these class-size guidelines?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that the school boards have to bus students out, but certainly the option is there should they wish to do that. Nonetheless, we did recognize that there was a bit of a difficulty in this area. So in the current budget I was successful with the support of all my government colleagues in adding about \$6 million, over and above the \$110 million I just recognized earlier, as a one-time initiative to address specific problems, should there be any, with respect to things like transportation services, with respect to other things that help out our school boards.

So the short answer: no, we're not compelling anyone to do that, but they do have the option to do that if they wish. Let's remember that the small classroom size initiative is a three-year program. It was five. We've sped it up down to three, and it's been very well received out there.

Mrs. Ady: My final supplemental is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. What is this minister doing in order to help schools that are squeezed for space but need to meet classroom size targets?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Included in this budget, which will be debated later this week, are 45 new schools as well as 109 new school projects of major renovations. So there's a lot of space going into the system. We are also prepared, though, to add portables because one of the issues is, quite simply, that in many locations the school space is not necessarily where the students are. So we are adding a considerable amount of portables. We hope that we will be able to accommodate it this year. If not this year, certainly next year the accommodation will be there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Water Strategy

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has repeatedly stated that the protection and sustainability of Alberta's water resources are a high priority. The hon. Minister of Environment reinforced his commitment last week at the environment

conference. However, the recent budget has left Albertans wondering if it's all talk with no capacity to deliver. My first question to the Minister of Environment: given the grossly inadequate budget for the Water for Life strategy, can the minister inform all Albertans what concrete actions he's prepared to take in achieving this goal?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member and other members of this Assembly who attended the first environmental conference of its kind in Canada right here in our province last week. I want to thank the hon. member for attending, like my other colleagues.

Here are some concrete actions that we are taking in the Ministry of Environment. A comprehensive water treatment facility review, of course, across the province's water facilities is taking place as we speak. We have over 500 water treatment facilities in our province. Over the next two months these will be reporting back to me as the Minister of Environment. It's a good example that when we released our Water for Life strategy, that was one of the first identified priorities that we wanted to undertake.

Also, I wanted to say that our water councils, of course, are in place, which is so important, another part of our Water for Life strategy unmatched anywhere in North America.

Finally, if I could give you one more concrete example, the water use stakeholder group reported and recommended phasing out water use for oil field injection. Of course, this is under way as we speak. Again, it's part of our Water for Life strategy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a full inventory of Alberta's water resources is essential to a long-term water conservation plan, is the minister prepared to allocate the necessary resources to gain an accurate measure and report on the sustainability of Alberta's surface and groundwater supplies?

Mr. Boutilier: Well, Mr. Speaker, a very good point and a good question. First and foremost, the short answer is absolutely yes. We intend to allocate the necessary resources in fulfilling our mandate that has been established in Water for Life.

If I could, though, one of the key points is monitoring, which we are doing. Last Friday, in actual fact – and members may not be aware – the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance issued their first report. Of course, these water councils are so important because they're right on the ground level in terms of what's taking place in their communities. Identified were some weaknesses in terms of agricultural practices that we need to improve, which we're committed to. Also, from a municipal waste-water perspective we need to look and see how we can conserve our water even more so because it truly is our blue gold of this province.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that the allocation for Stettler county referred to in Bill 11 far exceeds what the population level requires, can the minister explain what rationale was used to allocate nearly 2,500 cubic decametres of drinking water, which is twice what the usual population would consume?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you, and I want to thank the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, who, of course, was carrying Bill 11. I want to say this. I can assure all members of this Assem-

bly that in a growing province such as ours, in communities such as the hon. member has made reference to – this is treated water, and this treated water supplies water for areas like Donalda, Big Valley, and other areas. That is so important in the Stettler area because when they turn on their tap, they require drinking water. So what we've tried to do in that bill is deal with not only the pressures of today in a growing economy and the conservation principles that are so important but also deal with the future growth that's taking place, so we've planned for over the next 20 years, to the hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Charter Air Travel

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Conservative cabinet ministers, MLAs, political aides are corporate high flyers with little or no regard for what their extravagance is costing the taxpaying public. The information tabled Thursday on chartered jets and airplanes is frankly shocking: 258 air charters in a little more than a three-year period, costing taxpayers over \$1 million. All aboard Air Tory. My question to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: how can the government justify chartering aircraft on no fewer than 258 separate occasions when the government has its own fleet of four airplanes and these planes fly empty over 300 times a year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The majority of times that aircraft are chartered is when one of our own aircraft is down. As the hon. members on the government side certainly know, our King Air 350 has now been down for about eight or nine weeks. The reason we have four planes is because we need these planes, and that's consequently what we're looking at. These charters are very important and were subsequently followed through because the people on this side, the people in the government of Alberta, have to get around to see Alberta.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the aircraft must be down a lot.

The question I have to ask this minister is: how can the government justify, at the cost of several thousand dollars a trip, chartering aircraft to ferry cabinet ministers and political aides to places like Vegreville, that are within an hour's driving distance of Edmonton, especially when these same ministers get expensive cars and SUVs courtesy of the taxpayer?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I cannot comment on each individual flight. For example, the flight to Vegreville may well have continued on to Calgary or other parts of the province, so I think that's a very unfair question. Our members certainly on this side utilize those planes in the best possible fashion, and it would be very difficult for me to comment on each individual circumstance.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, does not the minister see that the taxpayers would be offended by this gross waste of public money no matter what he says about tootling all over the province?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, does the hon. member not see that it's very important for our ministers to get out around the province and to go all over the province and do our job?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Agricultural Assistance

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A couple of weeks ago the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development announced a reduction in the producers' share of the spring price endorsement premium, but many producers in my constituency are wondering why, given the low commodity prices and high input costs, they should even bother putting seed in the ground this year let alone buy crop insurance. My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Why should producers buy into this program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:20

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member brings up a very good point and a good question. The spring price endorsement and the risk insurance coverage are two production insurance options that were implemented to deal with exactly the scenario of low commodity prices and higher input costs. If commodity prices were to continue to drop, that would trigger a payment. We are working hard to respond to market conditions by giving producers a break on this risk management tool and reducing the producer's share, or portion, of the premium from 50 to 30 per cent and increasing the benefits under the risk insurance coverage from 50 to 70 per cent.

Our goal is to make it more attractive for the producers to participate in the programs because we want them to have a backup, and we want them to have something that they can have confidence that if crop prices do drop, they will have something. We have asked the federal government, Mr. Speaker, on a number of occasions to help with the other premiums and the other insurance. To date we've not heard anything back.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental is for the same minister. Do producers have some time to consider their risk management options?

Mr. Horner: Well, I believe that the hon. member is referring to the deadlines, Mr. Speaker. I didn't quite hear the whole question. They do have to move quickly because the deadline for the options to be undertaken is April 30, which is this Saturday. I would certainly encourage producers to drop by their AFSC office or to call the AFSC call centre to see if this option truly does fit for their farm and to see what kind of benefit they may be able to get out of it in the event of lower commodity prices.

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

Apprenticeship Training

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Later this week we will mark the International Day of Mourning for workers killed on the job. At the same time, with industry whispering in its ear, this government is considering lowering even further educational and safety standards in the apprenticeship training system. The proposed reductions will almost certainly result in more workplace injuries. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. Can the minister explain how moving from three journeymen for every apprentice to one journeyman for every apprentice, in effect tripling on-the-job class

size, will support maintaining or improving the quality of training for Alberta's apprentices?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the hon. member opposite I don't prejudge the experts that we get to review these issues, to have discussions with industry on all sides, both employers and employees, and to make recommendation. The hon. member would know, if he's had anything to do with this discussion at all, that the matter is currently before the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board and that they do a thorough analysis of these issues and talk to all the stakeholders before they bring forward recommendations. He will also know that in the historical context many other trades have moved ratios from more than 1 to 1 to 1 to 1 without a significant disaster or any disaster at all, as the hon. member pretends. In fact, the whole premise to his question is absurd, that anybody would change ratios with the knowledge that it was going to affect safety on the job.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Advanced Education then: given that the provincial apprenticeship committee voted unanimously to retain the current 3 to 1 ratio, if the minister can get past the absurdity of my previous question, would he support worker safety and training standards by committing today to retaining that ratio?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the toughest part of that question is indeed getting past the absurdity of his first one. However, as I said in my answer to the first question, I do not and this government does not prejudge the issues that we ask experts and people involved in the business to give advice on. It's before the training board. I will look forward to the training board's report before I make any determination or act on any recommendation. I don't know what their recommendation will be, and neither does the hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Human Resources and Employment then: given that a disproportionate number of workplace injuries occur during the first year on the job and two workers die every week in this province, why is the minister considering changes that will almost certainly result in more workplace accidents and fatalities?

Mr. Cardinal: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course we wouldn't encourage more fatalities. We are reviewing the Employment Standards Code now, and the things we do presently are the hours of work, overtime, vacation, general holidays, maternity and parental leave, and termination of employment.

In addition to that, the other thing we're looking at very closely is that a lot of the accidents that happen are not on the work site. Sometimes there is a misunderstanding and people think that because there's an accident, it's on the work site. Mr. Speaker, a high percentage of the accidents happen on the road to work and back home, and we are looking at that very closely to try and define and target where the problem is.

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

Minimum Wage Rate

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment. In February 2005 the minister announced that Alberta's minimum wage would be raised to \$7 an hour. This is good news for low-income, hardworking Albertans. Today the minister announced that this increase would be introduced all at once in contrast to the idea of a staggered increase. So reflecting the inquiries from business owners in my constituency, I would like to know why the minister has decided to increase the minimum wage all at once?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, that's the best question I've had in this House so far. First of all, I'd like to advise the Assembly and the member that all Albertans were given an opportunity to participate as to how the minimum wage of \$7 an hour would be implemented and when. Nearly 2,000 inquiries came in with recommendations, and 40 per cent of the 2,000 were employers. About 30 per cent felt that it was not necessary to put in a phased-in program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Some Canadian provinces such as Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia have set different categories of minimum wages such as entry level or workers receiving gratuities. Will the minister consider a similar approach for Alberta?

Mr. Cardinal: Another good question, Mr. Speaker. No, absolutely not. The government abolished the tiered minimum wage back in 1998, and it seems to work very well. Alberta's minimum wage rate of \$7 an hour will apply to all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you. The last question is to the same minister. What will you do to ensure that employees are not laid off and employers not forced out of business because of the increase in payrolls?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. Of course, there will be some additional costs to employers. That is why we've given four months for an employer to make the necessary adjustments. I believe the new rate is also competitive with other jurisdictions in Canada. You know, the average wage in Alberta right now is about \$18.50, and the average wage for a youth is over \$11.50.

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

Health Care Staffing

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Even though new graduates will soon be entering the workforce, we still haven't addressed the serious shortage that resulted from the slashing of jobs across the health sector during the 1990s. Almost a decade has passed, and we have yet to recover. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given all of the resources available to the government, why has it done such a poor job of anticipating future staffing needs?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would think there's at least one area that should be looked at very favourably, and that is that this past

year we graduated more registered nurses than ever before. We exceeded a thousand. We are working with the learning institutions, with the universities and colleges, and with the professional associations themselves. In fact, Mr. Speaker, contrary to the hon. member's opinion, in Alberta we are head and shoulders ahead of many other jurisdictions in Canada.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: why doesn't the minister adopt the Alberta Liberal opposition's recommendations on long-term and stable health workforce planning?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I know that I should be faulted for saying this, but I've never read the Alberta Liberals' position.

Ms Blakeman: You would learn a lot.

