

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 9, 2005**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 05/05/09

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. Renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service to the people of this great province. Amen.

Hon. members, in the Speaker's gallery is Mr. Paul Lorieau. He will now lead us in the singing of our national anthem, and I invite all, including the members of the galleries, to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

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 all members of this Assembly 20 very special guests from the Fort Saskatchewan pioneer club. They are accompanied today and led by their president, Mr. Al McNeil. These 20 guests are very active in the community of Fort Saskatchewan and do just a huge amount of volunteer work on behalf of many other citizens. I would ask them to rise in the gallery and receive the traditional warm support of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a constituent and volunteer in the Calgary-Buffalo constituency, Mr. Wayne Ellis. Wayne is in his fourth year of commerce at the U of C, and he's here to observe the inner workings of the Assembly. I'd like to ask Wayne to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, my guests are not in the Assembly yet. If I could wait and introduce them later. Thank you.

The Speaker: Indeed.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of grade 6 students from the Rimbey elementary school. They are

accompanied today by their teacher, Mr. Jim Moore; parent helpers Mr. Jim Reiser, Judith Woolsey, Emily Breton, Mrs. Brenda Kramer, and Mrs. Gwen Olsen; and another accompanying person, Mr. Jim Therrien. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would like to ask them now to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to introduce today two fine gentlemen who are responsible for assisting our citizens of Alberta not only when there is a fire and training Albertans on how to prevent fires from showing up but in environmental disasters, train derailments, and when bioterrorism could perhaps occur. Mr. Gord Colwell, the president of the Alberta Fire Fighters Association, and Mr. Brent Shelton, the treasurer of the very same association, are with us. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today that I introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly Mrs. Cheryl Bissell. She's a councillor for Yellowhead county. She's got her chaperone today, her granddaughter, Ryley Huber. I'd ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I could stand here and say that my guests have just arrived, but I have to say that my eyes are failing me as I get up in age. I'm privileged to say that this is the second group of students I've had to introduce in this session, which is rather rare for a southern Alberta MLA. This is a special group of students. They are from the Webber Academy in Calgary-West. The Webber Academy was started eight years ago by a former member of this Assembly, Dr. Neil Webber, and is also a special place for my colleague from Calgary-Foothills. We have 45 grade 5 students in both galleries today. They are accompanied not only by Dr. Webber but by teachers Janet Adamson, Janice Chan, and Daniel Mondaca. I would ask them to rise and receive the welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to present to you today four of Alberta's outstanding innovation leaders. They're here representing the Alberta Science and Technology Leadership Foundation, best known for its ASTech awards. With us today is Guy Mallabone, who is the chair of the ASTech Foundation and the vice-president of external relations for SAIT. Along with Guy is Dr. Michael Brett, who was the winner of the 2003 outstanding leadership in Alberta technology award for his work in nanomaterials technology. He's also the director of engineering physics at the U of A and a Canada research chair. Dr. Jed Harrison, a professor of chemistry at the U of A, was the winner of the 2002 outstanding leadership in Alberta technology award for his lab-on-a-chip. Dr. Talib Rajwani was a corecipient of the 2002 Leaders of Tomorrow award for his work in looking for the cause of scoliosis, a spinal disorder in adolescents. I would note that Dr. Rajwani's parents and sister are also in the gallery. They would want you to put October 14 on your calendar because that is the date of the ASTech awards this year in Calgary. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions to make today. The first is to introduce the parents of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, Art and Barbara Miller. They have lived in Pleasantview since 1965, 40 years if my math is right. Speaking of math, they have five grown children and, very impressively, there were 17 foster children who went through the Miller household. Rick is the eldest. His parents have recently returned from a holiday in Arizona. This is their first chance to see their son in action. I don't think they're surprised to see him here because they say that when he was 12 years old, every sentence that he uttered began with, "When I'm Prime Minister . . ." I would ask Art and Barbara Miller to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the STEP student for Edmonton-Riverview, who will be there for several months. His name is Ben Taylor, and he will be spending the summer trying to keep my life organized and help out in the constituency. Ben has just completed his second year at the U of A, majoring in political science with a minor in English. He's been a recipient of the Canadian millennium excellence scholarship award, an advanced placement national scholar, and also a Jason Lang and Alexander Rutherford scholar. He's very active in the soccer scene and is also in the Edmonton Youth Choir. I'd ask Ben to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a group of 38 individuals I would like to introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly. This group is comprised of 34 students and four adults. They are from Terrace Heights school. The group is led by teachers Mr. Jaques and Mrs. Stead, and they are accompanied this afternoon by parent volunteers Mrs. Miller and Mr. St. Dennis. The group from Terrace Heights is in the public gallery, and I would now ask them to rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Jung-Suk Ryu. He is the STEP student for the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. Jung is 20 years old. He has completed his second year of studies, majoring in political science at the University of Alberta. He currently holds an associate of music degree, runs a music school, and is a member of the Alberta music teachers' association. He has a passion for local politics, wrote opinion columns on various topics in the *Edmonton Journal* for two years, and founded Speak Out!, a network for high school and university students to communicate with local and national leaders, involving over 15 Members of the Legislative Assembly. He also ran as the youngest candidate in the 2004 municipal election and came through with close to 4,000 votes. We're happy to have him assisting us to meet the constituency needs. I'll ask Jung to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure about my guests, so maybe later on.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Sheila McKeage and Wilena Waechter. Sheila is an environmental biologist and is currently employed by a business known as Fiera. Wilena is a nurse in the community of Banff and volunteers her time with new immigrants. Both are here to watch the proceedings. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm greeting of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mrs. McClellan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the executive of the Hanna Youth Council. The Hanna Youth Council has been extraordinarily successful in increasing youth involvement and participation in their community, with involvement from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the town of Hanna. They're currently working on a pool fundraiser to build a new swimming pool in their town and planning a 1st of July barbecue. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise as I call their names: Shawna Wallace, who is the economic development community services co-ordinator for the town of Hanna, and youth council members Riley Georgsen, Kali Taylor, Dawson Kennedy, and Kaila Lewis. I would ask that the members of this Assembly give these fine young people a very, very warm welcome.

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

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you one of my favourite constituents today and the best present the Member for Calgary-Shaw received for Mother's Day this year; that is, the return of her second son, Jeff Ady, from serving a two-year mission in the New York South Mission. He's here today examining postsecondary options. I'd like to welcome him back to Alberta and ask if my son, Jeff, would rise and receive the warm welcome of the House today.

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. The RCMP's integrated market enforcement team facilitates co-operation between the RCMP and provincial securities commissions. Its goal is to have the RCMP work closely with securities regulators, federal and provincial authorities, and police of local jurisdiction. IMET, as it is called, is just one of many examples where the ASC co-operates with the RCMP and other provincial securities commissions regarding specific enforcement cases. My questions are to the Minister of Finance. Could she inform this House: why will the ASC waive its confidentiality exemption for the RCMP and other provincial securities commissions but not for this province's Auditor General?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Securities Commission is now in the process of reviewing what they may release under their legislation. I don't believe the concern is at all in reviewing the information; it's in the reporting of it and ensuring that the confidentiality remains then.

Dr. Taft: The Auditor General Act covers that.

My second question to the same minister: what steps has the Finance minister taken to ensure that enforcement files at the ASC are not being destroyed or tampered with?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I think that's a preposterous suggestion.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Again to the same minister: why hasn't the Finance minister brought in a truly independent, out-of-province interim chair instead of yet another Tory friend?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the opportunity to respond on behalf of the Deputy Premier. The hon. member alludes to Mr. Valentine, of course. The opposition has a long history of smearing good Albertans, and Mr. Valentine is, indeed, a good Albertan who is eminently qualified. He was the Auditor General of Alberta from 1995 to 2002, he previously served as chair of the Financial Advisory Committee of ASC, he's an adjunct professor in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Calgary, and he recently completed a six-month term as interim vice-president, finance and services, for the University of Calgary.

He is also currently a member of the board of trustees and the audit committee of Fording Canadian Coal Trust, Superior Plus Incorporated, PrimeWest Energy, and Resmore Trust Company. He graduated with a bachelor of commerce degree with distinction from UBC and is a fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants. Mr. Speaker, most importantly, Mr. Valentine's integrity – this is from the opposition.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Governments and organizations across Canada are implementing whistle-blower protection for their employees, but this government refuses to follow the lead. When serious allegations of wrongdoing at the Alberta Securities Commission were raised by employees, those employees were publicly insulted as cowardly and depraved. They were intimidated, bullied, and one was even fired. My question is to the Minister of Finance. Given that by July 1 of this year all companies regulated by the Alberta Securities Commission are to have whistle-blower protection in place in those companies, why does this government continue to deny its own employees equivalent protection?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I have said consistently that employees can feel very confident in bringing forward any of their concerns to me, and they have brought forward some concerns. They've done it under the basis of anonymity and confidentiality. I've said in this House before and I'll repeat it one more time: if an employee is fired from that organization or any organization that's under, certainly, my purview, they have every opportunity and every avenue to proceed, to ensure that this release was done in the proper way.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. To the same minister: given the serious repercussions ASC employees face for voicing concerns about irregularities at the ASC, does this minister see the hypocrisy in companies at the ASC being required to protect whistle-blowers while the ASC itself does not provide that protection?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Valentine assumed his chairmanship of the ASC today. This morning he met with senior management. He had an opportunity to go around and be introduced

to the staff. I think the staff were very pleased with that opportunity to meet Mr. Valentine. I have every confidence in Mr. Valentine's interim chairmanship and that these issues will be resolved.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier would like to supplement my answer.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I would love to supplement. I would like to table a press release from the Alberta Liberal opposition. It's dated October 11, 2001. The leader at that time was Kevin Taft according to this printout. It says:

Mr. Valentine's integrity and desire to improve the way government conducts business has increased the credibility of the Office of the Auditor General. My colleagues in the Official Opposition and I extend our best wishes to Mr. Valentine.

The Speaker: Okay. We now have two points of order: the Leader of the Official Opposition, the official House leader. We'll deal with those at the conclusion.

Hon. leader, you have one more question in this set.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will this minister immediately do the right thing and implement whistle-blower protection rules at the Alberta Securities Commission to protect the commission's own staff?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the new chair, the interim chair has had an opportunity to meet staff. I've said consistently that staff can feel very confident in bringing any of their concerns forward to me. I think that we'd all be best served if we let the interim chair do his job.

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

Calgary Ward 10 Election

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to the Calgary ward 10 voting scandal this Tory government launched an inspection whose terms of reference limited the investigator's ability to get to the bottom of the fiasco. Yet even the police were surprised when the inspection was terminated last week. Legal experts note that a full independent public inquiry as requested by the Liberal opposition, Calgary city council, Calgary Court of Queen's Bench would have been able to legally proceed alongside the police investigation. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: given that the federal government had the courage to call the Gomery inquiry, which is getting to the bottom of Adscam, why won't the Alberta government be equally transparent and accountable and courageous and call a full public inquiry into ward 10?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, apart from the heightened level of rhetoric in the preamble the question is essentially the same as the question that was asked by the Leader of the Opposition last week, and the answer is exactly the same. The legal advice that I had as Minister of Municipal Affairs was that the inspection process could go on concurrently with the police investigation. The recommendation was that we proceed with an inspection as opposed to a full-blown inquiry because of the fact that anything done at the inquiry level could possibly affect the outcome of a police investigation and criminal charges and the ensuing court case that could come out of that. So that's the very simple explanation.

Mr. Taylor: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: if that's the case, then why was the inspection terminated? Was it fear of another Conservative public embarrassment?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the inspection has not been terminated. The inspection is very much still on course. Mr. Clark is in the process of completing his report. In fact, Mr. Clark will be hearing arguments from the significant players in the case and then will be forwarding the report.

At the appropriate time I am more than prepared to table documentation. Two documents here: one is dated December 14, and the other one is dated December 30, and these are the news releases that were issued by my office at the time that the inspection was put in place. I just want to read the first line of the inspection release. It says, "A provincial inspection will be held into Calgary's October 18, 2004 Ward 10 election to determine whether any irregularities occurred during the voting process." A short time later another press release was issued with the terms of reference, and the terms of reference very clearly say, "the municipal inspection is to deal with matters not dealt with by police authorities."

Mr. Speaker, the process is very clear. The process is proceeding exactly as it was intended to proceed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will this minister, then, instruct the inspector, the investigator, to resume his inspection and talk to all the witnesses before he writes his report?

Mr. Renner: In fact, Mr. Speaker, the inspector has done exactly that. I expect the inspector to provide me with a full report, to report to me what were any irregularities in the election process and what his recommendations are to ensure that these same kinds of irregularities do not come into future elections. The purpose of this process is to restore confidence to the electoral system in this province.

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

Health Facilities Review Committee

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The crisis in long-term care is due in part to inadequate inspections of our nursing homes and other long-term care facilities. Instead of professional, well-trained investigators doing surprise inspections, we have a Tory-friendly committee headed up by a government MLA that likes to visit these centres and talk informally with residents, staff, and management. Long-term care facilities receive such visits at best every two to three years. My question is to the Premier. When will the government take action to replace a Tory-friendly citizens' committee headed up by a government MLA with trained professional inspectors who have the authority to issue orders to correct deficiencies in Alberta's long-term care facilities?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I take exception to the term "Tory-friendly committee." The Auditor General, of course, has looked into this matter. While I haven't read the Auditor General's report, I am told he has made some good recommendations, which are being acted upon immediately so that care in long-term care centres can be improved. Our first priority is to ensure that people living in long-term care facilities are safe and that they are treated with dignity and respect. Now, I'm told that the minister of health and the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports are already addressing many of the Auditor General's recommendations and will continue to do so.

The Speaker: I do not believe this report has been shared with the hon. members yet, and it won't be tabled till later this afternoon, so

many members in this Assembly have no idea what's transpiring here.

Mr. Mason: Nor do I, Mr. Speaker, but we still need to get to the bottom of it. I haven't seen the report because it hasn't been released to me.

Instead of dodging the question, will the Premier commit to immediate implementation of adequate standards, including frequent, professional, and unannounced inspections?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, my apologies. The report will be released, I understand it, in exactly one-half an hour from now. Obviously, the two ministers have the report, have reported generally the results of the report to cabinet, and have indicated that many of the recommendations have already been implemented, are in the process of being implemented, or will be implemented.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, why has the government refused to follow the lead of provinces like Ontario, who make the results of long-term care facility inspections public and even post them on the Internet?

2:00

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if that's one of the recommendations, but if it is, we'll accept the recommendation. We tend to accept 98, 99 per cent of all recommendations that are put forward by the Auditor General.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Kyoto Climate Change Agreement

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As cited in the rural development strategy and known to virtually every member in this Assembly, Alberta's agricultural producers are excellent stewards of the land; however, they often bear the cost of maintaining the land that all Albertans get to enjoy. This land also serves another purpose. It acts as a carbon sink, reducing the overall effect of greenhouse gas emission. My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Given that agricultural land is an excellent carbon sink and given that the federal government has recently approved the Kyoto agreement, is there a way that Alberta producers can benefit from the continued stewardship of that land?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government really has been dragging their feet on this. You know, what they came out with early on was they were telling producers how much the Kyoto agreement might benefit them in terms of their environmental stewardship; however, to the detriment of a lot of forward-thinking producers they haven't really shown us anything besides the broad statements and the comments that they've made. They have no concrete plans about how we might be able to do this.

You know, there is a cost to environmental stewardship that is being borne by the producers right now in rural Alberta. We think there should be a reward that goes along with that. We haven't really seen anything yet from the federal government on that, which is very, very unfortunate, but we hope that perhaps in the future that something might come of it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental is to the same minister. Since the federal government has approved the Kyoto agreement without any implementation plan or one even apparently forthcoming, can the minister tell this Assembly if the Alberta government is working on a plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, thank you. We are looking at some various solutions that might meet the needs of our producers in addition to working on some of the protocols of definitions in conjunction with the federal government. We're trying to push the federal government to speed up as quickly as they can in terms of coming up with a carbon credit plan. We've been asking the federal government to show some leadership on it as it is really a federal issue in terms of the definition of those credits.

In reality, they should have figured this out before they signed the agreement. It would have been much more helpful and more beneficial to the producers because then instead of our industries here buying credits in foreign lands, they could have been transferring that wealth to the producers in Alberta and in Canada. We hope that we can help them move toward something closer to that.