Again to the same minister: given that the long-term care sector has asked to increase the hours per patient per day from 3.1 to 3.6, why did the government decide on an increase to only 3.4 hours of care per day?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted that the hon. member opposite has asked me about staffing for long-term care because we are working with the regions on this. We are talking about it from several vantage points. In one instance you will have a facility that has patients with a significant degree of acuity – in other words, they need additional staffing – and our regions, with their standards and with the work with private, not-for-profit, and publicly funded facilities, work with that facility to make sure that the care plans in those facilities for the people that are involved are appropriately staffed to the acuity required for that patient.

I see that you're not anxious to hear the rest of my response, but . . .

The Speaker: Hon. minister, that's totally inappropriate. We have a guideline of certain sections, and there's going to be no filibustering in the answer period as well as the question period.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Access to Postsecondary Education

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Northern Alberta is experiencing serious shortages of trained tradespeople and professionals in many areas. While there are a number of colleges in the region, the number of programs that are available are limited, and the cost of attending postsecondary training is a financial barrier that keeps many students from pursuing an education. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. What plans does the minister have to increase the number of educational opportunities or options available to students being educated close to home?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government certainly recognizes that Albertans in rural and remote areas of the province do face greater challenges in obtaining postsecondary education, and I can speak from experience on that, having travelled some 500 miles from home to go to university. That's why when I talk about access and when we talk about access, it means more than just opening more classrooms in universities. It means improving access for Albertans who don't live close to a postsecondary institution.

There are several programs in place to help Albertans access

postsecondary learning opportunities close to home. Athabasca University, for example, has distance education courses in many degree programs as well as a group of colleges and technical institutes working together under the umbrella of eCampusAlberta, developing even more courses for online delivery. We've recently announced that we'll allocate \$90 million to the access growth fund to achieve the target of adding 15,000 postsecondary spaces over the next three years. We're committed to making sure that there's a place for every Albertan who wants to advance their education, whether that's in a physical seat or a virtual seat, a rural seat or an urban seat. We support the efforts of postsecondary institutions in rural areas to work with regional industries to meet labour market needs and to work within the regional economy.

So, Mr. Speaker, there's quite a number of programs and opportunities to expand the opportunity for education in the rural areas.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental is to the same minister. He did mention industry. Could I ask the minister: in which way is he working with the industry and other employers to make sure that the number of students required fills the needs of Albertans and, in particular, northern Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are listening to industry, we're listening to people involved in postsecondary institutions, and indeed we're listening to students and to parents and to communities. Based on what we've heard, we've agreed to boost postsecondary funding significantly. As I've mentioned, we have targeted some of that funding to the high-demand areas. We're encouraging and supporting institutions to develop and deliver quality learning experiences. For example, we've provided \$1.5 million to Athabasca University to accelerate their program development and \$1.2 million to eCampusAlberta.

At the other end of the spectrum we have our community learning centres, and the budgets for the community learning centres are going up as well so that they can assess what's needed in their neighbourhood, what's needed in their community, and make sure that programs are brought in or access to the programs are made available. So it's a wide spectrum. In addition, there are things like Alberta-North, a consortium of six northern colleges and Athabasca University, to support the delivery of learning opportunities in more than 50 communities.

Mr. Speaker, there's a wealth of opportunities we're working on, and we're looking for more ideas from Albertans to help make that happen.

The Speaker: The hon. member I'm sure has another question.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: more specifically, how does the minister plan to address the acute shortage of skilled tradespeople in the north, that is adversely affecting the commercial and residential development?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just today we announced the increase in the RAP scholarships, and we had the RAP scholarship winners in the gallery this afternoon. Five hundred registered apprenticeship program scholarships issued this year as compared to 50 last year, a significant increase. Over a thousand apprenticeships and technical training classes; 16 per cent of the currently scheduled classes will be offered north of Edmonton.

Establishing the Alberta aboriginal apprenticeship project, which helps aboriginal people enter and complete apprenticeship programs. The youth apprenticeship program, which is a pilot in northern Alberta, helps students in grades 7 to 12 explore career options. Promoting the registered apprenticeship program, which allows people to start their apprenticeship training while still in high school. Increasing access to training in the trades by recognizing prior learning and work experience.

An Hon. Member: Four more years.

Mr. Hancock: I'm glad that he would want four more years.

As the Minister of Education would want me to say, it's a great question and a great program in Education Week, that we're sponsoring more apprenticeships and starting right in grade 7 and moving up. Skills in Alberta will be having a competition of Olympic-style proportions to demonstrate the value.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair is aware that there is a full moon out.

Thirty seconds from now I'll call upon the first of half a dozen members to participate.

Vignettes from Alberta's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, this historical vignette of the day may be of particular interest to those interested in water in the province of Alberta.

On this day in 1914 CPR President Thomas Shaughnessy formally opened the Bassano Dam on the Bow River, a project to provide water for the eastern irrigation district, an area over 600,000 hectares. The earthen dam has a 107-metre wide base and extends over 2,150 metres beyond the spillway, which can handle a flow of 3,000 cubic metres of water through the sluice gates.

Almost 300,000 cubic metres of earth were moved to build the dam, which in 1914 was referred to by the *Scientific American* magazine as "America's greatest irrigation project."

head:

Members' Statements

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

Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Earth Day 2005 the Alberta government announced our province's newest provincial park, the Lois Hole centennial provincial park. This park honours a remarkable woman's love for the land and her commitment to our children and their future. It also honours our earth and Alberta's centennial.

Mr. Speaker, the park lies next to Edmonton and the Hole family's hometown of St. Albert, and it includes the former Big Lake natural area. The site is globally recognized as an important bird area for its nesting and migrating waterfowl and shorebirds, attracting bird watchers from around the world. For 144,000 school children in the area it is an unequalled outdoor classroom. As a provincial park it will enjoy a high level of protection and recognition.

2:40

Our former Lieutenant Governor once said, "If we hope to preserve our way of life," we need to "rediscover our respect for the land, the water, and the entire natural world." Mr. Speaker, the Lois Hole centennial park is a place of life where we remember a great Albertan who celebrated life and who wanted to celebrate Alberta's centennial.

Thank you.

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

Ian Seright

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize a true friend to the residents of east Calgary and to the people of Alberta. Mr. Samuel Ian Seright passed away peacefully last Wednesday, April 20, in Calgary.

As a long-time resident of Calgary-East he gained the title of the unofficial mayor of Forest Lawn. Ian proudly served as our dedicated and enthusiastic centennial ambassador and had often proudly remarked that he looked forward to adding the title of Premier to his lengthy contributions to this great province.

Ian was married to Dorothy for nearly 50 years before her passing. He was both a dedicated father and a loving grandfather. The love and dedication that he demonstrated towards his family was much like that which he dedicated to our province: unparalleled and truly genuine. His uncanny ability to remember the slightest details about all of the people whose lives he touched will forever remain in the minds of those who knew him. His ability to remember meetings, birthdays, anniversaries, and other important events was what made Ian a true friend to those who knew him.

Following his retirement from the city of Calgary, Mr. Speaker, Ian continued to celebrate all aspects of life: family, friends, politics, religion, and community service. His love for the residents and community of Forest Lawn and the people of Alberta were beyond measure. A sympathetic and sensitive person, popular with the people of Calgary-East and the greater Forest Lawn community, cheerful and enthusiastic in all his endeavors: that was the Ian that we all knew.

He was proud to be an Albertan, and today I am proud to speak of his contributions and his dedication to this province. I believe that if Ian were listening today, his warm smile would be evident, and he would want to reassure all of us that the world will go on as usual, that this tragic event is nothing out of the ordinary, and that, in fact, all is well. God bless you, Ian.

Colleagues, please help me recognize the contribution of this great Canadian.

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

School Closures

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are 35 public schools in and around Edmonton which are eligible for closure according to enrolment or utilization criteria. These schools and the communities where they are located could be the next victims of the provincial government's school space utilization rate as defined by Alberta Infrastructure. There are over 6,700 children attending these schools.

The school closure process not only affects the communities of Wellington, north Edmonton, Terrace Heights, and Strathearn but communities across the city. The following public schools in Edmonton meet the school board's criteria for closure. I hope your school is not on this list: Balwin, Braemar, Duggan, Eastwood, Gold Bar, Grovenor, Hardisty, Horse Hill, John A. McDougall, King Edward, Malmo, McKee, Mill Creek, Queen Alexandra, Rio Terrace, Ritchie, Rutherford, Stratford, and Talmud Torah.

The only positive benefit that has occurred as a result of the Edmonton public school board's recent cluster study regarding school closure is the recognition for immediate changes to the entire process. Parents and communities feel that their issues and concerns are not being addressed. The closure process is proceeding too fast.

The province of Ontario has recently approved a policy on school

closure that examines as mandatory considerations prior to closure the value of a school to the student, the community, the school system, and the local economy. Notice of a year must be given if a closure is to be considered. Moreover, a task force headed by a trustee with board membership is mandated to hold public hearings, solicit feedback, and gain community consensus, including consideration of the value of the school to the local community. A school can only be considered once in a five-year period for closure.

The frustration expressed by parents regarding Edmonton public's closure process sends a clear signal that we can and must do better. The public school system and the closures that surround it affect us all. Why are we forcing one community against another?

Thank you.

Registered Apprenticeship Program

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the announcement from Advanced Education that 10 times as many scholarships, worth half a million dollars, will be available to students in the registered apprenticeship program, more commonly known as RAP. This is great news because, as we all know, Alberta's economy is strong, and the demand for skilled tradespeople is high. Alberta's innovative RAP program is a win-win opportunity for students and employers. Students are able to start a career in the trades while completing high school, and employers have the opportunity to train future workers.

RAP is a program that allows high school students to become employed as apprentices and get on-the-job training hours while they complete high school with no delays in graduation. Students also earn an income of at least minimum wage while they are working. Students from across Alberta have said that RAP provided them with an extra incentive to do well in and graduate from high school. They've also said that RAP has helped them become more aware of the career options that are available to them.

The RAP scholarship is a \$1,000 award based on letters of recommendation from employers, teachers, and counsellors, comments from the student indicating their interest in a career in the trades, and the student's academic marks. The purpose of the scholarships is to encourage students to continue with their apprenticeship program after high school. Increasing the number of RAP scholarships from 50 to 500 is a great way to highlight apprenticeship training as an exciting postsecondary education option.

I commend this government for demonstrating such a strong commitment to addressing the increased demand for skilled workers as well as a strong commitment to young apprentices in Alberta. These scholarships will encourage even more young Albertans to see apprenticeship as a rewarding career pathway.

Thank you.

Wes Montgomery

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, sadly, today Edmonton and all of Alberta has lost a broadcasting icon. Wes Montgomery, a popular radio morning man and sports dinner master of ceremonies extraordinaire, passed away at the age of 66. Wes began a 47-year career in radio at CKYL, Peace River, a station which was owned at the time by a former member of this Assembly, the late Al "Boomer" Adair. CHED, K-LITE, CISN, CFRN, and for the past 12 years CFCW listeners woke up to Wes Montgomery morning shows for just about as long as anyone can remember.

There are few personalities in radio who are recognizable in just about any northern Alberta community they visited, and Wes was one of them. That's because at some time in the past he accepted an invitation to emcee a sportsmen's dinner or a local fundraising event

whether it be for an agricultural society or a charitable organization, or more than likely he took part in a bonspiel and all the other stuff that goes along with bonspielsing.

Wes was an unabashed supporter of Edmonton, the Eskimos, and, of course, the sport of curling. He had no time for those who wanted to put things down and had no time for media smear campaigns, but he would spend endless hours on air talking about people of all walks of life who did good things. Many times those endless hours of storytelling were to the chagrin of the station manager.