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

Applewood Park Community Association

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Community Development sent me a letter last month stating that Wild Rose Foundation grants are given to organizations for specific programs of that organization, and funds may not be transferred to another organization. But financial statements from Calgary Applewood Community Association show that they broke the rules and transferred the grants to another organization. My questions are to the Minister of Community Development. Why did the minister allow Applewood to break the rules and transfer grant funds to another organization?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, I have difficulty speaking specifically to Applewood Park Community Association. You can appreciate that there are many, many grants that are given by the Wild Rose Foundation. But in general terms what I understood is that Applewood was a community association that was looking to do some work overseas and that in 2004 there were grants which they were eligible to apply for for the purposes of building some clean drinking water projects in Vietnam. Now, the way the Wild Rose Foundation works is that partners from Alberta may wish to oversee a project that is taking place in another jurisdiction, in this case Vietnam, and that the Applewood Park Community Association has accounted for the money as it was spent on the project in Vietnam.

I can take a look at this in some greater detail at some juncture, but I can say in general terms that there is a process by which Applewood would provide the financial statements to the Wild Rose Foundation, and if the Wild Rose Foundation is not satisfied or there's some discrepancy with respect to the accounting for the money being spent on the project that was being applied for, then the Wild Rose Foundation can initiate a process by which that money is returned.

Mr. Agnihotri: Does the minister know the name of the organization that ultimately received the funding?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the answer to that is, and I expect that it is part of Applewood's submission to the Wild Rose Foundation for the accounting, which I think came toward the end of last month. It will probably disclose the entity that the money was spent with for the purposes of building these clean drinking water facilities in Vietnam.

Mr. Agnihotri: How does the minister know that the funding was spent according to the Wild Rose standards?

Mr. Mar: I don't know that, Mr. Speaker. That's the whole purpose of the Wild Rose Foundation having an ability to audit so that they can be assured that the money, every dollar, was spent in accordance with the rules that were established at the time that Applewood, or any other agency, may have been applying for that money. So there is a procedure by which Wild Rose will look at that dollar for dollar. I can assure the hon. member that the Wild Rose Foundation has a very, very long track record of supporting excellent projects in developing nations throughout the world.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Custom Environmental Services Ltd. Fire

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Residents of east Edmonton and Strathcona county are concerned following the fire at Custom Environmental Services on Thursday, the 5th of May. My question is to the Minister of Environment. What is being done by his department to determine what toxic chemicals were being stored at the site and what was in the smoke cloud?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure this Assembly and members in the direct area where the fire took place that number one is to ensure the public health safety of our citizens and, of course, restoring the environment to its original form. I want to say to the members of the Assembly that our air monitoring lab from environmental protection was on-site within literally minutes of when we were contacted by the emergency management area. As well, our immediate investigation has determined that based on the records of the company at this time, there were no PCBs being stored on-site. However, there were fluorescent light ballasts being stored, which may have contained, in actual fact, small quantities of PCB.

Our investigation is ongoing, Mr. Speaker, but I want to assure the citizens in that area that everything, of course, has been done to protect the interest of their clean air and with the co-operation of the many emergency agencies that were involved on-site.

Mr. Lougheed: To the same minister: what role does his ministry play in assisting the fire departments on-site?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I want to first of all congratulate specifically the city of Edmonton fire emergency services and also Strathcona county emergency service units and other emergency agencies that were there, as I'm sure all members of this Assembly join me in congratulating them. Ultimately, what we want to do first and foremost is work on the command centre with the fire officials in providing them with the necessary data so they can make the proper decisions when it comes to if, in fact, an evacuation should take place or not, which, of course, did happen in this particular instance.

Also, I want to say about our air monitoring vehicle: we're working right now with the city of Edmonton, where, in fact, we're going to be having some more emergency unit vehicles on-site because, as you realize, as we collect the data, it's an extremely dangerous situation, so we work in close partnership with the emergency officials, in this case with the city of Edmonton and Strathcona county emergency officials.

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, I'm wondering if the department has some new initiatives with respect to ongoing monitoring to assist those departments.

Mr. Boutilier: Absolutely so, Mr. Speaker. I can assure all members of this House and all Albertans that we will do the utmost, working in collaboration with emergency officials. Remember, the first objective when the fire took place was working in collaboration to put the fire out. Then at the same time our investigation is ongoing. We have lab samples that are coming forward, and we'll be reporting also back to the citizens in the area, and I can assure this House that we'll report back to this House on the findings of our very comprehensive investigations that are being carried out.

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

2:10 Highway Construction

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to the government Transportation website, almost half, 44 per cent to be exact, of Alberta highways will be in fair to poor condition by 2008. The cost of the Anthony Henday Drive P3 has more than doubled from its original \$241 million estimate to its current \$493 million taxpayer bill. The twinning of highway 63 to Fort McMurray will be spread out over 10 years while it's been 40 years and still waiting in Calgary for a southern ring road bridge to cross the Elbow River to eliminate Glenmore gridlock. My questions are all to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Does the minister consider a score of 56 per cent good enough for Alberta's highways?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much. The simple answer to that is no. Mr. Speaker, we do have a considerable amount of work that needs to be done on Alberta highways. We need to keep Alberta on the move. We need to keep the transportation of goods and services rolling in Alberta. So the simple answer is no.

Part of my job as Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation is to ensure that the roads are in good shape, to improve the amount of roads out there that are able to be travelled upon. That's something I take very seriously, and it's something we're attempting to do.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can the minister justify the multimillion dollar cost overruns of road projects such as the Anthony Henday, highway 11, and highway 725, to name just a few?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much. First of all, Mr. Speaker, on highway 11 we added an extra truck-haul route to the twinning part, which added approximately \$82,000 to the road construction.

On highway 725, unfortunately, we were \$3 million over a \$7 million project simply because there were some landslides that

actually delayed construction and caused us to do a considerable amount of work so that there would not be any landslides again.

Mr. Speaker, on the Anthony Henday we actually expanded the scope of the project. We added many more interchanges to allow the Anthony Henday to be completely free flowing. It's roughly 120-lane kilometres of road, and there are now 24 interchanges and bridges on that particular route. That's what accounted for the \$493 million, and that's what accounted for the increase from the initial cost as well as cost overages that have occurred in the last three years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why should the residents, workers, and oil sands developers of Fort McMurray be forced by this government to play highway 63 road-risk roulette for another decade?

Dr. Oberg: Well, Mr. Speaker, last week in conjunction with the Minister of Environment we made a very important announcement for Fort McMurray. The announcement was \$530 million dollars to be spent over the next 10 years to upgrade highway 881; to upgrade highway 63, adding in passing lanes, adding in staging areas as well as four-laning the route from Suncor to Syncrude. Included in that are four interchanges in the city of Fort McMurray as well as numerous other issues.

I made it very plain when I went up there that I would like to see that time frame accelerated. I would like to see that time frame accelerated down to four or five years, and certainly that's what we're working toward. Obviously, Mr. Speaker, it does depend on the amount of money that we have in the upcoming budgets. I am hopeful that there will be more money in there and that we can accelerate that to the four- or five-year time frame, which is very important for the people of Fort McMurray.

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

Health Symposium Webcast

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Like many of my colleagues I was unable to attend the health care symposium due to scheduling conflicts. Luckily, our government created a webcast, which was available live to all the world. On that webcast I was able to listen to the speeches, actually watch the speakers, and I was also able to clearly see the overheads. It truly was just like having a front-row seat. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can you provide the members with access to those same speeches so that we can refer them to our constituents?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, over the next 30 days those will be available over the web through Health and Wellness, and if there's any difficulty in accessing any of those PowerPoint presentations, we'll be pleased to follow through for any member of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. My only supplemental is for the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. Such a webcast requires the use of high-speed Internet, one of the capabilities of the SuperNet. Would the minister please give us an update on the availability of the SuperNet across Alberta?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make one point very clear right off the bat. The Alberta SuperNet is much more than an application or a service. It's a giant highway over which you can run any number of applications. The Internet is just one service. The health symposium was delivered via webcast, which is simply broadcasting over the Internet. Depending on the event you're holding, webcasting is a good option. The quality of a webcast depends on the quality and speed of your Internet connection.

SuperNet can have many participant sites interacting with each other. For example, you could have experts in different SuperNet sites interacting with one another in a virtual panel session. We have meetings in our department using SuperNet video conferencing with people in Calgary on a regular basis. You could hook up a Smart board and have multimedia presentations live. You could invite rural Albertans to their local school or library, where they can participate, ask questions, and add their own perspective. This is all video conferencing, and you could easily add webcasting over the Internet so Albertans in rural SuperNet communities could view the session from home or work over a high-speed Internet connections. SuperNet thinks big, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Enron Activities in Alberta

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government knew that the Competition Bureau was in the middle of investigating Enron for market manipulation when they let Enron participate in the power purchase arrangement auction in the summer of 2000. Court evidence shows an Enron trader stating in regard to that auction:

. . . the only unit that's been bid on is Sundance B, and I'm just wondering when these three or four other people move around a bit and everybody's got a unit, is just – that the best thing would be to slow down, but . . . some of . . . these other clowns are on these units, so they're mispriced.

My first question is to the Minister of Energy. In what way were the power purchase arrangement auctions mispriced?

Mr. Melchin: I'm not certain of the preamble, what all that meant. If you would forward that preamble to us, we'll take a look at that.

In respect to the power purchase arrangements, they were put out on an open bid and tender and were appropriately priced by the market.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, I'll be glad to table that at the appropriate time.

The Speaker: Well, it's in *Hansard* anyway. It doesn't have to be tabled.

Mr. MacDonald: Now, my next question: why did this government allow Enron to buy power generation in Alberta when they knew that Enron was being investigated at the same time for market manipulation and price fixing?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, fortunately in this country we do go under the presumption of innocence. That issue still has been investigated, as he said. The federal Competition Bureau did come back, back then, and found nothing that they could pursue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that Enron had control over power generation in Alberta while they were being investigated, did the government put extra surveillance on Enron to ensure that they didn't withhold the generation that they had purchased to drive up electricity prices in this province?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, there's no one party, Enron or any other, that had control over the marketplace. The great thing that did happen is that numerous entrants came through and provided generation. Today as a result of that – I've got to re-emphasize, as a great result of that – the consumers in Alberta continue to have the lowest nonhydro rates in this country.

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

2:20 Custom Environmental Services Ltd. Fire (continued)

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday a witches' brew of toxic chemicals, including PCBs, exploded, leading to a fire in southeast Edmonton that burned out of control for eight hours. I think many Edmontonians, including myself, were surprised that these sorts of toxic, dangerous chemicals are allowed to be stored and treated in quonset huts with fabric roofs in the middle of town. The owner of the facility says that he plans to reopen his business as early as tomorrow. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Why do we spend tens of millions of dollars every year subsidizing the money-losing Swan Hills toxic waste plant and then turn around and allow operators like Custom Environmental Services to store and treat toxic chemicals, including PCBs, in the middle of a major metropolitan area?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I want to first of all thank the hon. member for commenting on the province of Alberta's leadership pertaining to Swan Hills because that type of facility is ultimately an incredible leader across this country, if not North America. So I thank the hon. member for that.

Pertaining specifically to the fire that the hon. member mentions, it's a concern of ours. We're doing investigation. No opening will take place pertaining to the facility until, in fact, all environmental regulations are followed to the letter and spirit of the law, I can assure all members of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. To the same minister: you know, given that it took hours for air quality monitoring equipment to be operational at the site of the fire, how can nearby residents take any comfort from the ministry saying that human health was not compromised during this fire?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, perhaps allow me to provide a quote – and I will table this at the appropriate time – from the medical officer of Capital health, who stated, and I quote: there shouldn't be any long-term impact based on what took place because of the excellent work by the fire officials in that area.

We're all in this together: the fire department, the air monitoring people from Alberta Environment, disaster services people. We all work together to protect the interests of Albertans and the environment, and that's exactly what we've done today, tomorrow, and well into the future, I can assure all Albertans.

Mr. Eggen: But how could the hon. minister know that human health was not negatively affected by the explosion of this toxic brew of chemicals unless follow-up testing is done on emergency personnel, workers, and nearby residents? I think they owe that to them.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, once again, our investigation is ongoing. Once again, our air monitoring from Alberta protection were on the command site within minutes of the event taking place. Once again, our investigation is ongoing. We're investigating all of the air monitoring that we've done as well as the preliminary air monitoring we did on the day of the accident.

Mr. Speaker, our first objective is working with emergency officials to put out the darn fire and, at the same time, continue to work in terms of protecting the environment well into the future. Our investigation is ongoing, and I can assure this hon. member that we'll continue to do the utmost to protect our citizens.

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

Workers' Compensation

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the last few years there were two important government-commissioned reviews of WCB administrative actions to ensure fairness and accountability towards injured workers. Reflecting questions from my constituents, my question is to the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment. What has the government done with the recommendations from these reviews?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. The two committees made a total of 59 recommendations, of which 49 were accepted or accepted in principle. Of course, extensive public feedback was held, including a symposium on the workers' compensation system and also round-table discussions on accountability.

As no doubt you're aware, the government passed Bill 26 in 2002, Mr. Speaker, which saw a number of changes in the whole compensation system. Some include annual reports by Workers' Compensation, performance reports to the Auditor General and also the minister; annual WCB general meetings, open to the public of course, a streamlined WCB decision review body, and a new medical panel process for resolving differences that required medical opinion. There's also the Appeals Commission, separated from the Workers' Compensation Board, and of course the Workers' Compensation Board now implements the appeals program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there is a resolution that was passed at the recent PC Association of Alberta convention to ask the government to monitor and report on the implementation of those recommendations, my question is to the same minister. Hon. minister, what action, process, and time frame are you going to take for this important monitoring?

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can do that very quickly. The committee has met 12 times since they were put in place, and they'll be reporting to me on the implementation of the recommendations very soon.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental question is to the same minister. Given that injured workers still have serious issues with the WCB, will the minister provide opportunities for interested parties such as injured workers to send submissions to the monitoring authority?

Mr. Cardinal: Yes, Mr. Speaker, they can do that.

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

Sex Trade Workers

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend marked the continuation of tragic events as yet another sex trade worker was found dead outside of Edmonton. Not only are Edmonton-area prostitutes living in fear, but they feel vulnerable and unprotected and are ready to take advantage of any program that may offer them the opportunity to get off the streets. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: given that transitional housing would allow sex trade workers a chance to escape from the drugs and the pimps who are controlling their lives, will this government establish programs to enable sex trade workers to make the transition from short-term emergency shelters into permanent housing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very serious issue that the member has brought forward, and I do appreciate the opportunity to respond because I am just as concerned as the member is. I understand that this is the 12th victim, depending on the autopsy results, hon. member, that we could've had here in the Edmonton area over the past 16 years. I would encourage women who are seeking refuge from life on the street to access the facilities and services that are available at the Women's Emergency Accommodation Centre here in Edmonton. We do provide \$1.3 million to that centre in funding for 99 beds. I think that at the flatiron building there are 75 beds and at Elizabeth House 24 beds.

What is provided there for women when they do access the centre, of course, is room and board. More importantly, there are counselling services, and there are services available for them to make that transition back to the community. There are programs available there, hon. member, and that does assist the women. So, hopefully, they'll access it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Will the minister commit to providing more funding to ensure that the transitional housing and services are available to help women with their involvement in prostitution?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, that too is an important question, and we are meeting with the minister responsible for Children's Services and also with the Solicitor General about how we can provide a comprehensive, co-ordinated approach to this issue with program options, and that would include the transitional housing, hon. member, that you are looking for. That would include that even further than what we do have today. I don't know what the outcome of that will be because we're currently meeting.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. To the Solicitor General: have additional funds been added to Project Kare to aid in the swift arrests of the individuals who are committing these heinous crimes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the hon. member. Yes, additional funds were provided to Project Kare and to the RCMP. Regarding that project alone, over \$800,000 was provided in addition to last year's \$2.9 million budget. So in total they received \$3.7 million, which includes 43 investigators, which includes analysts, intelligence officers, and the ability to investigate. It also includes four Edmonton Police Service detectives that are working on the case, so they're working on the case together. They're utilizing experts from across Canada and, as well, utilizing the skills of their investigators throughout northern Alberta, central Alberta, in Calgary, and through the EPS.

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

2:30

Health Services in the North

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has committed over \$9 billion on health spending in 2005-2006. Northern Alberta experiences a lower funding ratio for capital infrastructure dollars compared to the rest of the province. The northern residents are required to travel greater distances for health care services as well. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What steps is the ministry taking to make better use of the rural and regional health care facilities in the north to reduce the travel costs of patients by providing medical care in northern communities, that would also reduce the cost to larger southern centres?

Ms Evans: Three quick things. Mr. Speaker, when the electronic record is in place, it will help us co-ordinate patient services. Part of that is integral to the proper delivery in northern and regional areas. The telehealth program has made sure that specialists can be accessed through the northern areas. Beyond that, for some of the more particular needs of regions, we work with them and their global funding model and through the province-wide services to see if there are ways that we can co-ordinate service delivery to accommodate the residents.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental, again to the same minister: what funding will be allocated to purchase specialized equipment such as dialysis machines?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of different things I should report. For the last three years, concluding this year, there will be about \$148.9 million total that has been spent out of federal funding through the trust fund that was established to improve this opportunity for diagnostic imaging. The machines for dialysis can be funded through the province-wide service delivery should they choose to take advantage of that account beyond their global funding.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is also to the same minister. How does the minister plan to address the ongoing need in recruiting and retaining health care professionals in rural Alberta?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I know that a number of members have been really concerned about this. Through the rural physician action plan we hope to make significant differences. I should report that through the rural family medicine network we have provided 60 rural residency positions: 30 of them are entry and 30 of them are second year. Also, since April 2002 we've had 190 foreign-trained physicians that have had direct placements and opportunities in rural Alberta. Finally, starting this fall, in conjunction with the Ministry of Advanced Ed, we are providing a medical school bursary program for at least 10 students that we expect to work in rural Alberta.

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

Automobile Insurance Reforms

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Only this Conservative government could fumble auto insurance reforms so badly. To this date they've managed to enrage the insurance companies, alienate the auto insurance brokers, and Alberta drivers are still only seeing minimal premium reductions after they were frozen at their highest rates ever. My question is to the Minister of Finance. Other than for a Tory caucus committee reporting in September, does this government have any kind of a long-term plan to reform the auto insurance mess, which they have created?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member opposite is the person that has indicated to me that they think it's a mess. Auto insurance reform, in fact, is working. We have about six months of auto insurance reform under our belt, if you wish. It came in on October 1. There is a mandatory 6 per cent reduction unless a company can show reason that they shouldn't be charged with that reduction.

As has been indicated in this House, there is a process under way now to review the rates, and there is a process in that time for public input. Mr. Speaker, that will occur in the next weeks, and we will have a complete assessment by fall. It was intended to have that by the 1st of October, but because of the lateness of getting off on this, it'll probably be the 1st of November.

Mr. R. Miller: Only privately owned vehicles, Mr. Speaker.

Will the minister instruct the Automobile Insurance Rate Board to conduct a full review of questionable insurance industry practices, such as block transfers, like the review that has just been released in Quebec?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, the automobile insurance review will occur. The Auto Insurance Rate Board has put out the terms of reference for the review. I haven't found – I must comment on this – that the auto insurance companies are enraged. In fact, I would say that we have a cordial relationship. They may not like the fact that we have imposed reductions on them, but I would not say that they have indicated to me that they're enraged with this government. Again, the auto insurance reforms that were put in place in this province were put in on the compulsory portion of your insurance on private vehicles, and that, essentially, will be what the Auto Insurance Rate Board reviews this summer. I am sure, though, that they will receive some thoughtful opinions on other parts of insurance during that review.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell us: why is this government the only one in the entire country that needs to pass a law to immune itself from lawsuits as a result of their bungled auto insurance reforms?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're maybe the only government in Canada that's really done true auto insurance reform.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now I'll call upon the first of six hon. members to participate today.

Vignettes from Alberta's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, it may be of interest to you to know that historically on May 9, 1906, the very first session of Alberta's First Legislature was prorogued after 38 sitting days. Prior to prorogation Lieutenant Governor George Bulyea gave royal assent to 76 bills, including a bill that would incorporate the city of Wetaskiwin and the city of Lethbridge and an act to establish and incorporate a university for the province of Alberta. At the very same time, a very major constitutional issue was brewing in the province of Alberta, and the then Premier of the day, Premier Rutherford, was not to survive the ensuing two weeks of antagonism that was occurring at this very same time.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

Battle River Community Foundation

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to recognize the Battle River Community Foundation. Founded in 1994, this organization serves communities throughout the Battle River basin area including Camrose, Tofield, Viking, Galahad, Alliance, and Hughenden. It is one of 11 community foundations in Alberta.

Community foundations provide individuals and businesses the opportunity to create an endowment fund which will be used to fund projects for the betterment of the community. Some examples of the projects funded by the Battle River Community Foundation include scholarships and assistance for villages in purchasing equipment for their fire departments. Recently the foundation gave \$15,000 to the counties of Camrose, Paintearth, and Flagstaff to study environmental issues. Over \$350,000 has been distributed since the beginning of the fund.

In addition, the Battle River Community Foundation honours community leaders at an annual banquet. Last year the Joe Voytechek family was honoured, and an endowment worth \$25,000 was established in their name as a lasting legacy to their many contributions in the Camrose community.

2:40

To improve the returns from the endowment, the Battle River Community Foundation struck an agreement with the Edmonton Community Foundation which allows them to pool their resources for investment purposes. In this way, donations can be pooled to provide sustainable funding for programs and projects for years to come. While this arrangement is beneficial for the investment of Battle River's capital, it is the strong and continued support of the community which allows this organization to thrive. This includes the community-minded direction from the foundation's board of directors, led by chair Blain Fowler and executive director Dave Stolee.

This support has ensured the development of an endowment fund valued at \$1.5 million. As such, the Battle River Community Foundation will be able to meet the emerging needs of the community on a sustainable basis in perpetuity. This is an amazing achievement, and I applaud the efforts of the members of this organization for the achievements they have made, the programs they support, and their commitment to making the Battle River area an even better place to be.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Ritske and Immigje Veenstra

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through the darkness of the Holocaust shone the luminous examples of the Righteous among the Nations, a title derived from the Talmud to describe those who risked their own lives to save the lives of others. In 1963 Yad Vashem embarked upon a world-wide project to honour non-Jews who saved Jews during the Holocaust. A commission headed by an Israeli Supreme Court justice, following specific criteria, has been charged with the duty of awarding the title Righteous among the Nations, the only project of its kind in the world.

There are over 8,000 authenticated rescue stories in which the lives of Jews were saved. Yad Vashem's policy is to pursue the program for as long as petitions for this title are received. If the Righteous are deceased, the honour will be bestowed on their next of kin. The honouree is awarded a specially minted medal bearing their name, a certificate of honour, and the privilege of their name being added to the Wall of Honour in the Garden of the Righteous at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. In addition, the recipients are honoured with a tree planted along the Avenue of the Righteous. The tree, symbolic of the renewal of life, is a living testimony to remarkable heroism. With courage and compassion, risking torture and death, the Righteous among the Nations saved many individual lives and, as the Talmud says, "the entire universe."

The late Ritske and Immigje Veenstra are among those honoured at Yad Vashem. This brave Dutch couple saved many Jews' lives. Last Thursday night in Calgary Vicky Penner from Carstairs and her brother Ted Veenstra from Brazil received the Righteous among the Nations award on behalf of their deceased parents, Ritske and Immigje Veenstra.

Of all the people that the Veenstras harboured during the war, all survived the war. Vicky now corresponds regularly with two survivors, Ruth Lavie-Jourgrau and Julia Izaks-van der Velde, who were both present at the ceremony and who now reside in Israel and enjoy the company of children and grandchildren, all made possible by the selfless act and the courage of Ritske and Immigje Veenstra.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

A Tribute to Mothers

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the very distinct pleasure of rising to pay tribute to an amazing group of people who more than any other group of individuals can truly be credited with changing the world. This group of people didn't just affect the world once but change it in significant ways every single day. That group of people is mothers.

I know the impact my own mom, Maureen Griffiths, had on my life, and I like to think she raised a pretty good son, but along with that she also raised my younger sister and my younger brother, who are both very successful. She was an amazing homemaker, which we know is the equivalent of having two full-time jobs in and of

itself, had a part-time job off the farm, acted as cook, cleaner, truck driver, grain dryer, cattle feeder, and nurse to a bunch of sick, hungry, tired, and occasionally grumpy men on the farm. Still, amazingly, she is the most caring, strong, and beautiful woman I've ever met.

Mr. Speaker, these women, mothers, are also leaders, volunteers, businesswomen, teachers, doctors, nurses, and other professionals. Whether they are like the Famous Five fighting for human rights or volunteers fighting social injustice or world-famous athletes or curing diseases or creating jobs, they do this all while raising not just children but raising the future of our communities, our province, our country, and the world.

No words can ever say thank you enough. No gift of flowers can ever say thank you enough for the band-aids when we bled, the hugs when we hurt, the support when we were scared, and the swift kicks in the backside when we needed it. You helped make each of us what we are today, and still you help us get better every single day. We know that no love is stronger than a mother's love.

To all of the angels out there like my mom, on behalf of the members of this House, we say thank you, moms. We love you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Hank Williams First Nation

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to highlight a northern success story, the story of filmmaking in northern Alberta. One of the first films to be shot in northern Alberta was in 1919. It was called *Back to God's Country*. What else would you call it, really? There were many aboriginal actors in that film, but unfortunately none of them were credited for their work.

Today aboriginal and northern people are involved in almost every aspect of film production, and they are receiving credit for it. Last Friday there was a red carpet ceremony in Edmonton for the Alberta premiere of the movie *Hank Williams First Nation*. The film is about a 75-year-old Cree man and his 17-year-old nephew who set out on an ambitious adventure from northern Alberta to visit the gravesite of Hank Williams in Nashville.

This film was produced in northern Alberta with northern investors and has opened to critical acclaim. From the north are producers and investors who believed in the movie and committed dollars to see this realized. Credits go to a number of people, Mr. Speaker, too many to mention here, but I must mention Aaron Sorensen, a 38-year-old former teacher who brought this First Nation story to life and is to be commended for his artistic abilities.

To Aaron Sorensen and to the investors, congratulations on your involvement in what I call the best little movie made in northern Alberta. The arts are alive and well in northern Alberta, Mr. Speaker, and that's just great because we have many more stories to tell.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Conflict in Sudan

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently on these grounds we gathered to commemorate the unparalleled tragedy of the Jewish Holocaust and pledged ourselves as Albertans and Canadians to stand unshakably against such violations of humanity.

Eleven years ago the world watched in horror but failed to act as 8,000 Tutsis were massacred by Hutus despite desperate pleas from all around the world, including from our own General Roméo Dallaire.

Again the African continent is facing genocide in western Sudan, the Darfur region, described by some as Rwanda in slow motion. According to UN information 300,000 people have been killed and more than 2 million displaced since 2002. A friend, Val Laforce from Medicine Hat, has just returned from three months in the refugee camps of Darfur, and she along with other committed individuals of Care International is calling on all citizens to raise their voices yet again for the protection of children and adults in this ongoing disaster.

A number of high-level meetings with the government of Sudan resulted in some humanitarian aid, but the recent UN resolution to refer the issue to the international court is woefully inadequate to address the ongoing starvation, abandonment of agriculture, and violence by government forces and arab militia against citizens. Many observers, including Canadian Stephen Lewis and former Major-General Lewis MacKenzie, are calling on the international community to intervene along with the African Union.

As citizens of a wealthy country and province it's easy to diminish our role in this conflict except for two fundamental truths. Number one, violations of international law and humanity anywhere are assaults on us all. We are either complicit in silence and inaction or we stand with human rights and peace everywhere. Number two, our country and Alberta are host to an increasing number of Sudanese and others from unstable and resource-poor regions. Greater commitment to foreign aid and development is essential to reduce such lawlessness. As members of the Legislature we cannot limit our focus to this province. We are world citizens. We need to speak out with others, including NGOs, in favour of the rule of law and human rights.

On behalf of the many here in the Assembly and citizens across this great and caring province I express my outrage that our federal government and governments of the free world continue to fail us and the world in taking decisive and meaningful action to protect the lives of innocent men, women, and children by confronting abusive and lawless powers. I call on the national government and all parties to focus attention and necessary resources with others in the international community to immediately confront yet another emerging genocide, including humanitarian, political, and military aid through appropriate bodies. Mr. Speaker, to betray these people is to betray ourselves, our children, and our future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, because of the serious note the chair did not intervene, but you were one minute and five seconds over.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

2:50 Events Attended by Member for Calgary-Varsity

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This past Friday and Saturday were busy volunteer recognition days in both Calgary and Edmonton. On Friday afternoon I met Pat Nixon, the founder and director of the Mustard Seed Street Ministry, who gave me a guided tour of the amazing Calgary facility, which could just as easily be referred to as Miracle on 1st Street SE. Pat has fought demons in his own Daniel's den of provincial penitentiaries. He has also wrestled and worked with angels in the form of hundreds of volunteers who have positively impacted the lives of thousands of downtrodden souls.

The Mustard Seed program is more than just feeding an empty belly and providing an overnight bed. A variety of health, education, guidance, employment, and related second and third life chances are provided. As a Baptist minister Pat Nixon can't officially be considered for Catholic sainthood, but he sure qualifies amongst the people for whom and with whom he serves as Saint Pat.

On Friday evening in Calgary the members for Calgary-Currie, Calgary-McCall, and myself had the pleasure of attending the 40th annual celebration of Meals on Wheels, entitled Feast for Your Ears. Among the many individuals who contributed both to the success of the event as well as to the program as a whole were Sandra Walker, who has recently become the president of the board of directors; Lou Winthers, a recent director, who has an incredible history of service with both the Calgary health region and Calgary hospices; and Dana McLaren, who has volunteered in a variety of roles over the years. Two of the award recipients were Hattie Boothman, who has volunteered for the entire 40 years of the Meals on Wheels program, and Kay Conacher, another great Calgary-Varsity constituent, who delivered the first meal back in 1965 and has continued to literally serve for over 37 years.

Saturday morning I along with the Member for Calgary-Currie, local MPs, and provincial and municipal dignitaries including the Hon. Peter Lougheed witnessed and in many cases judged amazing school projects at the Calgary Heritage Fair, held in the city hall atrium. Amongst the outstanding projects was that of Carlos Garcia, a grade 4 student at St. Gregory elementary/junior high school. Carlos's project on the Halifax explosion demonstrated the high quality of projects exhibited at the fair.

In conclusion, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the tremendous work and results of the Minister and Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation, who put on a fabulous Centennial Legacy Ball at Edmonton Shaw centre on Saturday night. It was a great recognition and fundraising event, which was attended by a variety of individuals and organizations throughout Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. That came with a surplus of 25 seconds.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I stand to present a petition signed by 910 Albertans urging the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to "introduce legislation that will (a) allow parents the authority to place their children into mandatory drug treatment and (b) fund urgently required drug use treatment centres" for youth.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition prepared by the McKenzie Towne public school committee, 422 names, to address the need for a public school in McKenzie Towne and to address the need throughout Calgary, in all communities.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the Premier.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Premier I wish to table a copy of the Alberta Official Opposition news release from October 11, 2001, entitled Official Opposition Extends Best Wishes to Auditor General Peter Valentine, to which I believe the Premier referred during question period earlier.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of the two documents that I referred to in question period today, one being the terms of reference set for the provincial inspection into Calgary's ward 10 election process and the second being the announcement of the provincial inspection to proceed into Calgary's ward 10 election.

The Speaker: The hon. chair of the Legislative Offices Committee.

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the report of the Auditor General on seniors care and programs, dated May 2005. Copies of this report are being distributed to all members today.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. I would like to table a letter by Joan Ingoldsby and Cheryl Weiler. The letter details concerns about the quality of care in the long-term facility where their mother is staying. These concerns appear to stem from a chronic problem of staff shortages.

I'd also like to table a letter from the Elder Advocates of Alberta Society. The letter argues that the Health Facilities Review Committee has been used to field, diffuse, and dismiss complaints, thereby misleading the public into believing that nursing homes and other eldercare facilities are being monitored.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents to table today. The first is a letter addressed to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development from Melissa Tkachyk of the World Society for the Protection of Animals. The letter expresses WSPA's disappointment that they were not consulted as stakeholders for the review of Alberta's zoo licensing.

The second is a press release issued by the Sierra Club of Canada last Thursday. The Sierra Club has built a database to evaluate the progress of provincial commitments to the national forest strategy, and they found that Alberta has no management framework for maintaining old-growth forests.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a transcript of a tape between Enron traders Tim and John. It is listed as exhibit SNO-221, and it's in regard to the power purchase arrangement auction that Enron participated in in the summer of 2000.

My second tabling is a pamphlet from the Ottewell community patrol program, Helping to Keep our Neighbourhoods Safe, and it's produced by the Ottewell community patrol program from the Ottewell police station.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of each of four letters calling on the government to not have temporary foreign workers and to look at the deskilling of the workplace that's going on in the industry.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, with thanks again to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, the other day when I introduced one of the gentlemen who was with us from the Canadian armed forces, I indicated that he had been wounded in Belgium. The town that I gave was Bergen op Zoom. It is actually in the Netherlands, and it was corrected, and *Hansard* recalls that.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of a letter from a constituent by the name of Rudolph Klingbeil. Mr. Klingbeil is a retired public service employee who wrote expressing his concern about his public service pension, which has recently been reduced from \$1,620 a month to \$950 a month and now down to \$841 a month.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, we had two points of order that came basically at the same time. The leader of third party interjected with a point of order, and I understand that he's delegated his spokespersonship to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. The Official Opposition House Leader rose almost at the same time, and I gather she's delegated her speaking responsibility to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. So let us proceed.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Point of Order

Referring to a Member by Name

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our point of order refers to *Beauchesne* 484: "It is the custom in the House that no Member should refer to another by name." I believe that during question period this afternoon the Premier, the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, did refer to the Leader of the Opposition by name.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Same point of order, hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford? A different point of order.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Just with respect to this particular point of order I think it was the Premier's intention to simply point out the fact that the person who was raising the issue now on behalf of the Liberal opposition happens to have been, we thought, the leader at the time, which we'll get to in the second point of order.