There are few people who enjoyed every day of life more than Wes. From the days of the Point After to the Riverbend racquet club to a curling rink somewhere in the province there is a better person today because they knew Wes Montgomery. To Wes's mom, two sisters, eight children, and eight grandchildren our deepest sympathies, but knowing Wes Montgomery, he would be proud if this tribute were signed off by simply saying: have a happy doorknob.

Thank you.

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

Mayor's Luncheon for Business & the Arts

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Along with my colleagues from Calgary-Mountain View and Calgary-Varsity last Thursday I had the honour of attending the 12th annual Calgary Mayor's Luncheon for Business & the Arts. The luncheon celebrates the arts, artists, and partnerships that are forged between business and the arts. I believe it was Denise Carpenter of EPCOR who said that the businesses represented at the luncheon get it. They understand the value of arts and culture to a civilized society.

There were three major artists' awards. The Enbridge emerging artist award was won by Michele Decottignies, who, among many other things, is the founder and artistic director of Stage Left Productions and Balancing Acts, the longest running disability arts festival in the world. The Telus artistic innovation award went to EMMedia Gallery and Production Society, a nonprofit media arts organization that provides equipment, technical support, and programs for independent video, audio, and multimedia artist-producers. The EPCOR established arts award was given to artist, mentor, innovator, arts administrator, educator, curator, writer, and community activist Sandra Vida, who has arguably done and seen nearly everything that is possible for an artist to do and see in her 35-year career.

Oh, there is one thing Sandra Vida has not seen in the last 17 years of her career, and some of the people she mentors are young enough that they've never experienced such a thing. That would be an increase in provincial government funding for arts and culture in Alberta. There hasn't been one since 1988 even though funding for arts and culture doesn't come from tax dollars. It comes from gambling revenues, which I'm willing to bet have climbed dramatically, phenomenally, astronomically over the last 17 years.

Mr. Speaker, EPCOR's Denise Carpenter says, and I quote: as times have changed, the arts have increasingly converged with business and everyday life; art teaches important lessons about adaptability, flexibility, critical thinking, and problem solving, characteristics that enhance our employability and ultimately our citizenry. EPCOR gets it. So do Telus, Enbridge, and dozens of other Alberta businesses that do their part to support the arts. The question is: why doesn't this government?

head: 2:50

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from a number of good Albertans, largely from Fort McMurray, Calgary, Edmonton, Sherwood Park, and a lot of other communities in Alberta, and it reads:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to prohibit the importation of temporary foreign workers to work on the construction and/or maintenance of oil sands facilities and/or pipelines until the following groups have been accessed and/or trained: Unemployed Albertans and Canadians; Aborigines; unemployed youth under 25; under-employed landed immigrants; and displaced farmers.

There are 101 good Albertans on this petition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition with 100 signatures on it. The petition notes that Alberta's labour community was not properly consulted before the introduction of Bill 15, the Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2005, and asks that the bill not be passed by this Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 206

Alberta Pharmaceutical Savings Commission Act

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce private member's Bill 206, the Alberta Pharmaceutical Savings Commission Act.

Pharmaceutical drugs represent the fastest growing cost in our health care system. Not surprisingly, it is also the most privatized component of health care delivery. Bill 206 would take the first step in reducing these costs through such measures as reference pricing, bulk purchasing, and reductions in demand that, unlike user fees and copayments, do not punish the sick and the elderly. I would therefore like to move first reading of Bill 206.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a first time]

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

Bill 207

Alberta Association of Former M.L.A.s Act

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 207, the Alberta Association of Former M.L.A.s Act.

This bill will create a nonpartisan association of former Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Membership would be open to all individuals who have been but are not currently a member of this Assembly. This association would be able to use its knowledge and experience to promote the ideals of parliamentary democracy in Alberta and throughout the Commonwealth.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 207 read a first time]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents to

table today. The first is a letter from Mr. Stan Buell, the president of the Small Investor Protection Association. His letter condemns the recent firing of the director of administrative services at the Alberta Securities Commission and asks that the minister intervene to protect whistle-blowers.

The second item I have to table today is a letter from Mr. Paul Pomerleau. Mr. Pomerleau points to the role of unions in creating the so-called Alberta advantage and raises concerns about foreign temporary workers and other issues facing Alberta's working people today.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is an e-mail from a Calgary-Varsity constituent, Mark Hambridge, that was sent to the Premier. Mr. Hambridge identifies himself as a concerned citizen who is among the many who are bitterly disappointed with the decision to "allow smoking in certain public places, contrary to the wishes of the vast majority of Albertans."

I am also tabling five copies of the program of the 12th annual Mayor's Luncheon for Business & the Arts, at which Calgary's Liberal caucus clearly heard the arts community's plea for provincial funding support.

Speaker's Ruling

Referring to an Officer of the Legislature

The Speaker: Hon. members, the other day, Thursday, at the conclusion of question period statements were made by the chair with respect to the conduct of a certain member with respect to certain questions that were raised and innuendo with respect to an officer of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta. Comments did arise, and I invited members to return on Monday, that being today, to offer suggestions with respect to this matter. Should hon. members choose to participate, I'm now offering them that opportunity. I do have a statement that I intend on making at the conclusion of hearing those members who wish to participate.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When you rose and requested that we review this matter, I would advise you that I was at that time in discussion with the Minister of Finance about whether or not a question of privilege ought to be brought. I have not brought the question of privilege because the process which you put forward would have pre-empted that process, or it would have been premature. I still have the intention, subject to what you have to say today, to bring forward a question of privilege to be determined if that's the appropriate course.

The reason I say this is this is not a matter which is being overstated, to say that the comments that were made are, in fact, a breach of the privileges of this House. Just to refresh so that we can speak to this in context, at page 947 of *Hansard*, speaking with respect to April 21, Thursday, the comments in question are the phrase:

Given that the Alberta Auditor General has been the auditor of record for the Securities Commission and has repeatedly given the commission unqualified audit approval, will she do the right thing and bring in a genuinely independent out-of-province investigator?

And a second statement at page 948:

To the same minister: will she admit that the Alberta Auditor General has no credibility on this issue given that year after year his office has given the commission a clean audit report?

Those were statements made by the hon. Leader of the Official

Opposition, Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. They were made last Thursday afternoon and provoked quite a deal of outrage in the House and comment by yourself, and rightly so because the Auditor General is an officer of this Assembly. The Auditor General, however, is not in this Assembly, cannot respond to those sorts of comments, nor ought to be called on to respond to those sorts of comments.

It's not to say that auditors general or other officers of the House or the subjects that they deal with are not properly the subjects of questions which can be brought before the House. In fact, I think most parliamentarians challenged to do so could raise the issues without slugging the character, reputation, independence, or otherwise of the individual involved, in this case an officer of the House. So it's not to say that there should be a shutdown of questioning but, rather, that questions or comments, for that matter, outside of question period must always be put in an appropriate manner because the one thing that all members of this House and all officers of this House have is their integrity, their character.

When the character of a member of this House or an officer of this House, even the employees, quite frankly, is drawn into question in the manner in which it was put forward, it brings the whole context of governance into disrepute. There's one thing that we ought to do as members of this Assembly, in my humble opinion: it's to raise the level of respect for this House, not lower it. We should constantly be on our guard to ensure that the public knows and understands that each and every member of this House and that each officer that serves this House is here to do the best for Albertans. We can have a difference of viewpoint as to whether we are doing the best for Albertans or what the right thing is, but we ought not to be bringing our character into disrepute in the manner that was suggested.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, it's my humble submission that this is a matter which is far more serious than just a point of order or just a comment made in question period. In fact, I would suggest that it's far more serious than one in which the normal process of this House might be that a person would rise and withdraw the comment or apologize.

We saw that happen in this House on March 23, page 410 of *Hansard*, where a point of order was raised when the same member, the Leader of the Official Opposition, in a question to the same minister, the Minister of Finance, said, "Who is she trying to protect?" A point of order was raised because, again, although the issue that the hon. member was trying to raise might have been perfectly appropriate, the manner in which he raised it called into question the character of the minister. That was drawn to the House's attention by way of a point of order, which was referred to at page 420 of *Hansard* that day. Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar rose and on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Riverview withdrew the remark. The Member for Edmonton-Riverview didn't show up in the House himself to withdraw the remark but had someone rise on his behalf and withdraw the remark.

In my humble submission, Mr. Speaker, that would not be the appropriate way to deal with this. In fact, I would refer us to *Beauchesne's* 24.

Parliamentary privilege is the sum of . . . rights enjoyed by each House collectively as a constituent part of the High Court of Parliament, and . . . enjoyed by individual Members, because the House cannot perform its functions without unimpeded . . . services of its Members; and by each House.

So it's not necessary for a question of privilege to be raised against an individual member. It can be a question of the privilege of the House, and in this case I think it is appropriately so.

I won't go on at length to speak about the question of privilege

because I think that would be more appropriately done if, Mr. Speaker, when you make your comments, you indicate that that's an appropriate course of action. However, I do believe that we should speak to the question of privilege on this matter as outlined, as I said, by *Beauchesne's* 24, 25, and 60.

I think we should also be looking at *Montpetit* 524-525 in that context in talking about the protections of officers of the House, and in that context I would even quote page 524, chapter 13, of *Montpetit*.

This is a longstanding tradition in our Parliament that we be cautious when we attack individuals or groups, particularly in the judiciary, and those who are unable to come in here and have the same right of free expression as we enjoy with impunity here.

That quote, by the way, is a quote from one of our own previous members, McClelland, who at that time was sitting as the Acting Speaker in the national House. The quote is a very important one.

Montpetit goes on to say:

While it is permissible to speak in general terms about the judiciary or to criticize a law, it is inappropriate to criticize or impute motives to a specific judge or to criticize a decision made under the law by a judge.

Now, that's with respect to the judiciary and judges, but I would suggest to you that the same logic applies with respect to officers of the House. They can't be here. They can't defend their reputation on the floor of the House. The issues are important, but the manner in which they are raised is so very important because all we have is our character, our good name, and if we want the public to respect this institution and to respect governance and to be involved in the process, we have to raise, not lower, the standards.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the appropriate way to deal with this matter would be to refer it to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing or to Leg. Offices or both because Leg. Offices is the appropriate place if one does have a concern about the competency or the independence or the aspects with respect to an officer of the Legislature. There is an appropriate way to deal with it, and that would be through Leg. Offices, raising it at Leg. Offices. But in this case, raising it in the manner that it was raised in order to make a partisan political point denigrates this House, denigrates the members of this House, and breaches the privileges of this House and ought to be referred to the appropriate standing committee for a discussion about how we would deal with those sorts of circumstances, how we can ensure that the rules clarify that it's not appropriate to act in that manner, and to sanction the member.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this is an interesting thing, the opportunity that the Speaker has presented to the Assembly, in that it is not a point of privilege that is being discussed but a general discussion of the point of interest raised by the Speaker. I'm in somewhat of a quandary on how to respond to what has been placed before us now by the Government House Leader. I'm not responding to a point of privilege, but that's certainly what is underlying the comments that he's made. I assume that if a point of privilege is indeed made, the proper notification will be given, and I will be given adequate and fair opportunity to respond exactly to the point of privilege.

Which brings me to the discussion today. The Government House Leader raised a number of issues, and if I may, I will go through and respond to some of them. In particular, the Speaker had referred all members of the Assembly to review *Beauchesne* 493 and *Marleau and Montpetit* 524. I think what's important here is to look at the wording that was used by the Leader of the Official Opposition very

carefully. The specificity of language is important in these cases. At no point was the Leader of the Official Opposition impugning directly on the individual but on the office and on the work of the office.