However, I think the member from the third party has pointed out very correctly that we ought not refer to any sitting member of the Assembly by personal, or private, name. So we would ask that that reference be withdrawn, and we apologize for that having occurred.

3:00

The Speaker: Well, thank you very much. That definitely concludes that point of order. It is absolutely correct: the Premier did refer to an existing member in this House, and that was a violation. So we've dealt with that one.

Now, hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, a different point of order?

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

Mr. R. Miller: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I rise to raise a point of order under Standing Order 23(h), (i), (j). This afternoon, as was mentioned, in question period the hon. Premier in response to a question from the Leader of the Official Opposition not only referred to him by name, which has already been dealt with by yourself, but

also he made comments which I believe were specifically designed to create disorder in this House.

When he quoted the Leader of our Official Opposition as having made certain comments about the former Auditor General, he attributed those words specifically to the current Leader of the Official Opposition. Mr. Speaker, that is blatantly false. It's totally inaccurate given that the hon. Premier was reading from a press release that was dated 11 October 2001, and it very clearly says in that press release, "Alberta Official Opposition Leader Ken Nicol." Given that he was reading directly from the piece of paper, I have no other conclusion to draw than that he was deliberately trying to create disorder in the House.

Also, *Beauchesne* 486 says that "much depends upon the tone and manner, and intention, of the person speaking." Again, I think that if one were to consider the tone in which it was said and, in my opinion at least, the obvious glee with which the hon. Premier was saying it, I again can come to no other conclusion than that, in fact, he was intending to create a certain amount of disorder in this House.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would await your ruling on that point of order. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to this particular point of order I don't believe that the comment made by our Premier was at all intended or designed to create disorder. Specific to the tone and the manner that's been referred to, I think that the point here – and likely this is exactly the case – was that the Premier was simply trying to demonstrate and point up some of the hypocrisy that seems to have engulfed the Liberal Official Opposition in regard to the appointment of Mr. Peter Valentine, who, as we would all know, or most of us in this House at least would know, is and was an enviable, outstanding Albertan with a great track record of service to this province and, in particular, to this Legislative Assembly for a number of years.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, just to refresh people's memories here, Mr. Peter Valentine served as the Auditor General of Alberta from 1995 to 2002. Prior to that, he served as a senior partner in the accounting firm of KPMG, a very respectable accounting firm in our parts, from 1958 to 1995. I might also point out that during that time Mr. Peter Valentine served as partner in charge of professional practice of the Calgary office, also as chairman of the KPMG International Energy Practice Group, and also as senior audit partner responsible for a variety of medium- to large-sized organizations, with expertise in the petroleum industry and Canadian securities practice. Finally, Peter Valentine also previously served as chair of the Financial Advisory Committee of the Alberta Securities Commission, and I believe the Premier indicated some additional points in that respect.

I believe the point here is that in October of 2004 the Liberal opposition, in its news release entitled Official Opposition Extends Best Wishes to Auditor General Peter Valentine, went on to say at the bottom of the press release:

Mr. Valentine's integrity and desire to improve the way government conducts business has increased the credibility of the Office of the Auditor General. My colleagues in the Official Opposition and I extend our best wishes to Mr. Valentine.

And it also states briefly:

Albertans have been well served by Mr. Valentine's dedication and commitment. He has helped to hold the government responsible for its plans and actions through critical and thoughtful recommendations in his annual reports.

That having been said, Mr. Speaker, if you look immediately to the left-hand side of this press release, there you will see on the

masthead or on the letterhead the personal name of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview shown as the leader of that particular team.

However, now that I've had a chance to review this news release in greater detail myself – and I believe the Premier and others have gone through it more carefully – we have to note that, in fact, the quote that was used and the two quotes I've just read were attributed to Ken Nicol, the former Leader of the Alberta Liberal Party. So those quotes were attributed to him in the news release. However, one would assume that since the current Liberal leader was simply allowing his name to stand on the letterhead and on the masthead immediately attached to that, perhaps there was some form of endorsement – who knows? – of that same press release as made. Otherwise, one would have thought that perhaps it could've been handled in some other way.

I will say this to the House and to you with due respect, Mr. Speaker, that I believe that this was an honest oversight or slip, if you will, on the part of our Premier, and I know that he would want it recorded in *Hansard* that a correction of this inadvertent reference is hereby made. So whichever form of explanation the House would accept: if you wish it withdrawn, we can withdraw it; otherwise, we'll just have it stand as corrected. That would be the conclusion of my remarks.

The Speaker: In *Hansard* today the document in question that was referred to by the Premier is dated October 11, 2004. Now, I understand that the hon. Deputy Government House Leader referred to a document dated October 4, 2001. So are we talking about one and the same document, do you think?

Mr. Zwozdesky: My apologies. I thought I said October '04, meaning October 2004, and I left out October 11. But it's clear that it's October 11 that I was referring to, of 2004.

The Speaker: Okay. That's the first clarification.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you.

The Speaker: Now I'll deal with the second part.

Mr. R. Miller: On the order of clarification, Mr. Speaker, the document that I have, and I'm assuming that we're talking about the same document . . .

The Speaker: Oh, don't ever do that.

Mr. R. Miller: . . . very clearly says 11 October 2001.

The Speaker: The Premier referred to a document dated October 11, 2001.

Mr. Zwozdesky: I'm sorry. That's my mistake. I just noticed it myself. The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is quite correct. I just misspoke a minute or two ago. I meant to say October 11, 2001, to be clear. My sincere apologies to him.

The Speaker: Now that we have that matter cleared up, we'll deal with the second one. If my memory is correct, the Leader of the Official Opposition on October 11, 2001, was not the current Leader of the Official Opposition. The Leader of the Official Opposition then was Dr. Ken Nicol. So it's true that what the Premier said today was not that particular individual's name but another name.

I believe that there was an explanation given. I think there's even a withdrawal, on the verge of an apology. Everything else, as far as

I can see, in all of this – have we now dealt with this matter, hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford?

Mr. R. Miller: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay. I love harmony. Thank you.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, May 5, it is my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 32.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Q32. Mr. Eggen moved on behalf of Mr. Martin that the following question be accepted.

For each of the fiscal years 2000-2001, 2001-2002, 2002-2003, and 2003-2004 how many Albertans received benefits from the AISH, assured income for the severely handicapped, program, and for each of those years how many received the maximum benefit rate?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to put forward Question 32 in reference to getting the information on Albertans receiving benefits from AISH. Our specific focus here is to get the percentage of individuals who are receiving the maximum benefit rate. Of course, this has a lot to do with how people perceive how many people, first of all, are receiving AISH and then also taking that maximum rate, which is otherwise not very much money per month.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports I would like to indicate acceptance of the written question if it is amended. This amendment was shared earlier this afternoon with all members of the House and is in accordance with the protocol for written questions. I'd like to move that Written Question 32 be amended by deleting "and for each of those years how many received the maximum benefit rate." The amended question would then read: "For each of the fiscal years 2000-2001, 2001-2002, 2002-2003, and 2003-2004 how many Albertans received benefits from the AISH, assured income for the severely handicapped, program?"

3:10

I'd like to share the following rationale for this change. AISH clients may receive full benefits one month and partial benefits the next, depending on their financial situation. Sometimes an AISH client or their spouse may earn more or have more employment earnings for one particular month; therefore, the AISH client wouldn't receive the maximum benefit for that month. The needs of our clients change from month to month, and within a given year the number of clients and the amount they receive fluctuates.

Also, the original question would require AISH staff to review approximately 32,000 files to determine the types of benefits each client would receive each month over the years in question. This would take away from their ability to support AISH clients. By clarifying the question, we can in a timely manner respond with the number of Albertans who received AISH benefits for the years in question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I appreciate the explanation as to why it might be difficult or problematic to put together all of the information on who is receiving the maximum AISH benefits during any given fiscal year, I think that it would not be impossible. Certainly, it would still be, I think, very useful for all Albertans to see who does manage to receive the maximum allowable benefit rate for the whole year in each given fiscal year, if you understand my distinction. Perhaps if the amendment was going forward in that way, that we could have the individuals who are receiving the maximum allowable AISH benefit rates for the entire fiscal year, moving through each of those years that we had asked for it, then I would find it acceptable. Otherwise, it loses the essence of the question almost entirely.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder to conclude the debate.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, at least I've learned that if you do in fact have an amendment, then you are getting some information. So it might forward our illumination on this issue that I think a lot of Albertans, not just those who are affected by the AISH rates but all Albertans, have a vested interest to make sure that people are receiving a just and fair living wage or monies so that they can in fact live a decent and reasonable lifestyle. I guess that as amended, something is better than nothing.

Thank you.

[Written Question 32 as amended carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, May 5, I would just move that motions appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

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

**Bill 203
Report on Alberta's Legacy Act**

[Debate adjourned April 4: Mr. Eggen speaking]

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been some time. I think this bill has been moved forward to different places for a number of weeks, but I am very happy to resume the debate on Bill 203.

I think, just to remind ourselves about it, that we're looking at how we can build a postsecondary education system that is sustainable but also meets the changing needs of our province. While we have a very wealthy province, I would suggest that we have been excluding a larger and larger percentage of our population who would otherwise want to and deserve to and, really, need to go to postsecondary education by, in fact, making it unaffordable for those individuals to go to a postsecondary institution.

We've heard a lot these past couple of months on ways by which we can in fact improve that situation. I have said it before, and I'll say it again, that even the very most conservative analysis of how we might run our postsecondary education system would suggest that you must make the most efficient use of your population. The people who are most able to in fact be successful at a postsecondary institution do need to go there and graduate from there so that we can build a system of not only education but a workforce based on meritocracy and ability rather than, perhaps, just how much money one's family has in the bank.

Now, specifically with Bill 203, I must say that I do oppose this bill. I know that it was the Liberal opposition flagship bill for the last election, but I would suggest that it gives permission to the Conservatives to continue a decade-long policy of systematically and deliberately lowballing government revenues and, thereby, also budget surpluses.

I'd like to remind all Albertans of how the Liberals sort of moved this way and then that on the question of unbudgeted surpluses. After years of criticizing the lowballing of revenues here in this House and thereby underestimating surpluses under the former leader of the Liberal Party – I'm not sure if we mention those names or not – in the first months of the current leadership I think suddenly using unbudgeted surpluses to fund endowments now becomes the foundation of Liberal fiscal policy. I find this confusing at best, and it certainly goes against our own caucus and my own personal view of how public education must be funded.

Over the last 12 years or so the Conservative government has underestimated budget surpluses by a cumulative total of \$27.3 billion, or an average underestimation of \$2.25 billion per annum. This systematic underestimation of budget surpluses has been mainly accomplished by lowballing revenues, mostly oil and gas revenues but also other revenue sources like gambling and corporate taxation. Over the past 12 years the Conservatives have also underestimated revenues by a total cumulation of \$33 billion, or an average lowball of \$2.75 billion per year.

During this 12-year period these unbudgeted surpluses were applied to the provincial debt, allowing the rapid paydown of a \$23 billion accumulated debt, rung up during the years of another Conservative government. In addition, this lowballing of revenue policy has allowed an average of \$500 million per year to be applied to extra in-year spending for different political hot potatoes as they might pop up.

At one time the Liberal opposition, particularly under the previous leader, opposed such budgeting, which I would consider to be deceptive at best, Mr. Speaker. Now the NDP opposition stands alone in doing so, it seems. Today the Liberal opposition is making unbudgeted surpluses to build the heritage fund, to fund extra in-year capital spending, and to fund endowments for advanced education and for the arts, a centrepiece of this budget policy. Instead of urging the government to accurately forecast budgetary revenues and to accurately provide for needed expenditures in the budget, the

Liberal opposition is giving the government permission to continue to lowball revenues in order to generate large unbudgeted surpluses.

3:20

Sound budgeting requires expenditure provisions up front to inflation-proof the heritage fund, Mr. Speaker, to fund infrastructure, and to provide stable, predictable funding for postsecondary education and the arts, humanities, and social sciences. This ensures that expenditures are properly scrutinized before the money is actually expended.

Budget forecasting is not an exact science. A sustainability fund is a good idea so long as it is properly used. In years where there is an unbudgeted yearly surplus, money should be paid into the sustainability fund. In years where there is an unbudgeted yearly deficit, monies should be paid from the sustainability fund to keep the budget in balance. Disingenuous it is to hear the Liberals criticize the Conservatives for only budgeting \$250 million in 2005-06 for the postsecondary endowments when under the Liberal plan zero dollars would have been budgeted, and the endowments would have been entirely dependent on unbudgeted surpluses.

With this analysis I would suggest that there are better ways to fund postsecondary education. The most fundamental thing is to make sure that you are making that commitment to long-term funding for nuts and bolts that make the universities and colleges work regardless of what sort of unbudgeted surplus situation we might find ourselves in. So with both Bill 203 and Bill 1 we have serious concerns, Mr. Speaker, that I think need to be addressed and the public should know about.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising on the privilege of 29 to ask a question with regard to what I've just heard. The Member for Edmonton-Calder criticized the Liberals for believing what they said and actually putting it in print, but he offers no solutions with regard to the surpluses. Perhaps he would enlighten us as to the NDP's position with regard to surpluses, budgeted or otherwise.

Mr. Eggen: Well, certainly. I think that it's very clear that our policy in regard to surpluses is, number one, to be paying into a sustainability fund to maintain a reasonable base budgeting . . .

The Speaker: Actually, we have no provision for such a standing order under this matter and subject in the Routine.

Now, when I recognized the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, did he also want to participate?

Mr. Bonko: No. It was just with respect to a question.

The Speaker: Okay, which we don't have.

Then the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to participate.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that Bill 203 is a very good bill. I think it's very clear, and it's easily understood by all Albertans. Thirty-five per cent of the budget goes to the heritage fund; 35 per cent goes into postsecondary education for an endowment fund, also to be noted that there is no cap on that; 25 per cent of the annual budget goes toward paying the infrastructure debt – which is noted to be \$8 billion; however, as we stand here and speak, it is growing every day – and then 5 per cent into the humanities, social sciences, and arts. I also believe that this would help prevent

all of the different ministries from dipping into the surplus through supplemental estimates and insist on better budgeting practices right from the outset.

The 5 per cent would go, as I mentioned, to the humanities, social sciences, and arts to supplement existing funding and encourage development in these fields. Even that, at this point, is a pittance to try and catch up to the deep cuts that have been forced onto the arts, especially within the educational system – the U of C, Grant MacEwan, U of A, U of L, and, more importantly, in the high school programs – when often this is where latent talents and creativity are noticed and encouraged.

Our theatre companies are stretched to the limit to write, produce, and perform live theatre. Why must all of our talented citizens, be they artists in any of the mediums – the writers and the musicians, the actors, set designers, and on and on – go to other jurisdictions for the experience necessary to strive for excellence in their craft? How much more shallow our society is by being deprived of exposure to other dimensions of which our minds are capable. All work and no play makes Jack a very dull boy indeed. We want, we can afford, and we must increase the dollars to our arts community.

This part of Bill 203 would indeed invest in Alberta's future and in the arts community. They would have sustainable and predictable funds coming to them. They would know that the surplus is announced every year, and it's quite easy to establish what 5 per cent of that amount would be. Our movie industry, although it has some fantastic successes, is really operating on a shoestring and, therefore, should even be more highly commended. They're in an exceedingly competitive environment. With our geographic location and highly trained staff – technicians, actors, et cetera – we should be shooting movies in at least two locations every month in this province, but in order to do that, this arts community that we speak of simply has to have sustainable funding and, certainly, more of it.

I believe that this bill is a very comprehensive bill. I think it covers all of the many areas that have been hit very hard by the cuts over the last 10 years. I also believe that it would encourage – as I've said before, which I think is very important – better budgeting practices by this government. You can't just lowball it and then later on think, "Oh, well, we've got extra money" and be dipping into it.

I think it's a very comprehensive bill. Certainly, it covers our future, and I would ask support for this bill.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the first opportunity I've had to rise and debate Bill 203, and I'm grateful for the opportunity. I believe that there is much in this bill. Some dissenting opinions across the way and down the aisle from us notwithstanding, I think there is a great deal to recommend in this bill. It was created in an odd sort of way because, of course, private members' bills cannot be money bills, so the bill was crafted in such a way that we are asking essentially for an annual report from government as to what the government's financial picture would look like if the Liberal plan for investing surplus monies was followed year in, year out. It's the closest we can come to actually putting a private member's bill on the floor that would in fact ask this House to vote on dividing up the surplus in the way that we campaigned during the 2004 election, which is very much still part of our platform.

Before I go on, I want to address briefly, if I can, some of the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. You know, he would be right in his criticism of our surplus investment policy if, in doing this, we were also to cancel all budgeted spending on postsecondary education and public education – I don't know how

far he might want to take it – health, social services, community development, whatever. There's no intention to do that. This deals with the surplus, with the disbursement of surplus monies, or at least deals with, agreeably, a somewhat hypothetical scenario asking the government to produce an annual report on what would have happened in the past 12 months, in the past fiscal year, if this plan had been followed. The surplus, by its very definition, involves monies that are left over after the revenue has been counted up for the fiscal year and the expenses have been counted up for the fiscal year, and we take expenses away from revenue, and we see what's left over.

We go even further, of course, Mr. Speaker, because there's a very clear definition of surplus set out in Bill 203. Under Bill 203 a surplus is defined as the net assets of the sustainability fund in excess of \$2.5 billion at the end of the fiscal year.

3:30

We're not shortchanging the sustainability fund. Far from it. We are guaranteeing that there will be funds available in the sustainability fund on an ongoing basis for future emergencies. So the surplus that we're talking about investing – 35 per cent in the heritage savings trust fund, 35 per cent in the postsecondary education endowment fund, 25 per cent in our capital account, and the additional 5 per cent, up to a \$500 million cap, into our arts, humanities, and social sciences endowment fund – is from the money left over after all of that.

Now, aha, that's the unbudgeted surplus. The big, unbudgeted-surplus bugaboo. Well, I don't think it's as much of a bugaboo as my colleague from the third party would see it because, trust me, Mr. Speaker, we are not part of a dark side conspiracy here to pull the wool over the eyes of Albertans. We are dealing with the reality of an economy based in large part on a nonrenewable resource, which some years is in fantastic demand and some years is not in that much demand at all, some years is in great supply and some years is in short supply. The laws of supply and demand coupled with some good, healthy, free-market speculation in the futures markets, I guess, determine in large part what a barrel of oil is going to sell for on any given day any given year.

So there is volatility built into that. That's why we have a sustainability fund, a sustainability fund which was, by the way – and I'd be delighted to accept the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder's praise for the sustainability fund – originally an idea of a past Liberal caucus. It was adopted, ultimately, by this House, and that's good. The sustainability fund is there to get us over the bumpy parts when we're in a bust year as opposed to a boom year. I know I'm using the B words here, and nobody in this province likes to do that, but for lack of a better description, I'll use boom and bust as a shorthand there.

The member himself admits that budgeting is not an exact science. It is an exercise in prognostication, after all, in predicting the future. While it's not an exact science, you can be pretty certain that you can predict that in some years, perhaps in many years, no matter how much you try to be exact in your budgeting, you're going to end up with, as the member calls it, an unbudgeted surplus.

I've spent a good deal of time talking about the unbudgeted surplus, and I want to get off of that because I don't want us to get too bogged down in that concept, just to say that this bill would seek an annual report from government on what the government's finances would look like if we were to take the surplus, the pie of extra money left over after the expenses have been taken away from the revenues and the sustainability fund's needs have been met in any given fiscal year, and then looking on that amount of money as a pie, cutting it up in very predictable ways: 35 per cent to

postsecondary education, 35 per cent to grow the heritage savings trust fund, which I will remind this House was the original concept behind that fund when it was created over 30 years ago by the Lougheed government.

It's been a long time since that heritage fund has had regular investment in itself. There's one investment in the last I'm not sure how many years, something like 18 years. One investment – I think I exaggerate there – in the last several years in any event to inflation-proof the fund. That's been it, and the fund in real terms is, in fact, worth less today than it was in 1987. That was not the intention of the people who created, who set up the heritage savings trust fund back in the '70s. So 35 per cent into that to make it grow the way it was supposed to, another 35 per cent into an endowment for postsecondary education, 25 per cent into the capital account, and 5 per cent into the endowment fund to support the humanities, social sciences, and the arts.

My colleague from Lethbridge-East, I thought, spoke quite eloquently on the need to invest in the arts, social sciences, and humanities in this province, so I'll leave her remarks to stand without elaborating on them.

The 25 per cent into the capital account. You know, on the campaign trail after spelling out the 35 per cent in the heritage fund, the 35 per cent in postsecondary education, and 5 per cent into the arts and culture fund, as I sometimes refer to it in shorthand, I would say: "And the other 25 per cent? Well, after all, we are Liberals. We would spend it." That's essentially what we would do ultimately with that capital account. Yes, it would go in there first to grow somewhat, to produce some income. But, after all, the idea of the capital account is to raise money in a predictable, sustainable way, to continue to address and pay down, if you will, the infrastructure deficit that this province has that is in the billions of dollars.

The 35 per cent into an endowment for postsecondary education. This I will speak on briefly, Mr. Speaker, because I am, after all, the Advanced Education critic for the Official Opposition, and we've spent quite some time in this House debating Bill 1. The 35 per cent into an endowment for postsecondary education is above and beyond in our concept: above and beyond predictable, sustainable, reasonable funding for advanced education in the province of Alberta. The trouble with Bill 1 – and I think my colleague from Edmonton-Calder will agree with me on this – one of the problems with Bill 1 because there's more than one, is that it does not deal with the issue of base operating grants. It does not deal with the need first and foremost to address the systemic flaws, the fundamental flaws in the advanced education system in the province of Alberta, by boosting the basic funding for the system. There's just not enough money in the pot to do the job required.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 1 was not intended to address that by the government's own admission. Our postsecondary education endowment fund was not intended to address that. We're very clear, as I think the third party is although our numbers may vary slightly – I'm not sure – on the notion that in order to make the postsecondary education system work the way it needs to work for the young people of Alberta and for all people of Alberta who need to engage in lifelong learning, it needs a boost of 8 per cent, or a hundred million dollars, per year in each of the next three years at least. This government in its budget committed to far less than that. This government in its budget also . . . [Mr. Taylor's speaking time expired] I'm done.

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

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to address the Assembly today regarding Bill 203, the Report on Alberta's Legacy

Act. When I received my copy of this bill upon first reading, I found it very interesting that the hon. member is bringing forward a bill that proposes a yearly report which would look at what would have happened had the government taken the Liberals' advice. I have to say that I think this is a great idea. In fact, I don't think that this bill goes far enough, limiting the report to only how the Liberals think we should deal with surpluses. I would actually be very interested in reading a report that looked back over the past decade at what Alberta might look like now had the government taken all of the Liberal opposition's advice or, even better, if there had been a Liberal government here in Alberta, God forbid.

Now, just a quick look at some of their election promises over the past couple of elections and some of the debates in this Assembly tell us quite a bit. I think I might even be able to figure out right here, right now what a report of that depth would look like. Mr. Speaker, if I had to guess, I would say that the first section of a report on what would have happened under a Liberal government in Alberta would be called The Liberals IU Program. That is insurance unemployment.

In this last election the Liberals suggested that we should have a socialistic government monopoly style of auto insurance, one that would undoubtedly drive insurance businesses out of Alberta, increase unemployment, provide Albertans with roughly the same insurance rates we already have, and cost the taxpayers millions of dollars to set up. So, basically, had we adopted that program, many Albertans would be out looking for work while still paying the same rate for insurance as they did so.

The second section of the report would likely be titled Albertans Get Lit Up. Under a Liberal government in Alberta, we probably would not have deregulated electricity, which would in turn have cost taxpayers billions of dollars to purchase and build the power plants and transmission lines that we were in desperate need of prior to deregulation. We're still seeing some of those same needs today, Mr. Speaker, but thankfully these will be built by industry rather than by taxpayers.

3:40

Furthermore, London Economics International reports that Alberta's power rates are competitive with other provinces while we have no debt on our power infrastructure. Although I'm sure that the report on what would have happened to Alberta under a Liberal government would say that power prices would also have been competitive, we continue stating that blackouts would have been commonplace due to lack of generation capacity under the Liberal regime.

Further to that, whereas provinces like Ontario and Quebec have tens of billions of dollars of debt carried by their state-run electricity provider, which taxpayers in those provinces will be paying back for years, Alberta has no debt fiscally or through government-owned power companies. My guess is that the report would say that the taxpayer-supported debt to build power plants would be continuing to mount.

I believe a fitting title for the third section of the report would be Nothing Left to Lowball. The Liberal opposition often complains that the government lowballs resource revenue estimates, so needless to say, under a Liberal government they would be taking the highest possible estimates they could find for volatile commodities like oil and gas. Probably also needless to say, the Liberal government would have spent much more than they received. Rather than seeing surpluses, we would be looking at deficits. Instead of having no debt, Albertans would be crushed under mounting debt. We've already seen in Ontario how under a Conservative government they had balanced budgets, and now under a Liberal government they are running billion-dollar deficits each and every year.

Mr. Speaker, the fourth section of this report would prove to be quite interesting. I think it would be titled Dethroning the Royalties. No, I don't think that Queen Elizabeth would be getting scrubbed off our centennial quarter. What I refer to is that the Liberal opposition has often been heard musing for years that they think that royalty rates need to be drastically raised. Peter Lougheed raised royalty rates in the 1970s to ensure that Albertans were getting their fair share while making sure that the oil and gas sector would still want to explore and extract the oil and gas from our land. This balance provides Albertans with billions of dollars in revenue annually as well as jobs for hundreds of thousands of Albertans. I imagine that under a Liberal government there would have been drastically higher royalty rates, drastically less oil and gas development, little or no royalty revenue, high unemployment, a greatly reduced oil sands venture, and most likely a much smaller population. I didn't even factor in their love for the Kyoto protocol in the picture.

Mr. Speaker, this final section, at least in this volume, would probably be titled Tax to the Max. A quick look back through *Hansard* shows that no matter what amount of money we are spending, no matter what we are spending it on, the standard response from the Liberal opposition is that we should be spending more. We just heard it. I would suggest that members watch the Liberal opposition during the upcoming budget debates where they will most likely be saying that we should be spending more on health care, more on education, more on municipalities, more on policing, more on the arts, more on universities, more on libraries, more on teachers, more on doctors, more on seniors, more on children, more on the environment, and more on agriculture.

If you can think of something that the government spends money on, the Liberals will tell you that we're not spending enough. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if they have their budget response speeches written even before they've seen a copy of the budget. I'm certain that this report would list all of the extra spending that would have occurred under a Liberal government, and I'm also certain that the NDs over there would have said that even that was still not enough.

So I, too, am sure that the report would have enlightened us as to how the Liberal government would have been able to afford all this extra spending, certainly through higher taxes and more debt. We would see increases to our personal income taxes, corporate taxes, royalty rates, health care premiums, and I would even venture to say that Albertans might have a provincial sales tax under a Liberal government. We also would probably have a much larger debt than we've ever had before.

For anyone who is tuning in late, Mr. Speaker, here's what I figure the executive summary would look like in a report on what Alberta would have looked like had the Liberals been in charge: high unemployment, high taxes, high debt, high spending, and we would all be sitting here in the dark.

I would also like to say that I find it very ironic that the hon. member has brought forward suggestions on how to spend our surpluses when, had we listened to their suggestions in the first place, there wouldn't have been any surpluses.

Mr. Speaker, I've always likened it to the story of the little red hen. Nobody wanted to help the little red hen make the bread. They didn't want to help pick the wheat, and they didn't want to help bake the bread. They didn't want to do any of the hard work. But once the bread was baked, they all wanted a share. That's how the Liberals want to spend our surpluses. They all seem to have great ideas. Now that we've done the hard work of balancing the books and paying off the debt, they all have grand schemes as to how to spend our surpluses.

That being said, I don't think that the suggestions for putting funding into a postsecondary education endowment fund, the

heritage fund, the capital account, and into the arts are poor ideas. In fact, before this very House today already is Bill 1, the Access to the Future Act, which will create the access to the future fund to expand and enhance opportunities for Albertans to attend high-quality postsecondary education.

Furthermore, this government has long had a standing policy that once our debt was paid off, we would begin to inject dollars into the heritage fund to inflation-proof it. Thanks to the perseverance and vision of this Conservative government that is now the case, and I look forward to that happening in the near future.

Furthermore, with the announcement of \$3 billion for municipalities to deal with their infrastructure debt, this government is once again already doing much of what the hon. member would like to see done.

So, in closing, Mr. Speaker, I obviously will not be able to support this bill. You may have guessed that. I don't want to set a precedent that the Alberta government will spend taxpayers' dollars to create a report to look at any and every policy an opposition member might pull out of their head. It's a waste of money. It's a waste of paper. Quite frankly, if the Liberal opposition wants feedback on their policies, there are 67 other MLAs that I am sure would be more than happy to give it to them.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm supporting this bill because it creates a surplus investment policy. I have to ask myself how we in the 21st century in the richest place on Earth can talk about an 18th century Scrooge philosophy based on economics and profits, where support for businesses is desired while help to individuals in need is considered a drain. I believe we can do better, and this bill is a step towards that. As I see the allocation of surplus funds, it would be as follows: 35 per cent of any surplus would go into the heritage fund, 35 per cent into an endowment fund for postsecondary education, 25 per cent into a capital account for infrastructure, 5 per cent into an endowment fund to support the humanities, social sciences, and the arts.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Most importantly, I believe that at the end of each fiscal year, starting with this fiscal year, March 31, 2005, the bill would require that the Minister of Finance prepare a report on how the financial affairs of the government would have been affected if the surplus investment policy was implemented. It requires that this report from the minister would be made public. We were suggesting also an automatic review of the act at the end of five years from it coming into force. So this would give us an opportunity for a review process, and I think that this would be a wise, judicious suggestion that would result in transparency and accountability.

It demonstrates a vision, a vision that moves beyond today and moves beyond some of the attitudes that we've just heard. We have enormous revenues available to us right now and for the short distant future coming from our natural resources, and what we most want to know is: how are we going to do something to ensure that this will have a lasting effect to the benefit of our children, our grandchildren, or even our great-grandchildren?

My constituents really support the idea of allocating these various surplus funds. Everyone liked the idea of the postsecondary endowment fund. People want to see this happen. They want to see that fund grow. They're willing to give this government, of course, credit for paying down the deficit that was owed by the province, but

they're also very much aware that in doing so, other deficits were created. So the idea of the infrastructure, supporting that wisely and having a plan for it, was supported by everyone.

I realize that the budget surpluses that Alberta has enjoyed in the recent past are directly related to energy prices. Past experiences have proven that these can be very volatile and maybe not sustainable for long periods of time. While recently we've had the good fortune of wonderful surpluses, they cannot be predicted with any degree of certainty, but this bill is talking about per cents of whatever surplus we do realize. This is an effort to have a plan, direction, and vision to ensure wise use of surpluses in the future. It is a savings, a trust, just like the heritage trust fund was meant to be.

When I look back at what Premier Lougheed created with the heritage trust fund, it was a vision, a vision that I think had some ingenuity with it. It was, I guess, a great benefit to this province. We've seen lots of benefits over the years. I can talk about the benefits to students in high schools receiving the scholarships year after year. We would also like to take a look, though, at what we can do to have this fund grow. It has not grown in the last number of years, and we do need a guaranteed revenue source beyond just the general revenue.

3:50

I'd like to look at the ingenuity and the vision and, I think, the possibilities of this bill that we're talking about today, a vision that takes us into the future by first dealing with the past. Repair the mistakes. Repair the neglect. Build the various areas back to the state that they were prior to us dumping all of our money into paying off the deficit and debt.

I think that as representatives of the people of this province we need to bring forward and pass laws that will make a real difference to Albertans and where we can see the benefits in the years to come. Albertans expect the government to be responsible and sensible with the funds they endow us with. It is, in turn, the responsibility of the government to give back to Albertans as much as possible through promoting the economy, job creation, effective public services, and lower taxes and supporting the things that in the end are truly an investment. Those are our people, our education, and our health.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. First, I want to maybe set the record straight. As much fanfare as this government wants to create over paying off the debt, we have to set the record straight. It is their debt that they, in fact, did pay off. They created it, and the whole province paid a heavy price to pay that off. To congratulate them is like praising your child for cleaning up their room. It's something that they're expected to do. They don't need to be congratulated on that.

The debt's not really officially paid off. As the government has set-aside to pay off the debt and to put those funds down early, they're going to face a financial penalty according to the press release of July 12. They can't pay it off just yet, until it becomes due.