In the directives of *Marleau and Montpetit* 526 directs us to look at “the tone, manner and intention”; in other words, the context of the comment. In this case the preamble was clear that our concern was not with the Auditor General, his professional abilities, or his integrity.

Our concerns were threefold. First, the formal mandate and power of the Auditor General is very restricted.

Secondly, the minister had artificially restricted the scope of his investigation by already putting parameters around it, encouraging the Auditor General to prejudge the investigation specifically “to dispel concerns,” which is a direct quote; in other words, the government’s publicly stated expectations. Our concern was with those publicly stated expectations rather than with the Auditor General’s character or professionalism. That’s not what we were questioning. We were questioning what the government had set out.

Third, perception is everything, and in this case it’s in the vital interest of the province that the public’s confidence in the ASC be restored. It is not impugning the character or professionalism of the office of the Auditor General to insist that it is best done with an investigation carried out by someone with no previous history with the Alberta Securities Commission. That’s not impugning anyone. It’s saying that if we’re going to have someone that’s truly independent look at it, then the public perception of independence can best be assured if the individual comes from without.

The issue of credibility has been raised, and I think that we need to reaffirm that credibility is by definition not an individual virtue but rather about an individual’s ability to instill confidence in others. In other words, we’re claiming that the office of the Auditor General’s audit is not likely to have the desired effect of restoring public confidence not because we think that any results would be fudged or any past history would leave lingering doubts, but it’s exactly because there have been repeated audits done, and we believe that in the minds of the public that would leave lingering doubts in the minds of the investment community. It is vital to Alberta’s interests that full confidence be restored. This is not a happy situation, to not have that public confidence firmly in place. That’s why we were clear to say that the situation with the Auditor General’s office did not have the required credibility.

3:10

When we look at *Marleau and Montpetit* 524, the text does not prohibit referencing members of the public. It merely discourages doing so, strongly discourages it, but it discourages it. It specifically permits it “in extraordinary circumstances where the national,” and I would argue provincial, “interest calls for the naming of an individual.” Now, we of course didn’t name the individual. We were talking about the office of the Auditor General and the work of the individual that heads that.

It can be argued, perhaps, that we have such a situation here. We are very aware on this side that this situation has now been discussed in the national press around confidence in the Alberta Securities Commission. I think that that is a fairly extraordinary circumstance and one that affects the well-being of all Albertans.

I’ve already pointed out that the Leader of the Official Opposition did not name any member of the public, but he did name an officer of the Assembly, who is charged with doing the business of the Assembly. If I may, that office is an employee of the Assembly and answers to the Assembly, and if we cannot criticize the work of an employee, who can in this context? That employee, that office does

report through the Legislative Offices Committee but does work for all of us in this Assembly.

I believe that members of this Assembly must be permitted to question whether charging that officer or that office with a specific task is the most prudent action to take by the government. The public interest here is not only getting to the bottom of the matter but also to be seen by the public and the investment community to be getting to the bottom of the matter. I would argue that the minister’s comment about dispelling concerns along with the historical connection between the audits done by the Auditor General and the ASC make it impossible to achieve the latter even if the office is fully capable of achieving the former; that is, the audits that have already been performed.

The Leader of the Official Opposition did not slander or slur the Auditor General directly or indirectly as a person. [interjections] There seem to be a number of people who wish to join in this discussion, and I’m sure that the Speaker will recognize them when they choose to be recognized.

Finally, if I may, Mr. Speaker, looking at *Beauchesne* 493(3), the use of protected persons and the phrase “those of high official station” has never been fully or finally defined. The example that we’re given is that it deals with “senior public servants,” and that may well be determined to cover the office of the Auditor General and the staff therein.

Again, this attack was not on the individual but on the suitability for this specific task at hand. The question was specifically around that if audits have already been done and been given a passing grade repeatedly, to ask them to do another one in which there may well be improprieties places that office in a very difficult situation. They’re either going to have to contradict themselves now or before, seeing as those audits exist and are on the public record.

I would argue that the questions that were asked by the Leader of the Official Opposition are not appropriate to be referred to the all-party committee on privileges and elections. Neither do I think they constitute a point of privilege individually or collectively, Mr. Speaker. It is the function of the Official Opposition to hold the government accountable. There were repeated attempts to in this case hold the Minister of Finance accountable for decisions that had been made, and given the context, we had to reference the work of the Auditor General and the staff therein and the work that was cited. There was no intention to directly comment on anyone’s character, but there is an issue of credibility that needs to be addressed, and I would argue that it is significant enough to fall within the parameters of what had been outlined in M and M 524.

So I look forward to the Speaker’s comments on the situation that has been brought before us, but I maintain as the House leader for the Official Opposition that we must have the latitude, respectfully of course, to question the government on the choices and activities that it engages in. That includes, I believe, specific to this case because it was raised, in fact, by the minister, that we had to be able to discuss the activities and credibility of the office of the Auditor General in context with the issue that was before us. To not have done that, we would not have been doing our job in asking the questions that needed to be asked around that issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to be able to discuss this on the record. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won’t take a great deal of time because both members, I think, went to the appropriate 493. I think just on the legal aspect of this 493(3) says that “the Speaker has traditionally protected from attack a group of individuals

commonly referred to as ‘those of high . . . station.’” I think the key point here – at least to my knowledge we have not done that in the Alberta Legislature – is that “the extent of this group has never been defined. Over the years it has covered senior public servants, ranking officers of the armed services.” Obviously, it’s not appropriate to here. Perhaps at some point we should decide in this Legislature who we are talking about, and the Speaker has cautioned members to exercise great care. The other reference is vague in this area too.

So I go to the *Hansard* and look at the questions. I take it that there are two things that seem to have caused some concern.

Given that the Alberta Auditor General has been the auditor of record for the Securities Commission and has repeatedly given the commission unqualified audit approval, will she do the right thing and bring in a genuinely independent out-of-province investigator?

Then the other one probably is that

the Alberta Auditor General has no credibility on this issue given that year after year his office has given the commission a clean audit report.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that perhaps we could say that the questions were intemperate, perhaps a little careless, but I think we do have to err on the side of free speech as much as we can in this Assembly. I would interpret this that it was not the Auditor General that the Leader of the Opposition was going after. He was suggesting that we needed a more public – and I’ve said the same thing – audit than necessarily the Auditor General.

Admittedly the language here, if I may say so, is careless, but I think that if every time in this Assembly somebody uses careless language, we’re going to go to privilege, that’s all we’re going to be doing time after time after time. I know that the Speaker has alerted our attention to this matter, and I think that’s a lesson that we can all perhaps learn, but I would think it’d be overkill, to say the least, if we went to privilege and wasted a lot of the Legislature’s time.

3:20

The point, Mr. Speaker, that I’m making is that you brought it to our attention, and perhaps we need to take a look at 493 in terms of what are the officers that we’re talking about here, because that’s very vague, and perhaps learn from this situation rather than taking a sledgehammer to sort of knock in a nail here. I’d be very careful. Once we go down this slippery route, then I think that it creates a lot of extra time. I say to members that we should always in this House err on the side of free speech and not try to control people.

You could take the interpretation, I suppose, in one way. The government did. I took it another way. For that reason, I don’t think that we should be having to go through that whole privilege motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, who is also the chair of the Legislative Offices Committee.

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is in that capacity as the chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices and as past chair of the all-party search committee which recommended Mr. Dunn’s appointment as Auditor General in March 2002 that I would like to add a few comments to the record regarding some comments by the member, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, that appear to be questioning the credibility of the Auditor General.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Dunn’s appointment was recommended and approved by a unanimous decision of the Select Special Auditor General and Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee, which included the hon. member in the membership. Mr. Dunn’s career achievements and community service were well documented in the search committee’s final report, which was the

subject of Government Motion 23, passed in the House without debate on April 15, 2002.

Since his appointment as Auditor General Mr. Dunn has also received the highest honour available to a chartered accountant, which was his election as a Fellow of the Chartered Accountants in February 2003. This recognition by his peers where his career, professional, and community achievements – and I quote from the Chartered Accountants of Alberta website – “have brought honour to the profession” confirms that Mr. Dunn is held in the highest esteem and would also appear to indicate that his character is above reproach.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other member wishing to make a comment on this matter? Well, then, hon. members, on Thursday last the chair was very, very dismayed by the tone of the questions, so then looked in *Hansard* on Friday to make sure that, again, this was not a mistake and looked at *Hansard* again on Sunday and then looked at *Hansard* again today, and after those four reviews still comes to a conclusion by looking at *Hansard* on page 947 and quoting the following, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview:

We need someone who will get to the bottom of these problems. My questions are to the Minister of Finance. Given that the Alberta Auditor General has been the auditor of record for the Securities Commission and has repeatedly given the commission unqualified audit approval, will she do the right thing and bring in a genuinely independent out-of-province investigator?

Further, the next question:

To the same minister: will she admit that the Alberta Auditor General has no credibility on this issue given that year after year his office has given the commission a clean audit report?

Go on to the next question. Once again the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview:

Again to the same minister: will she admit that the only reason she has asked the Auditor General to prepare one report for her and a separate one for the Legislature and the public is to keep the public in the dark about the real goings-on at the Alberta Securities Commission?

I’m a pretty imaginative person, but I cannot believe that we’re talking about any person other than the Alberta Auditor General in any of this. There’s only one Alberta Auditor General, and the Member for Banff-Cochrane has clearly identified who that Auditor General is and the process by which the Auditor General is among us.

Now, I do want to expand upon some of those comments that were made last Thursday, especially reflecting officers of the Legislature, and it is on the point of officers of the Legislature that I make my comments. I started off by saying that perhaps this was still early in the life of the 26th Legislature, but the fact is that this is not early in the life of the 26th Legislature. This is day 27, I believe. Including the evening sittings probably makes it 54. So the time for inexperience and the time for being a novice and the time for being a rookie is behind us. That’s not an excuse anymore.

The chair wants to identify for members that the officers of the Legislature are the Auditor General, the Chief Electoral Officer, the Ethics Commissioner, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and the Ombudsman. These individuals are all appointed or reappointed on the recommendation of a special search committee or the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices. Each and every appointment is the subject of a motion in this Assembly. All are debatable, and all are amendable. These five officers occupy positions that by statute are independent of government. The fact that the sums required to run these offices are not part of the government’s estimates but those of the Legislative Assembly reflects this principle of independence from the government.

Last Thursday the chair referred members to paragraph 493 of *Beauchesne's* and page 524 of Marleau and Montpetit, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. The same principle of not reflecting on certain persons in debate is found in *Erskine May*, the 23rd edition, at pages 438 and 439. If there is any doubt after reading those authorities, it is the chair's view that the officers of the Legislature in the province of Alberta occupy positions of "high official status," as the term is used in *Beauchesne* 493(3), similar to judges and senior public servants even though they are not specifically mentioned. To be absolutely clear, this chair will not tolerate personal attacks against officers of the Legislature.

Hon. members, so that there's no misunderstanding, the chair is not attempting in any way to become involved with questions on the grounds that they deal with sensitive issues. This was not the reason for the chair's comment last Thursday. The chair intervened because it was the chair's view that there were allegations or innuendos about the individuals who serve as officers of the Legislature. This chair takes very seriously the rights of members to freedom of speech in this Assembly. However, it is the chair's role to ensure that this important right is exercised fairly and within the limits that have been recognized in this and other Assemblies over many years.