However, the point remains about what to do with the large surplus that, in fact, remains year after year with regard to the amounts unbudgeted, re the royalties. There is no plan for future surpluses. The government refused to talk about it during the campaign, and they're still refusing to talk about it. But one party has put out a plan for sustainability and long-term thinking, and that is the Liberal Party. I've said this in the past and I'll say it again

now: it's unfortunate that just because it comes from one side of the House and has good merit, it shouldn't be in fact evaluated and considered then.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, why I think it's more fun in here in private members' bills is because what really happens is that you get really ill-thought-out ideas sometimes that come forward, but they deserve the consideration of this Legislature for a certain amount of time.

The planning that went into the bill I have to think is somewhat suspect. I would suggest that if we have surpluses like that, there is one place it should go. It should go back to the people of Alberta in tax relief. It should probably be set aside for emergencies or emergent needs that may not all be to do with health and education.

That said, there is some merit in the coulda, woulda, shoulda attitude of the opposition. I would love to have a Finance minister go back into the Liberal government gun control bill, and let's see how many lives could have been saved with that \$2 billion. I mean, it would be great if we could look back and then think what would have happened. It would be great to look back into the Liberal ad sponsorship scams and find out what we could have done with that \$200 million or \$300 million and the \$200 million or \$300 million we're going to spend finding out how they all covered their rear ends to make sure they're not the one that gets left holding the bag. Those would be great things for a Finance minister to do, but they'd be kind of counterproductive.

General Motors kind of taught us a lesson when they built a car. They put a big windshield on it, and they put a little rearview mirror. Mr. Speaker, that means that you govern looking forward. You keep an eye on the mirror, on what happened. You learn from the past, but you don't live in it. You only have one place for one driver in a car, and when you get a whole bunch of back-seat drivers trying to tell the driver where to go, if they listened, they'd probably crash. Thank goodness we've got a leader and a government that are able to pick their plan on a highway, and they're heading down it full speed ahead.

We've got rid of a lot of the baggage that many other governments aren't able to in debt and deficit, and now the road that we go on for Albertans is our choice. I just hope the people in this Assembly don't listen to the back-seat drivers looking out the back window wondering where we could have gone, what we might have done but look forward to all the possibilities we've got in Alberta. It's our destiny. So I just hope we get rid of this bill in second reading and maybe get on to something reasonably intelligent.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Boy, it's quite an afternoon, isn't it? You know, but for the grace of God and really, really good fortune this government would have broken their own law last year. I'd like to remind the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar that we approved \$1.9 billion in unbudgeted spending for the year 2004-2005, \$1.9 billion that this government spent that wasn't in the budget. It's only through good fortune and high natural resource prices that they managed to turn a surplus this year. So for him to talk about the tax-and-spend Liberals and read his fancy little report there – quite frankly, he's very, very lucky that the tables aren't turned on him. I really find that quite interesting, that the government that blew their budget within six weeks of it being passed last year should now stand up and talk about what a great job of budgeting they do.

In fact, we've already seen a number of budgetary announcements in the last few weeks that have caused me to question whether or not that's perhaps unbudgeted spending again being announced in the month of May. We haven't even passed the budget yet, and there are announcements coming out that I'm not even sure are included in the budget. So it's really just quite interesting to hear the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar talk about what a great job of budgeting this government does when it would be my submission that they're doing a rather dismal job of budgeting, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, if ever there was a time for a surplus investment policy, it is now. We're experiencing unbelievable resource revenues. We're seeing money come in that, obviously, even this government didn't expect would come in. We're seeing oil prices at the highest price they've ever been at, and the sky is apparently the limit. I am one of those that the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar referred to that says that this government always lowballs energy prices. Quite frankly, all you have to do is look at the record. You go back the 12 years that this government has been in place, and that's pretty consistent year after year after year. This is not just the Liberal opposition standing up and saying: oh, you guys always lowball prices. It's right there in black and white for anybody to go look at.

I'm really, quite frankly, looking forward to a year from now when we're at this stage again. We can go back and look at what the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford predicted the mean oil price would be over the year. I'll say it right now in case hon. members across haven't heard it: \$48. Having said that, I'm impressed that the Finance minister based her budget on \$42. I expected that they might use a number even somewhat lower than that. My personal prediction is \$48, and I'm on record for having said that several times.

The other thing that the government does, and they've done it again this year: they tend to overestimate the value of the American dollar. Again, this adds greatly to the bottom line at the end of the year. This year they're basing their numbers on an 85-cent dollar. Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that recently the dollar did reach 83 cents, and now it's back down around 80 cents. If it stays down around 80 cents, what it means, of course, is more money in the bank at the end of the year. I've always said that I'd rather see money in the bank at the end of the year than to go the other way, but to lowball the estimates, as this government has done year after year for some 12 years now, and then pat themselves on the back for their great budgeting at the end of the year, well, quite frankly, it's a shell game. If you were to look at several of the comments that come from the other side, often they accuse the federal government of doing the same thing. So it's a bad thing if the federal government does it, yet somehow it's perfectly acceptable if it's done here.

4:00

An Hon. Member: You're not suggesting that they're hypocrites?

Mr. R. Miller: Now, I would never suggest that they were hypocrites. I'm just simply suggesting that, on the one hand, it's not a good thing, and on the other hand, it seems to be okay.

Now, Mr. Speaker, very clearly during the election I heard from many, many constituents that, as I said, if there was ever going to be a surplus investment policy, now is the time. The idea of asking for a report as to what things might have looked like if, in fact, the Liberals' plan for surplus investment was adopted I don't think is a bad thing at all. I think that, certainly, in the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford there are many, many people who would like to know that, and I heard this time and time again.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to outline quickly what would happen, I guess, knowing that, quite frankly, we're up against a majority government, and there have already been several rather vitriolic comments indicating that this bill is not going to pass today. Certainly, that is up to the government. With their majority they have the power to do that. I'd like to read in my own little report very quickly as to what would happen if this government were to continue the next three years with a surplus averaging \$2.4 billion, what that might have meant to Albertans.

It would mean an extra \$2.5 billion in the heritage fund, an extra \$2.5 billion in the postsecondary endowment fund. If I can just take a second and point out, the government made a commitment this year to put what I consider to be a paltry \$250 million into that postsecondary endowment fund. Then, you'll recall, they instituted a \$3 billion cap. At the current rate of investment it would actually take 12 years for this government to reach that \$3 billion cap. Under the Alberta Liberal plan after only three years we would be at \$2.5 billion, and we'd be wondering why we had set that cap so low, as I indicated when we discussed Bill 1 in the House previously.

There would after three years be \$1.8 billion set aside in the capital account to look at the infrastructure debt.

Mr. Speaker, a full \$360 million after three years would have flowed into the endowment for the humanities, social sciences, and arts. You'll recall that earlier this session we actually passed a motion – I believe it was Motion 505 – that would mandate humanities and arts to be included in the high school curriculum. I know that that was a motion brought forward by a government member, and it was passed with an overwhelming majority and I think perhaps even a unanimous vote in this House. So, certainly, there was some recognition on the part of the government that arts and humanities are important, yet we're not seeing any action on their part to ensure that there's money going into some sort of an endowment fund that would fund that.

Now, our bill that we're debating this afternoon, Bill 203, would cap that amount at \$500 million, and I think I mentioned already that after three years that would have been at \$360 million. So it's not hard to see how we could, you know, fund initiatives like this quite easily with modest surpluses, Mr. Speaker, that are likely to continue for the next couple of years at least. I think it's spelled out fairly clearly in the bill, but for the information of those members who perhaps haven't read it yet, if and when we were to reach that \$500 million mark in the arts and humanities endowment fund, then that 5 per cent that had been dedicated to there would go into the heritage savings trust fund.

Mr. Speaker, I was fortunate enough to have my parents here this afternoon, and over lunch we were discussing the heritage savings trust fund. My father reminded me of a conversation we had around the family dinner table when I was but a young, young man where he indicated at that time that he would never see a penny of that heritage savings trust fund. I'm sorry to say that it looks, at least to this point, that he's probably right.

In 1986 that fund was worth \$12.7 billion. Today, nearly 20 years later, it's dropped down to \$12.1 billion. Now, I don't have to tell you what chunk inflation itself would have taken out of that, let alone the fact that it really should have grown.

Alaska's permanent fund, which began in the same year as our heritage fund, is almost triple our fund at \$36 billion, and of course everybody will know that they actually provide a cheque to Alaskan residents every year. Even given that they give money back to the taxpayers, they're still able to build their fund to \$36 billion.

The one that always blows me away, Mr. Speaker. Norway's petroleum fund started 16 years after our fund was started, and you're looking at a jurisdiction that is about the same size: \$120

billion in Norway's fund. It really has to make every Albertan stop for a second and ponder what our fund could have looked like if we hadn't been stripping away billions of dollars over the last 20 years and dumping that money into general revenue. It's just so unfortunate.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise and join the debate on Bill 203, brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, which calls for the Minister of Finance to "prepare a report on how the financial affairs of the Government would have been affected" if entire budget surpluses were allocated towards four funds or accounts. These four funds that were suggested were the postsecondary education endowment fund, the heritage savings trust fund, the capital account, and the endowment fund for the humanities, social sciences, and arts.

We don't need to visit a fortune teller to know that the report would be clear on one thing and one thing only: there would be no surplus due to the hypothetical on top of hypothetical that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is proposing here today. It would appear that the members from across the way have temporarily jumped from the gloom-and-doom bandwagon onto the what-if bandwagon for a short time only, I am sure.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very concerned with this bill because it deals with hypothetical situations, calls on numerous resources to be used in the preparation of an extensive report which is to be based on a number of hypothetical statements. As I see it, Bill 203 is asking for a report to be funded with taxpayer dollars which would hypothetically predict what would have happened to Alberta's financial situation if all budget surpluses were allocated towards education, postsecondary education, infrastructure, and the heritage savings trust fund.

While I'm unable to comment on the numerous hypothetical spending situations requested by the Member for Edmonton Gold-Bar, I can comment on what is being done with Alberta's surplus today in the real world. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar should be happy to know that through Bill 1, the Access to the Future Act, the government is setting up the access to the future fund. This is a real fund that will contain real dollars for real students. This is not fantasy, Mr. Speaker; this is real.

The access to the future fund will be set up to receive the income from an endowment within the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. A portion . . .

Mr. R. Miller: Sixteen cents per student per day.

Mr. Prins: Yeah, I heard that, and it's not true.

A portion of the future unbudgeted surpluses will go into this new endowment for Alberta students until it grows to a healthy \$3 billion. It is at this time that the Alberta heritage savings trust fund will pay the access to the future fund 4 and a half per cent of what is in the endowment. This real money will be allocated through grants from the access to the future fund. The fund is intended to provide base money to drive innovation in Alberta's postsecondary system. This real money will also be used to match grants designed to stimulate private industry, corporate, and other public contributions into Alberta's universities, colleges, and technical institutes.

The access to the future fund will establish and support improved learner outcomes; faculty, staff, and graduate student development, attraction, and retention; knowledge and technology transfer; as well

as affordability. An example of what the access to the future fund will provide is the matching contributions it will make to help create the new centre for Chinese studies at the University of Alberta. This innovative project will promote greater understanding of the cultural language and history of one of the world's largest economies in a country with which Alberta has enjoyed a special, long relationship.

This is just one example, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of other real financial supports that government provides for Alberta's education system and the individuals that participate in it now and in the future. These, too, are real. These are not hypothetical programs, and there is no hypothetical spending.

4:10

I would like to take the opportunity to discuss a few of these programs. The Lois Hole Campus Alberta digital library is another of Alberta's groundbreaking and innovative projects. This initiative is centred on the work already under way at the University of Calgary. The digital library, which is a province-wide initiative, when fully implemented will allow all postsecondary students and faculty, wherever they are located in Alberta, to access the resources and knowledge currently held in the individual libraries of Alberta's technical institutes, colleges, or universities.

Mr. Speaker, this initiative can be looked at as a digital neighbourhood for students, faculty, and the community to access a wealth of knowledge. Building on the opportunities created by the SuperNet and the postsecondary collaborations already in place, the digital library will be part of a province-wide system that will give Albertans unprecedented access to e-learning, e-health, and e-commerce opportunities across this province.

By embracing this real access to the vast array of information made available through the digital library, we will make Alberta one of the most information-rich provinces in North America. Through the technologically advanced learning facilities of Alberta's universities, the digital library will support satellite points to connect people with life-long learning. For generations to come, Albertans will be linked to knowledge and information that could only be imagined 20 years ago.

Mr. Speaker, this is real. There are no what ifs involved. There are no gloom-and-doom scenarios other than those brought forward by members across the way. This is real innovation at work in Alberta.

Another example of Alberta's real commitment to students across the province is the Alberta heritage scholarship fund. This fund will contain a billion dollars to provide estimated additional revenues of at least \$35 million annually. Originally endowed at a hundred million dollars, the Alberta heritage scholarship fund was designed to encourage excellence by recognizing outstanding achievement. The scholarship fund currently administers over 40 different scholarships and will award \$23 million in scholarships in '04-05. Since 1981 the Alberta heritage scholarship fund has awarded in excess of \$280 million to over 180,000 Albertans. That's a lot of money for students. That is real money supporting real students in a real way.

Mr. Speaker, there's also a \$500 million expansion to the Alberta ingenuity fund, which will build on the fund's activities in accelerating innovation in Alberta. The Alberta ingenuity fund was established in 2000 with an endowment of \$500 million. The fund was created to promote the discovery of new knowledge and encourage its application to benefit Albertans. This support of world-class research also advances science and engineering internationally. The fund provides various grants and awards in areas of both basic and applied research. Programs are developed in consultation with the international Science and Engineering Advisory Council, made up

of scholars and experts recognized worldwide for their achievements in the Alberta research community.

My final example, Mr. Speaker, is the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. For 28 years this fund has been providing real benefits for Albertans. The investment income from the fund has been allocated to Albertans' priorities, including health care, education, and debt elimination. As of December 31 of last year the fund's value was \$12.2 billion. Since its creation in 1976 the heritage fund has provided \$27 billion in direct benefits to this province. The current mission of the fund is to provide practical investment for the savings from Alberta's nonrenewable resources by providing the greatest financial returns on those savings for current and future generations of Albertans.

We could continue for hours discussing the numerous real programs which would provide real dollars for Albertans, but unfortunately we only have a limited amount of time. I'm confident, however, that my colleagues will carry this torch and enlighten the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar about what Alberta does and what is real. I encourage the member from across the way to put down his prophecy book, put away the doom-and-gloom scenario that they use for their platform. It's time to encourage what works and what is real.

Unfortunately, for these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I'm unable to support Bill 203, and I call on all my colleagues to refrain from supporting this legislation as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the debate this afternoon on Bill 203, the Report on Alberta's Legacy Act. I have listened with a great deal of interest to the previous speakers and have read in *Hansard* the debate from past Mondays.

However, before I get started on why I think the hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly should support the bill, I would like to note, particularly to many of the previous speakers, that in a private member's bill we are not allowed to introduce money bills. An example of that would be bills that expend government funds. Only a minister of the Crown may introduce a money bill; therefore, we are compelled to introduce a bill requiring a report. That is why it is necessary for us to have a report with Bill 203.

But, really, when you look at this bill, it is about a party that has a vision. Contrary to what previous speakers may think, this party, the Alberta Liberal Party, and our current leader, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview – he's no different than past leaders of this party.

There was an hon. member who talked about suggestions earlier and how this government listens to suggestions. Well, certainly, they listen to good ideas and good suggestions from this side of the Assembly, and I would ask you to listen to this one as well, Bill 203.

We were talking about the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore. Our former leader, Mr. Laurence Decore, was the first political leader in this province to point out how the Conservatives were spending money like it was water. If we go back, perhaps, to 1988-89, this government's spending was out of control, and I'm not so sure it's not out of control now, Mr. Speaker, because we're spending lots and lots and lots of money, and we still have all kinds of problems. In fact, we have the same problems.

So it is unfair to say that this is the party that created the debt. We certainly did not. But we came up with sound ideas on how to eliminate the debt over a long period of time without sacrificing our infrastructure, without sacrificing our delivery of public health care,

public education, without failing to look after those who, unfortunately, cannot look after themselves.

It was quite clear in the election campaign last fall, Mr. Speaker, which party had a heart. We were standing up for the people, and it was evident throughout the campaign. This government in reality has forgotten about many of the people in this province who cannot look after themselves, whether it's the AISH report or the latest Auditor General's report, this one on seniors' care and programs. I think all of us on both sides of the House should be ashamed about this report.

Getting back to the report – that is, Bill 203 – we have to be looking at what other leaders of this party have done and what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview had suggested during the election. Not only have we taken good Liberal ideas and turned them into government policies with Mr. Decore but also with Ken Nicol and the sustainability fund. That was a good idea, and it was adopted. So there's no reason why you can't adopt this idea.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster should know, if any hon. member of this House should know, Mr. Speaker, being that close to Saskatchewan, what happened to the Progressive Conservative Party after they were defeated. One of the big growth industries there was in jail cells because there was more than one or two of them that had to go to jail. In fact, their public image was blemished to the point where they had to fade into history. [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

4:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has moved second reading of Bill 203, Report on Alberta's Legacy Act. Does the Assembly agree with the motion for second reading?