The chair also wants to take this opportunity to say that for the most part the use of language in this Chamber and the decorum of members is of a high standard amongst jurisdictions in Canada. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview cautioned us about having to deal with this on a regular basis. The fact is, hon. members, that we deal with this on a very infrequent basis. If hon. members want to go back in *Hansard*, hon. members can go back to 1999, when to the chagrin of most of us, on November 23, 1999, when one hon. member was providing to the Assembly the report of the information and privacy committee, the then member for Edmonton-Riverview said, "Whose pocket is he in?" in reference to an officer of this Assembly. That created quite a commotion in this Assembly on that day in 1999 and led to considerable anxiety amongst the various members. It led to a retraction, and the retraction came before further serious damage could have been done to a particular individual.

Then from 1999 we switch to March 23, 2005. Hardly a frequent occurrence, a very infrequent occurrence. On March 23, 2005, another Member for Edmonton-Riverview used the following phrase in saying this about another member: "Who is she trying to protect?" That led to a discussion and was dealt with by a two-line retraction on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

So this is not a frequent thing. This is an infrequent thing. The House is not wasting its time in dealing with these matters. The House's time is well used in terms of dealing with this.

I repeat: for the most part – and this is the 99th year of history of this Assembly – the use of language in this Chamber and the decorum of members is of a high standard amongst jurisdictions in Canada. In fact, I believe the highest standard of decorum of any jurisdiction in Canada is found in this Assembly, and that's good. However, members may have recently noted that the tone and content of proceedings in other Assemblies in this land may not today be of the similar high standard that they were accustomed to seeing even in those Assemblies. There has been a deterioration in two Assemblies for sure, but that deterioration is not the tradition and it's not the practice in this Assembly.

3:30

I believe that people of Alberta expect members to conduct themselves in the best traditions of parliamentary democracy. This chair intends to meet those expectations for the good of this institution and for the good of all of its members.

The chair views the question of what constitutes proper parliamentary language in an Assembly in the 21st century as such an important matter that I'm now going to make a suggestion to the Assembly. Regardless of whether or not a motion for privilege is proceeded with – and I would hope, in fact, that on the basis of what I've said, that we've now entered a new century, perhaps there is an important time every once in a while to stop and review everything that we are doing and ask ourselves the question: is this appropriate for the time that we're now in?

I'm going to ask the hon. members through the various House leaders to consider a motion to refer this whole matter to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing or by creating a special select committee to look at this and other parliamentary issues as was done in 1993, when the chair was the Government House Leader, to review in particular the language, such things as put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, the specific identification, even though the chair has already indicated that in his mind the officers of the Legislative Assembly are those people who meet those offices of high standard, and generally to review this whole question of decorum and decorum in our Assembly.

We'll soon be entering our 100th year, and I believe that there's a caution that must be given to all members that we have to be better than what some members would see us be on any given day. I think the people of Alberta expect that of us, and I think that if there's any gift we can give to the people of Alberta on our 100th anniversary of this Legislative Assembly, it is to recognize that the highest calling in the land is to be an elected person, and we should be expected to act in the highest possible standard.

I want all members to know that if there are questions such as the type that were raised in this Assembly last Thursday, there will be an immediate intervention from the chair henceforth, and if that means that that time is now lost in the question period, that is the way it will be. Those questions will be ruled out of order, and the member will also be told that that's it for his or her participation in the question period on that day. There will be a vigilance. I will not allow people who are officers of this Assembly to be chastised in this Assembly.

Thank you.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Appropriate notice having been given on Thursday, April 21, I now rise 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. Appropriate notice having been served on Thursday, April 21, it's my pleasure to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 24, 25, and 26.

[Motion carried]

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I would like to request unanimous consent to reduce the time between division bells to one minute specifically in connection with any divisions which may or may not arise during Motions for Returns this afternoon.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there is a motion before the Assembly. The chair can only assume that there has been some discussion between various House leaders with respect to this matter. The motion basically is that if there is a division, shorten the time between bells to one minute. So there's anticipation there's going to be a division. It would be shortened to one minute. That's the motion.

Anybody want to participate on this? It's a debatable motion.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would have to suggest that at least on the first division we should not agree to that because members are perhaps not aware that the bells would be shortened, and it would be unfair to them.

Now, there may have been a lapse of communication this morning. I understand from discussion just now across the House that it was raised with my executive assistant, but this is the first that I'm aware of the request, and certainly I have not taken the opportunity to apprise caucus members, so they may be anticipating that they would have the full 10 minutes to arrive.

Now, after that happened, I wouldn't have any objection once members had been in the House, had been called, and were aware of the process for the afternoon. Shortening the bells at that time would be quite an appropriate process.

The Speaker: Okay. Normally these motions are not debatable because it requires unanimous consent, but because I saw so many heads shaking with respect to this and in the light and the continuation of what I said about harmony in the Assembly just a few minutes ago, I allowed that interjection of the Government House Leader.

So we have a motion which requires unanimous consent. Not a problem. If you're opposed to it, you've already said it.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, do you wish to continue?

Temporary Foreign Workers

M24. Mr. Backs moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any and all documents pertaining to the June 2004 memorandum of understanding between the government and the federal government regarding foreign temporary workers.

[Debate adjourned April 18: Mr. Backs speaking]

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We spoke to this particular motion for a return quite extensively last Monday and ended the session with it. I just have to say that it's a very legitimate request that would be in the public interest to show Albertans that any and all . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, excuse me.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On a point of order. If I could ask the Speaker to clarify that last ruling. I'm confused as to whether or not the motion was debatable. If it was debatable, I certainly wanted to debate it.

The Speaker: It was not.

Mr. Mason: It was not?

The Speaker: No, it was not.

Mr. Mason: Thank you.

Debate Continued

Mr. Backs: Just to continue, Mr. Speaker, we spoke this through quite a bit last Monday, and a number of speakers spoke to it. The key issue is that these documents should be released in the public interest. That there would be things that were submitted in confidence that would be released by letting this go forward I think is questionable to me. It would be certainly in the public interest to do so. I think that this request should go forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to Motion for a Return 24 on behalf of the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment I just wanted to reference for everyone's attention that this particular motion did receive considerable debate.

The Speaker: You know what, hon. member? When I recognized the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, it was to close the debate, so I now have to call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion for a Return 24 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:38 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Backs	Hinman	Miller, R.
Blakeman	MacDonald	Pastoor
Bonko	Martin	Swann
Elsalhy	Mason	Taylor
Flaherty	Mather	

3:50

Against the motion:

Boutilier	Johnson	Oberle
Cao	Johnston	Pham
Coutts	Knight	Renner
DeLong	Liepert	Rodney
Evans	Lougheed	Snelgrove
Forsyth	Magnus	Stelmach
Graydon	Mar	Stevens
Griffiths	Marz	Strang
Groeneveld	McClellan	Tarchuk

Herard Horner Jablonski	Mitzel Morton	VanderBurg Zwozdesky
Total	For – 14	Against – 34

[Motion for a Return 24 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to just take the Government House Leader's lead one step further and now make the motion that subsequent division bells, should there be any for the remainder of the afternoon, be limited to one minute in duration. I believe all members have now had a chance to understand and hear what the intention behind that shortening of division bells was all about. I would put that motion forward for consideration at this time.

The Speaker: Hon. members, such motions that require revisions to the routine require unanimous consent. Is there any member opposed to this motion put forward by the hon. Government House Leader?

Ms Blakeman: Yes, sir. I'm opposed to it.

The Speaker: Okay. That's it.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Department of Energy Salary Contracts

M25. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the salaries of contracted employees and/or consultants employed by the Ministry and Department of Energy during the 2003-04 fiscal year broken down by amount and position title.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would appreciate getting this information from the Department of Energy. We know that in one case – I believe it's the business unit manager for electricity that is a hired hand from California, and I just wonder how many more hired hands there are in that department that do not work directly for the department through the normal hiring processes around our civil service.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, precisely how many contracted employees there are I think would be interesting reading. We know what the costs for civil servants' salaries are, but in a lot of cases we don't know what the costs of these contracted employees or consultants would be, what costs would be involved, and how many other consultants there are in that department. We know that that department has been having a great deal of trouble figuring out what to do with the mess over electricity deregulation.

Mr. Speaker, there is trouble in that department. There seems to be a great deal of trouble, and I for one can't understand why we would need to hire an expert from California. Surely to gosh there would be some home-grown help here that could try to fix these problems. I don't know. Maybe they could even read our low-cost energy plan and have a look at that and use that as a model to get out of this policy dilemma that we're in with electricity deregulation.

Certainly, that would be my interest in seeking this information at this time, Mr. Speaker, to find out just how many contract employ-

ees there are, how many consultants, and how much they're getting paid. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutilier: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure. Based on the motion on the record pertaining to that of contract employees and consultants employed by the Ministry of Energy during the fiscal year broken down by the amount and position title, the government is quite prepared to accept MR 25.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close debate.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Environment for that information, and hopefully I will not have to wait through the fullness of time to receive that information because I'm very interested in having a look at it quite soon. Thank you, and I appreciate it.

[Motion for a Return 25 carried]

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

Minister of Energy Noninternational Trip Expenses

M26. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a detailed breakdown of all expenses incurred by the Minister of Energy, his staff, and/or designate on noninternational trips during the 2003-04 fiscal year.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, whenever we talk about noninternational trips, we are talking about, of course, travel within Canada. We on this side of the House on more than one occasion check out respective ministerial websites just to see how much money has been spent on international trips. The last international trip by the Department of Energy is one that's going on right now, and it's costing over \$8,000, a trip to Washington, DC. I don't know whether it's to check up on our envoy or our ambassador there – is there a mid-term report card on the ambassador? – or what's going on. I thought the ambassador could look after things in Washington, and the Department of Energy could spend less time travelling there because the agent was in place, the job details had been described to us, and the man was going to get to work, but now we find out that \$8,000 has been spent on international trips just recently.

With noninternational trips – that's trips within the country – it would be great to find out just what is going on with this department. I was astonished to find out in question period this afternoon that one of the King Airs was worn out, that it was on a 10-week maintenance schedule. I can understand that with all the trips the government members make in these airplanes, it would need a lengthy maintenance overhaul because, certainly, with our government airplanes, they're up and down. They take off and land more often than a crop-duster would. Some of these take-offs and landings would be on trips that are occurring within this country, and certainly with the Department of Energy it would be good information to receive just to see where and when the Minister of Energy is flying within in the country and with whom.

Thank you.

Mr. Boutilier: I don't have much experience with crop-dusting, so

I can't offer any more insight into the hon. member's comments. Clearly, in the government's spirit of openness and transparency, which is important to all Albertans and that I know all members of all sides of the House certainly adhere to, it's indeed my pleasure on behalf of the Minister of Energy to again indicate that the government is quite prepared to accept MR 26 as was requested relative to showing "a detailed breakdown of [the] expenses incurred by the Minister of Energy, his staff, and/or designate on noninternational trips during the 2003-04 fiscal year." That's something that I think should put a smile on everyone's face in that spirit of openness and transparency accountable to all Albertans.

4:00

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I'd just have a question for the person sitting over there: who are you, and what have you done with the real Minister of Environment?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I could potentially call the hon. member on a point of something, but I will not. To the hon. person on the other side I want to say: I hope you're enjoying this beautiful day that God and the Ministry of Environment delivered today outside. He might consider going outside for a breath of fresh air and to contemplate the beautiful day that we enjoy.

Mr. Mason: That's the minister that I know and love, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: You've already spoken, so you can't speak again.