Mr. MacDonald: Clarification, please.

Speaker's Ruling

Closing Debate

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, your colleague spoke on your behalf to introduce this bill; therefore, when you speak or she speaks on your behalf, that closes debate. It's deemed that you have spoken before. So the second time you speak or whoever spoke on your behalf speaks, that closes debate. For closing the debate you only have five minutes. Did you want to comment on that?

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, could I have clarification, please. On the Order Paper today I believe there were 83 minutes left in debate, and I would just like to have it clarified that all 83 minutes have expired.

The Deputy Speaker: Not every speaker used all of their full 10 minutes, but once they sit down, that time has elapsed. According to *Beauchesne* 466(2), "should a Member propose a motion on behalf of another Member, a later speech by either will close the debate." So when I recognized you, I asked you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, to close debate, which gave you your five minutes to close the debate, so now we're proceeding with the vote. Is that clear?

Mr. MacDonald: Sure.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:24 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Backs	Mather	Taft
Bonko	Miller, B.	Taylor
Elsalhy	Miller, R.	Tougas
MacDonald	Swann	

Against the motion:

Abbott	Horner	Oberle
Ady	Jablonski	Ouellette
Amery	Johnson	Pham
Cao	Knight	Prins
Eggen	Liepert	Rogers
Evans	Lougheed	Snelgrove
Forsyth	Lukaszuk	Stelmach
Fritz	Lund	Stevens
Goudreau	Magnus	Strang
Graydon	Marz	VanderBurg
Griffiths	Melchin	Webber
Groeneveld	Morton	Zwozdesky
Herard		

Totals: For – 11 Against – 37

[Motion lost]

Bill 204

Pharmacy and Drug (Methamphetamine Limiting) Amendment Act, 2005

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to move second reading of Bill 204, the Pharmacy and Drug (Methamphetamine Limiting) Amendment Act, 2005.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The bill is not a complex bill. It is simply to reclassify ephedrine and pseudoephedrine as schedule 2 drugs. What does this reclassification as schedule 2 drugs mean? Schedule 1 drugs are sold only in pharmacies, stored behind the pharmacy's counter, and are available only by prescription. Schedule 2 drugs are available only in pharmacies and are stored behind the counter. Schedule 3 drugs are just available in pharmacies. So by reclassifying ephedrine and pseudoephedrine as schedule 2 drugs, products containing these drugs would only be available from behind the counters at pharmacies. The products affected by this move would be many cold medications and nasal decongestants.

The purpose of Bill 204 is to restrict the access to ephedrine and pseudoephedrine by individuals who are seeking these drugs for illegal purposes. Ephedrine and pseudoephedrine are two main ingredients used in the production of crystal meth and other methamphetamines. The use of crystal meth is a growing concern across all of North America, as I'm sure all members here can attest. Crystal meth is a growing concern in all of our communities and is affecting individuals, families, and innocent bystanders throughout Alberta. Crystal meth is highly addictive, is made from common household products, and is relatively cheap to obtain.

I applaud the Member for Red Deer-North for bringing forward Bill 202, which will help address the drug addiction issue for Alberta's children. With Bill 202 to help provide a very useful tool in helping to treat the drug addicted, Bill 204 will help to make it more difficult for those manufacturing illicit drugs to easily obtain the ingredients they need to manufacture a relatively low-cost product.

This bill isn't going to stop the manufacture of crystal meth in Alberta. I think we need to acknowledge this fact during this debate. Without Canada-wide action by the federal government differing legislation amongst the provinces will continue to allow for precursor drugs like ephedrine and pseudoephedrine to flow from jurisdictions with weaker controls and legislation in regard to these drugs. With hundreds of instructions available on the Internet on how to create small portions of meth with a few household products and little effort, many youths are beginning to experiment with these products of crystal meth.

This is an opportunity for Alberta to lead the way in Canada in regard to beginning to put stronger controls on the products that lead to drugs which are causing great devastation to a great number of Albertans and their families. Crystal meth is a problem that isn't going to go away. We need to decrease the number of people beginning to use crystal meth and slow the supply to those who are currently using.

4:40

While Canada and Alberta do not participate greatly, they do great jobs in routinely collecting data on substance abuse. The Edmonton Police Service report increases in drug seizure and charges in relationship to crystal meth from the period of 1999 to 2003. AADAC has reported that amongst youth clients, 25 per cent reported that they have abused some of the amphetamines; 19 per cent of the adult clients have claimed that they have also used some form of this too. Usually when we discuss or debate a certain drug or addiction, the discourse revolves around the individual user, their family, and innocent people who have been directly affected by the drug abuser through physical assault, robbery, or some other crime.

An incident involved an Edmonton man who was high on crystal meth and stole a truck and rammed the vehicle into a police cruiser after a long chase. Both officers in the police cruiser were badly injured. This is the type of recklessness and lethal behaviour that we need to rid our streets of, but this type of behaviour can be associated with a great number of street drugs.

One of the dangers that separates crystal meth from some of the other drugs is the manufacturing process. Setting up a marijuana operation in a home at the worst of times leads to moisture damage and mould spores. While mould can be dangerous to one's health, this pales in comparison to the danger that exists around a crystal meth cook lab. The manufacturing of crystal meth involves common products that can be obtained legally by any individual, but the ingredients can be extremely toxic and explosive. Individuals operating these labs have no training in chemistry or in the safe storage of toxic chemicals. They criminally look to make as much money as quickly as possible. The safety of the children living in these cook labs is at risk. The safety of the neighbourhood is at risk, and the safety of the law enforcement officials and emergency crews who arrive at these locations is also at risk.

According to a study conducted by the University of Washington, 52 per cent of Washington law enforcement officers who attended training seminars related to crystal meth laboratory investigations reported experiencing symptoms of ammonia, hydroxide, chloride, or acid exposure. These manufacturing processes are very dangerous and produce a number of hazardous by-products.

Albertans and the people who serve our community shouldn't have to worry about these types of risks. As a government we need to take steps to reduce the amount of crystal meth available, reduce the number of people who are trying to manufacture this drug. Bill 204 is a step in the right direction.

In July 2003 the College of Pharmacists announced that pharmacies across Alberta were going to voluntarily restrict access of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine by moving these products containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine as small therapeutic ingredients behind the prescription counters. This move has been applauded by other provincial pharmacy colleges, and those other colleges have been discussing whether a similar move should be made in their jurisdictions. This voluntary move by colleges has essentially already put pharmacies across Alberta into compliance with Bill 204 with regard to single-ingredient products, but multi-ingredient products will also need to be put behind the counter.

Consulting with the College of Pharmacists will be leading to an amendment being put forward by myself to move multi-ingredient products containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine into pharmacies but not behind the counter. What this does is provide an opportunity for Alberta's pharmacists to play a larger role in assisting Albertans in choosing the most appropriate drug therapy. Some may come into the pharmacy looking for a specific cold remedy, but with the help of the pharmacist this person might be directed towards an alternate treatment that will more effectively for what's ailing them. I would see an excellent opportunity to improve the care of Albertans.

Those who would be immediately affected by Bill 204 would be the nonpharmaceutical retail outlets. It is a possibility that Bill 204 would adversely affect the revenue stream that these stores now have. However, a great number of American states have had legislation similar to Bill 204 in effect for some time, and they haven't seen any significant backlash. I am confident that we'll see the same results here in Alberta.

The use of crystal meth is a growing concern in Alberta. It is a growing concern in all our communities and is affecting individuals, families, and innocent bystanders. Bill 204 is a step forward in reducing access to the main ingredients of this product of crystal meth.

I'd ask you all to support this bill. Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to contribute to the debate in second reading on Bill 204, the Pharmacy and Drug (Methamphetamine Limiting) Amendment Act, 2005. I have to start out by saying that there is no clear consensus with regard to this bill amongst the stakeholders, the pharmacists, and even in my own Official Opposition caucus. So we have two opposing points of view, one that might support this bill and one that opposes it.

Some people may be supportive of this bill as it tries to restrict access to ephedrine- and pseudoephedrine-containing drugs. These two chemicals are the precursors used to produce crystal meth. Myself, personally, I am leaning towards this point of view, supporting this bill, but with reservations, with qualifiers.

Why would I consider taking this direction and supporting this bill? First, as a community pharmacist who has practised for 11 years, I have seen people who expressed serious concern with the ease with which these medications are available and, further to that, the ease with which crystal meth is produced and the way it's manufactured.

Also, I am leaning towards supporting this bill because of my care for our young and our youth. Crystal meth is truly devastating. It is extremely dangerous. I'm not sure if some of the hon. members

know this, but initially a person who is addicted to crystal meth looks brighter and probably even achieves better in school. So this adds to the latency of the risk with crystal meth because a parent or a teacher might not notice that a person is addicted to a substance because they look brighter and they look more energetic. Then the downward spiral starts: they lose their appetite, they lose sleep, they lose their motivation, and then they get into the criminal activities, and so on.

Further, I might consider supporting this bill because other jurisdictions, places like Oklahoma, Texas, Iowa, and Arkansas, have either passed or are studying similar legislation, legislation that is very similar to what we're proposing here in Bill 204. There is evidence that passing such a law or such a statute helps address this problem even at least partially.

Also, as a representative of the public and as an elected official I can see the merits of this proposal. Personally, many of my constituents have approached me expressing support for such an idea. I think their approach was one that fits with the crystal meth bill that we passed in this Legislature a couple of weeks ago, Bill 202, because they see this as a threat and they see it as something that needs to be addressed radically and forcefully.

4:50

I would argue, again as a pharmacist and from my own experience, that a legitimate cold or flu sufferer will not really mind much going to the back of the drugstore to talk to a pharmacist and request his sinus or flu medication. In fact, as the hon. sponsor of the bill indicated, this might be a better scenario because this person, he or she, will have to talk to the pharmacist and in the process receive some counselling and education.

So if I support this bill in principle, I have some concerns that I would like clarification on or an explanation from the hon. member, particularly that again we seem to be off-loading this tremendous responsibility on the pharmacist's shoulder. Why is it always the pharmacist who has to police the industry?

Actually, this may even open an area of questioning that is really big and contentious. The pharmacists previously have asked for typed or computer-generated prescriptions, for example, to avoid prescription mistakes. We all know that to some extent physicians' writing is not the most readable. Some physicians complied; some didn't.

Pharmacists have asked for reimbursement for cognitive services, but we were met with resistance and delays from this government. I would quote an example. For example, if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford comes to my store and he presents me with a prescription that was written for two grams of poison – take as directed – I don't get reimbursed if I refuse to fill that prescription. I would say: my friend, this is dangerous, and this can kill you. Then he would leave the store, and I have not earned a red penny; however, if I ignore my professional judgment and if I ignore my ethics and my moral obligations and I say, "Yes. Go ahead. Take it. Two grams of poison. Take it as directed. See you in a week, if you're still alive," then I made the money. I made the professional fee, the dispensing fee.

So this is an example of where a pharmacist is asked to exercise his professional judgment and not getting reimbursed for it. So the natural question will be: will the pharmacist be compensated for this extra duty with respect to pseudoephedrine and ephedrine-containing products? Will we have the recognition and the compensation for it?

As I mentioned previously, there is also division on this matter, and some people feel that they cannot support it. I know for sure that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre, who also happens to be the Official Opposition health critic, is totally against it and cannot support it.

Further to this, I want to put on the record that we as the Official Opposition have received letters of objection from both the Canadian Association of Chain Drug Stores and also from the Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors. Obviously and understandably, these are organizations which are concerned that passing this bill will negatively impact their sales. I can understand and maybe even sympathize with them to some extent.

Further, our Official Opposition health critic is concerned that this bill attempts to go the easy way rather than tackle the real issues with respect to education, law enforcement, the inadequate treatment funding, and the lack of treatment and rehabilitation spaces and facilities.

So, really, at this stage of debate, it will be interesting and useful to listen to more discussion from our side and from the government side as well and possibly also from the third party and see what people have to say on this subject.

On the one hand, we have the idea that limiting access to the precursor would reduce the manufacturing of crystal meth. We have examples in some U.S. jurisdictions. There is also the angle that: no; supporting it at the wholesale level might be better and might be a more realistic approach than supporting it at the retail level. So these are considerations we have to all think about.

I think I can even expand on this and challenge the conventional thinking and say that there is also the angle with respect to sales of the precursor drugs, the ephedrine and the pseudoephedrine, in herbal or holistic medicine stores. These are stores or shops which are not rigorously controlled or regulated. It might be easier for them to stock it, and then a genuine drugstore or a grocery store might not be able to. Or you can actually even expand further and talk about oriental grocery and specialty stores, where in some cases these products are not even labelled in English, or they only list the botanical origin of what's inside, but they don't identify the chemical ingredients. So you have a product that says some type of bark or some type of leaf, but you don't know that it really contains ephedrine or pseudoephedrine.

These are questions which require answers, Mr. Speaker, and I would encourage other members to participate and possibly also the hon. sponsor of this so that when I support this bill, I would be comfortable supporting it, and I would take it back to my college and my professional association and say as one member, as one person, as one pharmacist that I supported it because of these reasons. Or if I go the other way and oppose it, I want to make a comfortable decision one way or the other.

I will retake my seat, and I will listen with interest to what other members have to say. Thank you.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak to Bill 204, Pharmacy and Drug (Methamphetamine Limiting) Amendment Act, 2005. It has become clear, especially after the Western Premiers' Conference in Lloydminster last week, that there is a massive increase in concern in the abuse of methamphetamine in all of western Canada. The discussion of crystal meth was one of the highest priorities of the western Premiers, and Premier Calvert of Saskatchewan is now chairing a committee to research the use of crystal meth in western Canada. Bill 204 will give Alberta another weapon in the battle against this vicious addiction.

To start, I believe a word of recognition is in order for the hon. Member for West Yellowhead for bringing forward Bill 204 and for recognizing the need for such legislation. I'd also like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung for his words and his wisdom as a pharmacist on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, the fight against drugs is a two-front battle. On one front we attempt to educate parents, children, and teachers on the dangers associated with drug abuse and drug addiction. On the other front we react to the circumstances presented to us by drug addicts and drug dealers. Bill 204 is a reaction to the methamphetamine problem. One of the worst aspects of the meth problem is the ease of obtaining the ingredients needed to produce it. Methamphetamine is mass-produced using household products, including ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, as we've heard this afternoon.

The Alberta College of Pharmacists have volunteered themselves as the foot soldiers in the battle against methamphetamine. The College of Pharmacists have engaged themselves by voluntarily moving single-entity ephedrine and pseudoephedrine products, which are products where ephedrine and pseudoephedrine are the only ingredient, behind the pharmacists' counters. But this measure is only voluntary and does not apply to nonpharmacy retail outlets.

Bill 204 will extend this voluntary measure by making it mandatory. It also calls for placing products containing any amount of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine behind the counter as well. Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 is not a panacea that will solve the methamphetamine problem in this province. It will, however, be another deterrent that will make the production of the drug more difficult.

According to the College of Pharmacists the standards of practice for schedule 2 drugs include activities that must be undertaken by the pharmacists interacting with a patient desiring to self-medicate with one of these products. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that pharmacists are in a very good position to determine whether a person is interested in obtaining drugs for the purpose of self-medication or if they are interested in purchasing drugs to assist in the production of methamphetamine. By putting ephedrine and pseudoephedrine in the schedule 2 category, the pharmacists will have the power to reject the sale of the drugs in circumstances that are suspicious.

I would like to spend a few minutes talking about another drug that has been used inappropriately in the past because this drug was changed from schedule 3 to a schedule 2 drug as a measure to stop its misuse. The trade name for the drug is dimenhydrinate, and the common name is Gravol. Gravol is supposed to be used to treat nausea and vomiting, but when taken in large doses, it can produce a high and hallucinations. Until 1998 Gravol was a schedule 3 drug and was easily obtained by anyone looking for a cheap high. When Gravol was changed from a schedule 3 drug to a schedule 2 drug, this was done by the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

5:00

In the case of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine some would argue that the change from a schedule 3 drug to a schedule 2 drug should also be executed in the same manner. I warn, however, that the case for Gravol is not the same as the case for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine. One of the main differences between Gravol and ephedrine is that at the time when Gravol was being abused, not many people were aware of this problem, nor was this problem as serious as the one we're facing with meth. Another difference is that Alberta was the only jurisdiction in the country that had Gravol as a schedule 3 drug. The federal standard as well as all other provinces had Gravol as a schedule 2 drug. The case for Gravol was, therefore, quite different than the case for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine. Making the change from a schedule 3 to a schedule 2 drug by the Lieutenant Governor in Council was practical for Gravol. It's less desirable for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine.