Mr. Mason: Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else on the motion?

[Motion for a Return 26 carried]

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

**Bill 201
Smoke-free Places Act**

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon, everyone. It is a pleasure to rise today and introduce third reading of Bill 201, the Smoke-free Places Act. As sponsor of the bill it should come as no surprise that I would have preferred an unamended version in third reading, but I want to point out that I'm very appreciative of the work that was done to find a wording that could be agreed upon by the majority. I'd therefore like to thank the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster for bringing forward the amendments during Committee of the Whole debate. I would also like to thank all of the other hon. members who participated in the debate.

I believe Bill 201 in its current form supports and reflects AADAC's Alberta tobacco reduction strategy as well as government policy. This is an important aspect of any private member's legislation. Bill 201 also respects the authority of municipalities to make what they think are the best decisions for their constituents and for their local business community.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to acknowledge the remarkable debate which has taken place on this issue over the past couple of months both in the Legislature and throughout the province of Alberta.

Upon reviewing *Hansard*, I was encouraged by the level of debate which took place. I also recall the number of members who in their maiden speeches and replies to the throne speech called for a session full of lively and productive debate, and I'm pleased that this bill provided an avenue for exactly that. I believe that this has at least in part inspired the majority of Albertans to take again an active interest in the proceedings of this House, and that can only be a very good thing.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge all of the Albertans who have called, e-mailed, and written letters to me over the last number of weeks. It's evident that this is an issue Albertans are concerned about and have an opinion on.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the support of my colleagues. It's unlikely that Bill 201 could have made it to third reading without the work that the members in this House have done to establish a compromise that is acceptable to the majority of Albertans both urban and rural.

Mr. Speaker, there are individuals who feel that this legislation is not going far enough, and I will not disagree with that opinion. However, the fact of the matter is that not every Albertan is ready for an extensive, province-wide ban on smoking quite yet. What may be most important to this process, however, is the increased awareness of the impact of second-hand smoke, the increased support for the wellness agenda, and the increased personal interest in a healthy lifestyle by Albertans. I believe that the amended bill does at least two things extremely well. It protects children and respects choice, and these are both extremely important ideals.

I do not believe that the Smoke-free Places Act as Bill 201 was in its original form would have received majority support anywhere in Alberta 20 years ago. However, an increase in information and education concerning the hazards of smoking and the health effects of second-hand smoke has resulted in smoke-free places being established throughout the province in the last while, and I find that extremely encouraging. Cities such as Edmonton and Calgary have reached a point where they along with their constituents are ready for an extensive prohibition on smoking in public places and workplaces, as are the municipalities of Banff, Airdrie, St. Albert, and others.

However, there are other jurisdictions throughout Alberta that have held municipal plebiscites on this issue which did not pass. So it is clear that these areas are not yet ready for an extensive prohibition on smoking in public places and workplaces. I am confident, however, that in a short amount of time these jurisdictions will be ready. In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, it is not the duty of this Legislature to force all Albertans to prohibit smoking. Instead, it is our duty as stewards to provide the tools necessary to promote a healthier province.

At this point I would like to remind our hon. members that although this legislation is in a sense a smoking ban, it is not about forcing smokers to quit smoking. Rather, its focus and purpose is about protecting the health and rights of nonsmokers who are involuntarily exposed to second-hand smoke. Unfortunately, this basic objective of Bill 201 may have gotten lost during debate from time to time. It's crucial that we keep this objective of protecting nonsmokers from second-hand smoke as the priority of this legislation. Mr. Speaker, Bill 201 is not about protecting the health of smokers or taking away the rights of smokers. It is about protecting the health of nonsmokers and protecting the rights of nonsmokers.

There is no doubt that smokers put a strain on Alberta's health care system, as do alcoholics, and obesity is also considered a strain on the health care system. In fact, many consider that it is quickly becoming a major epidemic. However, the difference between these afflictions and those of second-hand smoke is that drinking alcohol

and problems with weight are more often than not addictions and health problems that are isolated to the individual.

Exposure to second-hand smoke is different from these diseases in that it does not just affect the individual who chooses to smoke and put their own health at risk; it also affects individuals in the area around them, especially children. It's important that we make this distinction between affecting the rights of smokers and protecting the health of Albertans, especially children, who are involuntarily exposed to second-hand smoke.

I'm confident that Bill 201 in its current form establishes an acceptable provincial baseline throughout Alberta concerning smoking in public places and workplaces. It provides the bottom rung of the ladder, which municipalities, the province, and our country will hopefully continue to climb one rung at a time soon.

While this legislation has been altered from the original intent, more importantly, it is a step in the right direction. One of the most important lessons I've learned in life is that overcoming obstacles is best achieved through the utilization of careful, well-thought-out strategies. I've also learned that achievement is gained in increments with both individual responsibility and team effort that allow for proper consideration for the consequences of others.

I'm confident that our municipal partners will continue to institute smoking bylaws which reflect what is best for their constituents and their areas of business. I am confident that Alberta will one day soon see a province-wide smoking ban equal to the original intent of Bill 201. Until that time I know that we will continue to move forward in small steps, and I hope that all members will agree that prohibiting smoking in establishments which permit minors is an appropriate step at this time. While we protect the health of Alberta's children and respect the choice of Alberta's municipalities and businesses, we continue to move toward the ultimate goal of a healthier, safer Alberta for all Albertans.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would again like to thank my colleagues for their support and consideration. It's been an incredible experience, and I'm honoured and humbled to have been a small part of it. I look forward to this last stage of debate of Bill 201, the Smoke-free Places Act, and I encourage all members to support this legislation as a sign of our mutual progress towards a healthier Alberta and a step in the right direction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:10

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have this opportunity to participate in debate on Bill 201 this afternoon, the Smoke-free Places Act. I was listening with a great deal of interest to the sponsor of the bill, the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, and his explanation as to why we should support this bill at this time. Certainly, the hon. member's presentation has some merit, but when we look at Bill 201 and we see Smoke-free Places Act as its title, unfortunately after the amendments that were passed by this Assembly, the bill now reads Some Smoke-free Places Act in this province. We have completely changed the whole intent of this bill from a total workplace smoking ban without exceptions to what we have now.

If we look at what AADAC had done whenever they conducted a poll in 2003, they found that a large group of Albertans, nearly 80 per cent of people, across the province supported banning smoking in the workplace, and 77 per cent supported the prohibition in restaurants. These numbers varied little, it is interesting to note, across the province, whether it was in rural or urban areas. So we proceeded, as everyone knows, with this private member's legisla-

tion, and I was surprised whenever it was amended and it then became Some Smoke-free Places Act, not a total smoking ban.

Certainly, there were concerns raised by many hon. members in this Assembly that a workplace smoking ban would in some cases protect some employees but not all employees, but if we had a total ban, we would really be protecting employees. Now, is there going to be, as a result of this amendment, a change in WCB premiums? Are we going to have restaurants that have employees that work in the nonsmoking section or a bar or in any other public place employees that work in the nonsmoking section – are they going to pay less WCB premium than those that have to work in the place where there's all kinds of second-hand smoke? I have not heard an answer to that in the discussion to date on Bill 201.

We also have this idea that a workplace smoking ban, if we went ahead with this bill as it was initially drafted, would be bad for business. Well, experience shows that customers may be turned away, for instance, from a bar on a temporary basis, but they come back, and they adjust, and I think we're all better off for it.

Now, there shouldn't be any exceptions, Mr. Speaker. We can't just start making exceptions to smoke-free places. As soon as we allow one exception, we will have requests for more. Where do the exceptions end once we begin allowing them? If this were asbestos or some other comparable toxic workplace hazard, we wouldn't even be having these discussions about exemptions, and I think we're forgetting too quickly some of the nonsmoking advocates who have been pleading with not only Albertans but Canadians to quit smoking. Smoking in the workplace is a workplace hazard, and it should be treated as one. There are no exceptions. This isn't about protecting the smoker, I don't think. This is certainly about protecting the worker. A complete ban is necessary to level the playing field for all businesses.

Now, when we look at this, we remind ourselves again and again that most Albertans are ready for a smoke-free environment. If Bill 201 in its current form is acceptable, it is unacceptable to the grassroots Progressive Conservatives, the majority of the Progressive Conservatives from Alberta who attended the policy convention the first of this month. There was a vote. There were perhaps one-sixth of the delegates – I wasn't at the convention. I would like to have free observer status to the Tory convention sometime. I'd like to go, but it'd have to be free.

Mr. Graydon: We'll work on that.

Mr. MacDonald: I'd appreciate that. If you could work at that, I would be grateful.

There was a policy session there, and grassroots party members voted 250 to 4 to support a smoking ban in all public buildings. The same idea was expressed originally by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Now, at this time, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce an amendment at third reading here to Bill 201 to give all hon. members of this Legislative Assembly a second chance at giving the Progressive Conservative grassroots members their wish. I will take my seat, Mr. Speaker, until the amendment has been circulated to all hon. members of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The amendment that is being circulated I would like now to read into the record. I'm moving an amendment that the motion for third reading

of Bill 201, Smoke-free Places Act, be amended by deleting all the words after “that” and substituting the following: “Bill 201, Smoke-free Places Act, be not now read a third time but that it be recommitted to Committee of the Whole for the purpose of reconsidering section 5(3).” That section 5 has to deal with the exceptions that we talked about earlier.

When we look at this, I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to have a good, hard look at this amendment. Now, I was stating earlier that the Conservative Party delegates resoundingly backed a resolution demanding much stronger antitobacco laws from the government than it is going to pass with this Bill 201. The Premier stated this: “It can’t be done in this legislative session.” The Premier told some reporters that were assembled at the close of the Conservative Party convention.

This amendment in third reading to recommit this bill to Committee of the Whole gives this Legislative Assembly another chance at this time. It’s sort of the equivalent of the patch, but in this case this is a political patch because we can repair a bill. We can stop the process of this bill, and we can move it back, and we can repair it.

4:20

Now, as I said earlier, the majority of Progressive Conservative grassroots delegates that were at that policy session strongly endorsed a smoking ban in all public buildings. Also, it is interesting to note that the Premier stated at that policy convention that there is little that he can do to tinker with Bill 201, the Smoke-free Places Act, because it is too far through the legislative process to reconsider a blanket ban. Well, it’s not. We’re not all the way there, and hon. members we can move this back. We can have a look at the exemptions under section 5 and perhaps abide by the wishes of not only the citizens that are expressing their interest in a total smoking ban with AADAC but also the members of the Progressive Conservative Party.

Thank you. Please vote for my amendment.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the amendment that has been made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I think that it certainly reflects the thinking in the New Democrat caucus as well, that we ought not to read this bill for the first time, and it should be recommitted to the Committee of the Whole.

I think the motion that has been made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar doesn’t go far enough, Mr. Speaker. So I would like to propose an amendment to his amendment, and that amendment would read as follows: “Bill 201, Smoke-free Places Act, be not now read a third time but that it be recommitted to the Committee of the Whole for the purpose of reconsidering sections 5(3) and 10.”

So I’d like that motion to be distributed as well, and when members have it I’ll speak to it.

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, Mr. Speaker, I’m not sure whether we have to deal with the second amendment or the first amendment, so I’ll deal with the first amendment.

At that convention that the hon. member talks about, there were over 1,800 people, one of the biggest political conventions in this province’s history, and they dealt with a lot of issues.

Mr. Mason: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: You don’t have the floor.

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, I’ve got it over you.

The simple fact is: if we start to revisit these bills, where does it quit?

Mr. Mason: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. I believe I have the floor.

Point of Order Subamendments

The Deputy Speaker: Perhaps if you would allow me to read what you’re doing.

The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster is asking for clarification.

I would ask the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood: is this an amendment to the amendment?

Mr. Mason: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: So it’s a subamendment to the amendment.

Mr. Mason: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. So we would speak on that first when we decide to speak on it, after everybody’s got a copy of it.

The hon. Minister for Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I just wonder if I could get some clarification from the floor. These are somewhat unusual amendments. Can you advise if there is further debate allowed on this bill after these amendments have been dealt with, or if these amendments would be treated in a similar manner to a hoist amendment, in which case there is no further debate after the amendments have been dealt with? I think it will make a difference on whether or not members wish to participate at this stage or at a later stage, after these amendments have been dealt with by the House.

The Deputy Speaker: There would be a vote on each of the amendments, and then there would be further discussion on the bill as amended or not, but there would be no immediate question as in a hoist.

I could provide some further clarification to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. This is an amendment in itself, not an amendment to an amendment. So we would have to deal with the amendment on the floor first. Then if you want, introduce this as an amendment, but this is an amendment to the bill, not an amendment to the amendment.

So we are back speaking on the amendment as proposed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for that. Then I’ll continue with my comments, and maybe you can reset my clock.

Debate Continued

Mr. Mason: I want to just indicate that I will be supporting the amendment put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and indicate that while I think this section 10 should be added as well, this certainly will do the trick.

Now, I want to indicate that, Mr. Speaker, in fact, I was extremely disappointed with the amendments that were made to the original bill. If we go back to just before the session, the New Democrat opposition had a news conference at which we outlined plans to introduce the following motion to the Assembly, Motion 507: “Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to prohibit smoking in public buildings and indoor workplaces.”

Shortly after that, Mr. Speaker, there was quite a bit of interest in the introduction of Bill 201, which proposed to do exactly the same thing as the motion that we had put on the Order Paper for this

session of the Assembly. We all know the reasons why that is, and I think that the real question here that we need to focus on is whether or not people who are employed in an employment capacity should be exposed to second-hand smoke.

Now, the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed has indicated that some parts of the province are not ready for this, and the question is: whether or not parts of the province are ready or not, should they then be permitted to expose others to second-hand smoke? Whether or not those people want to or not, they are exposed as a result of their employment capacity. So should we then allow majorities in certain parts of the province to override the concern that we have for our workers who may work in bars and at bingo halls and so forth?

Mr. Speaker, I think that there are not very many times that I agree with the Conservative Party's delegates at their convention.

Mr. MacDonald: Their grassroots.

Mr. Mason: Their grassroots, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar reminds me. This is a government that prides itself in keeping in touch with the grassroots. Yet shortly after the confusion of the Conservative government and caucus over what they were going to do with this bill and the Premier's statements that swung back and forth like a weather vane for a month or so there, then they finally decided that they were going to amend this bill and essentially gut it, essentially take out the important aspects of the bill and allow, basically, smoking to take place in workplaces. Then, sure enough, the Conservative grassroots in a rare flash of logic indicated that – they passed a motion. They voted, in fact, 250 to 4 to support a complete smoking ban in all public buildings. So, obviously, the government and the Conservative caucus are offside with their own delegates to their own convention.

4:30

In a further demonstration of irony, Mr. Speaker, at the very same time that this bill was watered down, the state of Montana – which has served as Marlboro country in magazine ads which depict rugged cowboys puffing on cigarettes while riding a fence line – has moved to outlaw smoking just about everywhere but the great outdoors. The state Legislature voted earlier this month to ban smoking in all enclosed public places, including bars and restaurants. The Senate of that state passed the measure 40 to 10. Now, the governor has also said that he's going to sign the bill. I think that it's interesting that the lawmakers in that state have "acknowledged the health dangers of secondhand smoke and instead argued over whether the ban is the kind of heavy-handed government action that riles Montanans, who have long admired the rugged individualism represented by cowboys."

Now, Senator Joe Balyeat of Bozeman – and he's a Republican, Mr. Speaker, so, I mean, he's, you know, a sort of a distant cousin of members opposite – said, "Smoking is just plain stupid. But if this Legislature decided to outlaw stupidity, I think two-thirds of us would be behind bars. I just don't think we can legislate against stupidity." So he mirrors or echoes the statements of our own Premier, but he is not at all in the majority down there, and common sense has prevailed in Montana.

So I want to just suggest to members opposite that we should send this bill back to Committee of the Whole and reconsider the amendments that have been made by this Assembly, which I view as ill advised and not productive. Now, I know I have a lot to say about smoking and the effects of smoking and the public policy as it respects smoking, but I think, Mr. Speaker, that those points have been made before, and so I will take my seat.

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, briefly on the amendment. The amendment suggests that we should send this back to the committee. There is so little time in this House that we get to use for private members' business that I'm quite frankly surprised that the opposition doesn't seem to have any problem wasting Monday after Monday on questions they may feel are important. We've passed one private member's bill after a very passionate plea from the sponsor, and now we're caught up finally, getting close to having resolution on a second bill, and we want to go study it again. Well, to the colleagues from your side and the colleagues from this side that have their own private bills that are very important to them too, they deserve the time in this House, and one bill shouldn't take all our time.

So if you think that we have more duty to one private member than the other by giving more time for private bills, I disagree. I think the time that the private members have in here is too small as it is. We should deal with this matter and get on with other more important issues.

Dr. Swann: Well, with all due respect, I think there are some bills that are more important than others. This is a critically important precedent in Alberta, the first provincial bill that I'm aware of that would regulate smoking in public places. I think that anyone who has worked with people with sensitivities to tobacco, anyone with chronic lung disease, anyone with allergies, anyone with cancer or who has watched someone die of cancer has to recognize that this is a critical time for Alberta to take some leadership. I know that you can, and I know many of you want to. I guess I would just encourage the Assembly to take this opportunity and review this once again.

In that context, I just want to say a few things about what it means to me as a physician and what I think it means to most Albertans, as indicated in many of the polls, and particularly in the workplace, where we are exposing young people, pregnant women, and unwilling nonsmokers to a carcinogenic substance and a substance that actually aggravates asthma, chronic lung disease, and heart disease.

It's unconscionable that we wouldn't take the next step, as many jurisdictions are – and we're far behind some jurisdictions already at this stage – that we wouldn't honour the commitment that the original mover of this Bill 201 had in mind when he suggested that all people's lungs, whether young or old, deserve to be protected from environmental tobacco smoke. I know that most of you have indicated that in the first and second readings of this bill.

It's clear, also, that the economy will benefit from this legislation, not only the local economies, but also our health care budget would be less impacted by removing second-hand smoke from those who are wanting to avoid it. The health of people, a fundamental ethical issue promoting the health of our population: this flies in the face of investments in cancer therapy when we know that this is a cancer-causing agent and we are yet not prepared to reduce that possibility of impacts on young and older employees in the workplace.

I would just simply ask sincerely that all members give this amendment due consideration and consider the possibility of really showing some amazing leadership in this province to give it yet a second review and help us to move Alberta into the forefront in Canada.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to thank

the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed for bringing Bill 201 forward originally. I supported this bill because I believe it is the right thing to do. I'm disappointed that this bill has amendments that result in a watered-down version of the original.

We have lots of research and evidence that smoking is harmful to smokers and to those who experience second-hand smoke. We also know that health-related costs for smoking are enormous. Bill 201's original intent was to make a real difference for our society. We know that smokers who work in an environment that's smoke free are more likely to quit smoking. There are other studies that show smokers have decreased productivity, extra time taken on smoke breaks, increased sick days, increased health care costs.

There's evidence that a workplace smoking ban doesn't hurt business. I was looking at a report on it from 1998. All of California's restaurants and bars went smoke free. According to the California Board of Equalization, sales at places selling beer, wine, and liquor increased every quarter in 1998, 1999, and into 2000, the last period for which data is available. What's more, sales increases at these establishments outpaced by nearly 8 per cent increases at all other types of retail outlets.

Again, according to the New York department of health and mental hygiene, smoke-free workplace legislation has become increasingly popular. While 65 per cent of bar patrons in California strongly or somewhat approved of the law in 1998, almost three-quarters, 73 per cent, felt that way by 2000. Also, by 2000, 87 per cent of bar patrons in California reported that they were as likely or more likely to visit bars since they had become smoke free.

4:40

I quote also from the New York City department of health and mental hygiene.

Businesses with smoke-free policies experience less absenteeism when non-smoking employees are no longer exposed to second-hand smoke, which can trigger asthma attacks and other respiratory illnesses . . . Employers also see lower housekeeping and maintenance costs because they no longer need to clean ashtrays, sweep up cigarette butts, replace burnt carpeting, or clean fabrics and other materials nearly as often.

Smoking cessation programs in the workplace may also achieve substantial cost savings as well as productivity benefits. Workers who have stopped smoking for at least one year lose significantly fewer days of work and have fewer admissions to hospitals than those that continue to smoke.

This is about protecting the worker and not about the smoker. The evidence behind a total workplace smoking ban is clear.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we're speaking to the amendment to the bill, not the bill itself.

Mrs. Mather: Okay. I'll go to that.

I referred back to the intent of the original bill and that the amendments that we were going to be looking at today have watered this down considerably. It is with that that I need to say that on the basis of discussion with parents and students in my constituency I want to support this amendment because it will give us some real meaning, some real teeth. I believe that the watered-down version does not do justice to the intent of the original bill.

So I support the amendment to Bill 201, as I see it as addressing a smoking situation which has created a huge health concern in our province. I see this as a small step towards a province-wide smoking ban and better health. The amendment, however, can result in a larger step and, I believe, make a real difference.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Calgary-Lougheed, who brought forward a good bill, seemed to indicate that he's somewhat satisfied under the circumstances with getting what he can. I'd say to the hon. member that you're easily satisfied. I honestly believe that these particular amendments that were brought forward on the original bill gut the bill totally.

In terms of the 5(3), which the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is asking go back, it "designates the public place or workplace or a part of the public place or workplace as a place where smoking is permitted." Well, virtually a whole town could set up a number of places that they could designate as smoking. I mean, it's almost an encouragement to set up these places if you want to, and many of these places where they want these particular bars or whatever the case may be, they're going to do it. As a result, we're not going to be any further ahead, I don't believe, because a good bill has been gutted.

I know that it's not easy being a member of the government when this happens. But there are some times, hon. member, that you can't come back and say that you're satisfied because you can't be satisfied with this particular bill. I know, Mr. Speaker, that you have to go along, I guess.

I'm surprised because I think there's an opportunity for the government. It was mentioned that there were a couple things that happened. I don't think it could be clearer than when a Conservative convention votes 250 to 4. That's a pretty strong message that they're sending to do something. They're sending it to this caucus and this government. I would've thought cooler heads, the idea that we can't do anything at this stage – the amendment from Edmonton-Gold Bar is that we still can do something about this bill, and we'd be satisfying the grassroots of the Conservative Party and Albertans, generally, with this approach.

I see, as my colleague talked about, the Marlboro place, you know, moving ahead; other provinces are moving ahead. Here we're going to be Alberta, the home of smoking, compared to other places.

The reality is that part of it is the second-hand smoke. I know that the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed is well aware of that. It's second-hand smoke that people, if they want to work in a certain place that's been designated as smoking, are going to have to inhale it or they don't have a job. For many people that's not an option. But we've allowed them to go ahead and do this with this amendment. The Senate – I shouldn't say it. I won't even talk about that. There should be something of some sober second thought here in this Legislature. We still have the opportunity to do this.