Mr. Speaker, methamphetamine is a drug that has hit this province and other provinces like a plague. I doubt that there is an MLA in this room who has not heard a horror story from a constituent about

the devastating effect of this drug. The meth problem is simply this serious. A problem as serious as the one I am describing warrants extensive debate and discussion. Where Gravol was changed behind closed doors, changing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine requires more attention.

By passing Bill 204, Alberta will be the only jurisdiction in the country to have ephedrine and pseudoephedrine as schedule 2 drugs. This change in Alberta and the debate surrounding the change will cause the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities to also consider putting these drugs into schedule 2. If this change in Alberta prompts a change nationally, the battle against the spread of methamphetamine will gain considerable momentum, with Alberta at the forefront. Mr. Speaker, like Bill 202, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, Bill 204 is clearly a step in the right direction.

I spoke earlier about the two-front battle against drugs: the education and prevention battle and the reaction battle. The Alberta College of Pharmacists has proposed opening another front in this battle, and Bill 204 may provide them with an opportunity to do so. When drugs are categorized, suggestions are made by the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities, but the ultimate decisions are left up to the authorities in each jurisdiction. These scheduling recommendations embody a cascading principle approach in which a drug is first assessed using the factors for schedule 1. Should sufficient factors pertain, the drug remains in that schedule. If not, the drug is assessed against the factors for schedule 2, and if warranted, it is subsequently assessed against the factors for schedule 3. Finally, should a drug not meet the factors of any schedule, it becomes unscheduled or nonrestricted and available for sale from any retail outlet.

Bill 204 supports the college in bringing issues regarding this process to the forefront because politicians are reacting to the insufficient process by bringing forward legislation. Mr. Speaker, this process promotes the listing of drugs in schedules corresponding to the conditions of sale, providing for proper drug use and patient safety. The problem according to the College of Pharmacists is that this process does not speak to medications used as precursors to other drugs, nor does it consider the misuse of drugs.

Another issue with the cascading principle model for drug assessment is that it does not provide for any judgment calls. The Alberta College of Pharmacists would like the process to address these issues. If the Alberta College of Pharmacists can change the process of drug categorization to include the use of judgment on a drug-by-drug basis in terms of potential misuse and in terms of using the medication as precursors to other drugs, this will open a third front in the battle against drug abuse: the proactive front.

Mr. Speaker, pharmacists have been expanding their role in health care and have been trying to extend their services to better serve in the primary health system. In fact, in looking for ways to be more efficient, various health professionals have looked at changes to their roles to make better use of their time and their expertise. In these changes pharmacists have been singled out as professionals who may have a larger role in prescribing and dealing with what they know about schedule 2 medications.

Bill 204 gives pharmacists an opportunity to become more involved in primary health. By putting medications that are primarily made of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine behind the counter, they are able to offer advice for treating symptoms associated with the common cold, the flu, and other associated illnesses. By speaking to their clients, they are in a better position to recommend the appropriate medication for treating these illnesses. Although some may argue that putting these medications behind the counter will simply inconvenience people, I suggest that with an

aging demographic Bill 204 will actually better serve many of Alberta's citizens. By placing medications for more common illnesses behind the counter, these people must consult a pharmacist, who, by asking appropriate questions, may be able to assess more serious conditions.

Alternatively, people who are on other medications may be better served because pharmacists will be able to suggest medications for treating common illnesses that do not cause complications when they are mixed with their normal medications. As the population ages, Mr. Speaker, these situations will become more common. Although the purpose of Bill 204 is not to protect people from these scenarios, it does provide the medical field an opportunity to do so, perhaps relieving some of the strain on other areas of the health care system.

As legislators it is our duty to protect the rights of the child. Article 33 of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child states that children have the right to be protected from dangerous drugs. By being proactive and making it less than convenient to purchase the ingredients that make up dangerous drugs, we are taking proactive steps to protect our children.

Mr. Speaker, I conclude by reiterating that Bill 204 will not eliminate the crystal meth problem in this province, but I do believe it's another step in the right direction. I would encourage everybody to support this bill.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to discuss Bill 204 and, in general, with a strong sense of support. We are in a culture and a society where we're facing increasingly the mixed blessing of our pharmacological plethora of opportunities and the double-edged sword that they represent in terms of helping and harming people. With this new scourge almost an epidemic in some areas it's clear that drugs that we have found very helpful in benign conditions of the respiratory system are now being abused. While Bill 204 cannot possibly address the broad range of underlying causes, which is so often the problem in our system, that we're dealing with symptoms, it at least is addressing at a secondary level an intervention that to me holds some promise, just as the approach to cigarettes and tobacco in our society has been somewhat aided and abetted in its control by restricting access to tobacco and alcohol similarly.

There needs to be a short-term and a long-term approach to these problems. In the short term it does seem eminently sensible to me to restrict access and to reduce the ability, especially of young people, to these drugs. In the longer term it's clearly only a very partial solution, and we need the other dimensions of a full approach that include education, addressing social and economic and even spiritual roots of the addictive society that we have today. We need to have early identification and management of these problems in schools, in communities, and the resources to do this. We need public policies such as this to help us to address and support the broader aspects of challenging the roots of the addictive tendencies that we confront every day in the medical field, the health field, the social, criminal, and legal aspects of it.

I won't belabour the issue, but I did want to stand in support of this and recommend it as a secondary intervention that will help to stem the tide. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and contribute to the debate on Bill 204, the Pharmacy and Drug

(Methamphetamine Limiting) Amendment Act, 2005. Methamphetamines are part of a family of drugs known as amphetamines that were originally developed over 50 years ago. However, the widespread use and abuse of this drug is a relatively new phenomenon in our province.

Methamphetamine, also known as meth or crystal meth, among a variety of street names, is an exceptionally harmful and addictive drug. It is a stimulant that acts on the central nervous system. These effects can include feelings of euphoria, a decreased need for sleep, suppression of appetite and thirst, an increased sense of alertness, increased energy, and an increase in ambition. Additionally, at higher doses there is an increased chance of aggressive behaviour. The drug is very versatile in the sense that users are able to ingest it nasally, orally, intravenously, or through smoking. As with any drug, users develop a tolerance to methamphetamine, which necessitates the use of stronger doses in order to experience the same sensations from the drug.

5:10

The negative side effects of the drug include alteration of sleep patterns, psychosis, and mood swings. Prolonged abuse of the drug can lead to permanent nerve damage due to the way the amphetamines interact with the body's neurological pathways. Due to the fact that the drug may be injected, intravenous users of meth expose themselves to the risk of contracting HIV, hepatitis, and other blood-borne diseases if they are sharing needles. While all of these risks and the potential uncontrollable side effects are abhorrent, they do not set this drug apart from other illicit substances such as cocaine or heroine.

What makes methamphetamine different and, in my opinion, more dangerous is that they are easily produced using common household items. According to various law enforcement offices such as the drug enforcement agency, or the DEA, of the United States, a simple search of the Internet will reveal detailed plans of the necessary ingredients and tools used in the production of meth. All of these items are attainable by stopping at the grocery store and at the hardware store.

Also, several of these recipes provide alternatives to several ingredients that can be used if certain items are not readily available. In fact, only one of the ingredients used in making this drug cannot be substituted, and this is ephedra, ephedrine, or pseudoephedrine. One of these three drugs is crucial to the manufacture of methamphetamine. These drugs are commonly found in over-the-counter medications such as cold remedies. The availability of these ingredients makes it very easy for individuals to set up and operate small laboratories to produce methamphetamine. This is exactly what happened in the United States when methamphetamine appeared there.

While methamphetamine use in Alberta is a problem – it is a growing problem – we have the opportunity to learn from the experience of other jurisdictions to make a fairly accurate prediction of what may come. I would like to briefly discuss the experience in the U.S. to show how quickly the use and production of this drug can grow.

Meth started out in California, and that state remains the major producer of the drug in the country as well as a major trafficking hub for bringing the narcotic in from foreign countries. The DEA estimates that the rise of methamphetamine began in the early 1990s in California and grew very rapidly. From California use and production of the drug radiated outward through the rest of the country at an amazing speed. Data has shown that once the drug gained a toehold in certain states, its use and domestic production

literally exploded. In 1999, for example, the DEA reported seizing 57 meth labs in Mississippi, a state with a population that's comparable to Alberta, having 2.86 million people. In 2002 the DEA reported seizing 285 meth labs. This is an increase of 500 per cent. Likewise, Wyoming experienced an increase from 10 labs seized in 2000 to 54 seized in 2002.

Mr. Speaker, the majority of the risks that are associated with using methamphetamine have been outlined. However, the manufacture of this drug creates an entirely new set of risks, dangers, and hazards not only to those that are manufacturing the drugs but also to the community and to the environment. This is because of the ingredients that are used, the processes that are undergone, and the by-products that are created when methamphetamine is manufactured. Many of the ingredients used in manufacturing meth are highly volatile, including paint thinner and propane. The combination of these and other chemicals means that there exists a high chance of an explosion occurring, especially considering that the drug must be cooked in order to be produced. The second risk that comes from the manufacture of meth is that a variety of toxic fumes are produced during the reaction. These fumes can have a very harmful and long-lasting effect on anyone that comes in contact with it. The final side effect of the production of this drug is that the residue is toxic and ends up in the sewage systems of cities and towns.

The case in which the drug is produced, coupled with its highly addictive properties, means that addicts can begin producing their own narcotics. In the United States this has led to several tragedies involving people getting injured because of a meth lab explosion. This poses a risk not only to the individuals operating the lab but also to the police and to the fire personnel and in at least one case in the United States to the children of an individual that was operating a meth lab. In 1998 three children in California died when a meth lab their mother was operating exploded.

Thankfully, the U.S. is now witnessing a decrease in the number of clandestine meth labs. This can be attributed to the new legislation that has been brought in, designed to limit the precursor substances that are used in meth production. Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 seeks to do the same by narrowing the window of opportunity individuals have to purchase the necessary ingredients for manufacturing methamphetamine. By controlling the access to ephedra, ephedrine, and pseudoephedrine drug products, we are able to put controls on the volume of these drugs purchased, thereby curbing their potential use. The over-the-counter cold remedies that ephedra, ephedrine, and pseudoephedrine are found in will still be readily available for consumers to purchase as an over-the-counter item.

Mr. Speaker, we have a chance to learn from the experience of the United States and work to head off the explosion of methamphetamine use that our neighbours to the south are experiencing. By limiting the sales of the precursor drugs, we'll be able to limit the amount of meth made in home labs, thereby reducing the amount of this drug circulating in our province.

I support Bill 204 and would ask all my colleagues to do the same. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with some interest to speak on Bill 204. I think that the intention of this bill is admirable. Certainly, no one can dispute the fact that the problem that we have with methamphetamines in our province, across the country, across North America is reaching epidemic proportions. It's a drug that can destroy lives very quickly and change personalities very quickly.

Thus, it's expedient and responsible for this Legislative Assembly to do something about it.

I guess that the only reservations that I do have are in regard to putting the responsibility too squarely or with too much emphasis upon the pharmacists to deal with this problem. If we did manage to have this bill pass, I would certainly like to see it in concert with other measures to ensure that we are in fact dealing with the enforcement and educative and social issues that surround the abuse of this drug and, indeed, other drugs as well. We've already been speaking about crystal meth in regard to treatment programs for youth, and I would like to humbly suggest that we should certainly extend this expanded treatment capacity to all individuals who meet the misfortune of drug abuse or addiction in their lives.

I think that we might be able to see some amendments to Bill 204. Our research would suggest that there are more than 200 products that, in fact, contain the active ingredient ephedrine or pseudoephedrine. You know, I think that if we could limit perhaps the products that are kept behind the counter to products that contain a hundred per cent of either of these products, that would perhaps simplify the execution of this bill if it became law and simplify the responsibility of the pharmacists to be controlling otherwise, as I say, more than 200 different products.

5:20

I think we're seeing, as I said before, the issue of this drug epidemic sweeping across the country. I know that the Premiers in Lloydminster were speaking about this, and so it would suggest that whatever we do decide to do in this Legislature, we should act quickly and in consort with other jurisdictions so that we don't have that discrepancy in law or in enforcement between different provincial jurisdictions. So we must watch carefully what happens elsewhere as well.

We have seen a federal private member's bill addressing this issue. In fact, I think that some aspects of the bill that the Yellowhead MP brought forward, Bill C-349, are interesting and are worth considering. That's looking at not just ephedrine but instead looking at some of the ingredients that are used to change the chemical nature of ephedrine to make crystal meth, which include acetone and hydriodic acid and red phosphorus, in fact to place some controlling restrictions on those substances which are specifically used to convert ephedrine into crystal meth. So I would like to just introduce that possibility of looking at controlling or tracking the sale of those substances as being an alternative to retail cold remedy – somehow controlling those substances which are more retail-oriented.

As people have spoken to some great extent, different states in the United States have had laws on the books already concerning the control of cold remedies such as Sudafed and Claritin-D. In fact, Oklahoma has placed those pills behind counters and given the pharmacists the responsibility of looking for photo identification and for signing a registry as well, which, you know, back to my original point about placing too much responsibility on the backs of pharmacists, might indeed be an example of how that could become too onerous and extreme to execute.

Again, looking through various pieces of research, the discrepancy between states in the United States creates people moving from state to state to look for cold medication, not to treat their colds but, in fact, to manufacture crystal meth. So, as I said before, if we can work quickly in consort with some of our other provincial counterparts, I think we would be more effective.

I should say that I would support this bill but only if we are in fact working with other measures to limit the destructive potential of this

drug on our population and not just limiting it to the restriction of this one ingredient.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to address the Assembly today regarding Bill 204, the methamphetamine limiting act. I would like to congratulate the hon. Member for West Yellowhead for bringing this important legislation forward. It is great timing.

I would like to start by admitting that I was under the impression that it was already a law in Alberta. I had heard that ephedrine was only being sold behind the counter in my constituency and assumed that our regulations had been changed. However, it was only after some research that I learned that the Alberta College of Pharmacists had voluntarily moved ephedrine and pseudoephedrine products behind the pharmacists' counter. I applaud the move and feel that we as a Legislature shouldn't be dragging our feet on making this mandatory in Alberta. Ephedrine and pseudoephedrine are being used every day in bathtubs, basements, and kitchen sinks throughout Alberta to manufacture crystal meth.

Meth is one of the cheapest, most accessible, and harmful drugs circulating in Alberta right now. Part of this is because the ingredients are so easily obtained. If you came across a list of the precursors of this crystal meth lying on the street, the average Albertan would probably think that someone had accidentally dropped their grocery list on the way to the supermarket. I don't know the details of meth or how it's created, but I was told that if someone with illegal intentions had purchased some Sudafed, a bottle of iodine, a pack of matches, some Drano, and a bottle of Coleman fuel, they would be well on their way to having all the precursors to create a batch of crystal meth.

So the question we need to be asking ourselves as legislators is: how do we stop this? We can't outlaw all the precursors. We can't make it illegal to purchase Drano. We can't make it illegal to purchase a pack of matches. We can't make it illegal to purchase Sudafed. We can't even make it illegal to possess a combination of those precursors. If we did, we would be making criminals out of most Albertans. I would be willing to bet that many of us here in

this Assembly today has a box of Sudafed in our medicine cabinet at home, a pack of matches in a desk drawer somewhere, or a Drano container under our kitchen sink.

What we can do is make it harder to obtain the precursors. One thing I believe we need to keep in mind is that many of these products can be substituted in the crystal meth recipe. If we, for example, decide that Drano can only be sold in small quantities or only by licensed plumbers, then the meth producer will start to use a different drain cleaner or another cleaning product. It would also create a huge inconvenience for the average Albertan. I don't want to have to track down a plumber just to buy some drain cleaner. It would also unfairly hurt the manufacturers of Drano, only because some people have found a way to use their product in a way other than what it is supposed to be.

The same goes for many other precursors in this crystal meth. All of them are legal products. It's just that they are being used in a way other than that for which they are intended. And most can be substituted with other products; that is, with the exception of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine. Ephedrine and pseudoephedrine are the only precursors in crystal meth that cannot be substituted. Furthermore, it's the easiest and cheapest method for meth makers to obtain ephedrine or pseudoephedrine from common cold and asthma medications.

Many of these products containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine can be currently obtained off the shelves at a drugstore, grocery store, or even convenience store; that is, with the exception of those drugstores or supermarkets containing pharmacies who have voluntarily put them behind the counter. But is that fair? Is it even working?

If convenience stores can sell them to anyone, any time, in any quantity while those pharmacies who have voluntarily put them behind the counter question anyone who wants to buy ephedrine, it's fairly simple to figure out where the meth makers are going to buy their precursors.

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

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