Those things have occurred: the Conservative convention and Montana moving ahead. Those are two significant events that have happened since we debated this bill. If, as my colleague said, they care about the grassroots and what the people at the convention are saying, they should be prepared to go back and redo this.

The other point about it beyond the health hazards and the smoking is that what has happened in this province is a checkerboard economically. If you happen to be in one municipality that's outlawed smoking and there's another one close by, that's created some economic hardships for people in that municipality. Well, this is still going to do that. One municipality says: oh well, we're going to have this smoking; we'll vote on this; we're going to designate this as smoking where minors can't come in, and this one and this one and this one. The same thing is still there. We're still going to have a checkerboard. Some businesses where municipalities have done the right thing and banned smoking are going to be still at a disadvantage economically if they live closer to another area because

those people can just drive out. Say it's Clareview or Beverly. They can drive out to Sherwood Park or others.

I guess we haven't accomplished what the members set out to do in this bill. I know that we've put on our rose-coloured glasses, and we try to say: well, it's a step in the right direction. I honestly don't believe it is. I honestly believe that this bill has been gutted, and the same things will occur that occurred before because it's going to be an easy thing to designate a public place or workplace or part of a public place where smoking is permitted. So as I said, the check-board is there, Mr. Speaker. I don't see that anything has really changed with this bill.

That's why the amendment should get some serious second thought from members over there, so that we can go back and bring the bill back to the Committee of the Whole. Do what the Conservative grassroots want, do what Albertans want, do what the opposition wants, do what I believe the minister of health and the Minister of Community Development the first time they voted wanted, do what the Member for Calgary-Lougheed wants and have a bill that we can be proud of.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the hon. member, this is not a step in the right direction. It is the status quo as far as I'm concerned. For that reason, I would hope that the members would take a look at this and refer it back to the Committee of the Whole for the purpose of reconsidering section 5(3).

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak against the amendment, and there are a number of reasons that I would like to do that. The main reason I would like to speak against the amendment is because I think that the most important thing is to get Bill 201 passed. The reason I think that's important is because just as my city of Red Deer, the city of Edmonton, and the city of Calgary have gone about this thing in stages, I think we need to do that for the rest of Alberta as well.

Red Deer has the law right now where if you have anybody coming into your facility under the age of 18, there's no smoking allowed. I think it's worked in a wonderful, wonderful way because there is no restaurant in Red Deer that you can go into that allows smoking. I suppose there may be a smoking room to the back or to the side which I've never experienced, but in all restaurants when you walk in, there is no smoking. So it's done a marvellous thing for the locations where you'll find children most often. Within the next year I believe that Red Deer is going to move to a total ban. It's going to be something that our city council is going to decide, and I'm very proud of that.

I'd like to see a total ban in the province, but I think it's unfair to expect communities that haven't taken the first step to go all the way to the other end without going through the stages as well. I do remember going to some of our rural areas and into the restaurants and choking on the smoke that's in those restaurants. I'm going to be very glad to see that we take the first step, the first stage, because I think that the majority of restaurants will no longer have smoking. I think it's a good first step. I think we need it.

4:50

There are three things that I've always been concerned about. I think that even though this bill doesn't go as far as most of us want it to go, it still goes to that first step that I think is critical and urgent that we pass in this Legislature as soon as possible, and that is to stop the smoking in most workplaces. I know it will follow. I know it will come in time. Red Deer is going to a total smoking ban, I

think soon. I think Edmonton is, and I think Calgary is, and I'm not sure who else. I believe that when you take this step, the next step comes. Yes, the next step is the most important step, but I don't think you can get there without going here first. Certainly, it's not fair to allow the communities that we also have to listen to that haven't even taken the first step.

Although I'm not happy that this bill doesn't go all the way, I think it's really important that we pass it the way it is so that we can get started. Who knows? Maybe it will be back again next year, and we'll go all the way, or in two years. Whatever it takes. Right now I think it is important that we pass this bill and get the first step happening and have a healthier workplace for the majority of places even though it's not for all places.

One of my colleagues mentioned in the first debate on Bill 201 that sometimes when you go for all or nothing, you get nothing. I'm not happy to settle for nothing. I want something. I think this is a good first step. That's why I would not vote for this amendment but indeed vote for this bill in third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung on the amendment.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I am standing to support the amendment as proposed by my hon. colleague for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Why do I do that? As a pharmacist I think we should not be allowing smoking in any public place whatsoever. I think the amendment allows us to bring it back to committee and debate it some more. Also, because the constituents in Edmonton-McClung were about 99 and a half per cent in support of a total smoking ban as represented in their e-mails and letters to me, I am very comfortable making that presentation today.

What we're discussing is an issue of health promotion and disease prevention. We're not discussing what's good for business or what's not good for business. We're not discussing what's good for rural versus urban zones in Alberta. What we're discussing is second-hand smoke. What we're discussing is safety, health, disease prevention, and so on.

I commend the hon. member who sponsored the bill. I commend the brave hon. ministers who supported it in its initial stages of debate and swam against the current and stated their minds. I commend and applaud the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar because now he's allowing them to bring it back to the table and debate it some more, to listen to the grassroots as was previously mentioned.

I would urge all members to support this amendment, and let's debate it some more. Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to speak in favour of this amendment, and I do so, I think, with a certain sense of urgency at the importance of this amendment. The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster said that it was not important. That's not what the constituents of Edmonton-Manning have told me. They have told me very, very clearly that these amendments have indeed made this bill nothing from what it was originally intended to be and originally hoped for by many of the constituents of Edmonton-Manning. Certainly, it does not seem to be what was hoped for by many members of the Progressive Conservative Party.

On Monday, April 11, 2005, there was a report in the *Edmonton Journal*. Some parts of it I'll quote.

Premier Ralph Klein said Sunday his government will not rush to change its position against a province-wide smoking ban, a day

after one group of Conservative party delegates resoundingly backed a resolution demanding much stronger anti-tobacco laws than the government is poised to pass.

"It can't be done this legislative session; it simply is not possible," Klein told reporters at the close of the Conservative party convention. "So it would be another year anyway. I will leave it up to caucus, but I doubt very much if it's going to be raised again."

Mr. Speaker, I think it's clear that this amendment leaves open an option to deal with this, and the Premier was wrong in his statement that was quoted in the newspaper.

Another quote from that article:

"It was approved for 99 per cent of us, and this gives you some food for thought," said one delegate.

Others underlined the importance of the party to heed the delegates' message following a Saturday renewal session in which the party committed to a decentralized form in which top officials take direction from the base.

There again, Mr. Speaker, I believe that it's very important that this broad cross-section, broad multiparty support for a full ban as originally intended in the original bill is what Albertans really desire on this.

I think that in terms of business, realistically what we need is to have a stable business climate where the rules are clear considerably into the future, not where we will be looking to doing something again next year, as the Member for Red Deer-North put forward. That we do this in steps is I think irresponsible to our business owners. It's really, as the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview mentioned, the helter-skelter, hodgepodge network of municipal laws that will create situations where people will go outside of the boundary and leave one business that's one block in and go to one business that's one block out in order to take care of their habit. This can only create problems for those businesses within those areas.

Of course, it's a workplace issue as well. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar mentioned the WCB potential problems, you know, where we will have different jurisdictions having different wellness and different health concerns, really, with the way that they are dealing with the smoking issue.

The necessity of bringing this back to the Committee of the Whole, as envisaged in the amendment, I think is proper and necessary and, indeed, supported, I can only say, by the majority of Albertans. I would ask all members to support this amendment in its entirety and to look toward a much more realistic debate, for the government members of the Progressive Conservative Party to look to their own members and their own members' motion in that it clearly gave them some direction on this matter, and that we move on this as a means to also better the health of all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much, sir. I, too, would speak to the Smoke-free Places Act and the amendments put forward by my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar to take it back to the Committee of the Whole. In my constituency of St. Albert 70 per cent of our constituents supported the original bill, and 30 per cent suggested – and these were fundraising people, and I think this is very important. Fundraising groups in St. Albert were somewhat reluctant to support the bill because they were worried about their nonprofit ability, the ability to raise money for their kids' recreation. I think this is a very risky situation for them, that they would go out and have to raise money and risk their health for the well-being of their children. I think that's one of the reasons we're for the bill being accepted as it was put forth after the adjustments were made to the bill.

I think there's another situation here in terms of the group called Smoke-free St. Albert. This was a group that lobbied hard in the community of St. Albert and brought forth the realization of the changes in the workplace as of July 1, 2005. Their wish was to push on this, and they actually got it approved at city council. Their wish now is to have protection for all citizens applied on a provincial scale. They say that there's no doubt that the research shows that exposure to second-hand smoke is a major health hazard and that eliminating this risk in public and workplaces should be a top priority of this government. The savings to Alberta health care could be enormous. Many other Canadian provinces and other countries have already gone this route, and it's time the Alberta government stopped dragging their feet and did this job for Albertans.

5:00

I think that what happened in Ireland is also significant. I say with some pride that the tough Irish smoking ban implemented last year paid off and made the smoking ban the most popular move by the government of that day for all of Ireland.

So I'm speaking in favour of this bill going back to Committee of the Whole, and I think all rational research suggests that for the good of our children and our families this is the way it should happen, and this should take place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a geriatric nurse who has nursed many people with lung cancer and mouth cancer as they lay dying, I think that further discussion on this bill is certainly warranted. I've had numerous e-mails and contacts through my office with overwhelming support for Bill 201. Since the newspaper articles have been published regarding the grassroots vote by the PC Party at their convention, there have been even more from people, who understood that Committee of the Whole from third reading could go backwards, mainly asking if, in fact, there could be no changes made at this late date.

Discussion in Committee of the Whole could bring out even more facts in support of Bill 201 in its entirety and unamended by the first amendment. I would trust that the mover of the . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the member, but according to our Standing Orders, all questions must be decided in order to conclude debate on this motion once the time has elapsed.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:02 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Backs	MacDonald	Pastoor
Bonko	Mar	Rodney
Elsalhy	Martin	Swann
Evans	Mason	Taft
Flaherty	Mather	Taylor
Forsyth	Miller	

Against the motion:

Cao	Johnston	Pham
Coutts	Knight	Renner
Graydon	Liepert	Snelgrove
Griffiths	Lougheed	Stelmach
Groeneveld	Magnus	Stevens
Herard	Marz	Strang
Horner	Mitzel	Tarchuk
Jablonski	Morton	Zwozdesky
Johnson	Oberle	
Totals:	For – 17	Against – 26

[Motion on amendment lost]

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank all of the hon. members who participated in the first, second, and third readings of debate of Bill 201 as well as in the Committee of the Whole debate, and I would very much like to thank all hon. members for their support of this bill as a step in the right direction. Considering the amount of discussion there has been in this House and in this province in the last number of months, I believe I've nothing further to add at this point, and as such I would like to close debate on Bill 201.

[The voice vote indicated that motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:17 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Agnihotri	Jablonski	Morton
Bonko	Johnson	Oberle
Cao	Johnston	Pham
Coutts	Knight	Renner
Evans	Liepert	Rodney
Forsyth	Lougheed	Snelgrove
Graydon	Magnus	Stelmach
Griffiths	Mar	Stevens
Groeneveld	Marz	Strang
Herard	Mather	Tarchuk
Horner	Mitzel	Zwozdesky

5:30

Against the motion:

Backs	Martin	Pastoor
Elsalhy	Mason	Swann
Flaherty	Miller, R.	Taft
MacDonald	Pannu	Taylor
Totals:	For – 33	Against – 12

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a third time]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until 8 p.m.

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