

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 12, 2005**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 05/05/12

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. From our forests and parklands to our prairies and mountains comes the call of our land. From our farmsteads, towns, and cities comes the call of our people that as legislators of this province we act with responsibility and sensitivity. Grant us the wisdom to meet such challenges. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mrs. McClellan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not certain if my group are in the Legislature at this point, but I will introduce them. I have a very large grade 6 class attending the Legislature today from Greentree school. Greentree school is in Drumheller, the home of the world-famous Royal Tyrrell Museum. There are a number of parents, helpers, and teachers accompanying these students, too many to individually name. I would say that I've had a visit with the students, very brief because they had a little bus trouble getting here, and had a chance to tour them very quickly through my office. I've made a commitment that when their photographs arrive, I will come to Greentree school and spend a couple of hours with them in their class and talk about local government. If the students and parents, helpers, and teachers from Greentree school are in the gallery, I'd ask that they now rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: I think, hon. minister, that they haven't quite arrived yet. They're out there because I passed them in the hall. We'll do it again later.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the pleasures that members of this Assembly have is introducing school groups. Unfortunately, when you live as far away from the Legislature as the Deputy Premier and I, that's a rare occasion. So I'm doubly pleased, actually triply pleased to introduce today three classes of grade 6 students from Crestwood school in Medicine Hat. Members may or may not recollect that I have this opportunity to introduce this school each and every year. Every year since I've been elected, this school has brought their grade 6 students up. I think they probably hold the record for the most consecutive visits by a school to the Legislature. The tour guides today were telling me that they know they've been here at least 16 times because that's how long one of the tour guides has had the opportunity to provide the tour.

I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the grade 6 students from Crestwood school in Medicine Hat. They are accompanied by principal David George; vice-principal Al Tisnic; teachers Karen Irwin, Maria Thompson, Wade Lawson, Gary Ziel, and Kathy Western; also parents/helpers Tracy Klein, Janice Bonogofski, Cheryl Noble, Tracy Lawson, and Evelyn Walter. I would ask that they rise – they're in both galleries, I understand – and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a group of human resource interns who recently began their term with the government of Alberta. They will be working in Justice, Health, Sustainable Resource Development, Restructuring and Government Efficiency, and the personnel administration of my department. They are seated in the members' gallery. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Mar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my great privilege and honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly five young Albertans who are recipients of the Queen's Golden Jubilee Citizenship Medals. These medals and the scholarships that come with them recognize the recipients' outstanding contributions to their communities. They are Mallory Becker of Spruce Grove, Maria Chen of Edmonton, Bethan Jeffreys of Sangudo, Rae Varughese of Edmonton, Charles Voon of Edmonton. Each of these young Albertans exemplifies qualities that are synonymous with Alberta's strong heritage. I also recognize the parents and family members and friends who have been an inspiration and support for each of these recipients and who are with us today. I'd like to invite these young leaders of tomorrow and their parents to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you today and to members of the Assembly four wise women. They are here representing WISEST, women in scholarship, engineering, science, and technology, which is an organization that encourages young women to consider careers in science and technology through workshops, conferences, support groups, and research programs. One of their key activities is a six-week summer program for grade 11 students, providing them an opportunity to work with a research group at the U of A. They have an enviable success rate as 85 per cent of their alumni go on to pursue studies in the faculties of science and engineering.

With us today is Dr. Margaret-Ann Armour, the WISEST vice-chair and assistant chair of the Department of Chemistry at the University of Alberta; Grace Ennis, who is a WISEST co-ordinator; and two summer research program alumni, Cleo Espiritu from the summer of 1999 – and Cleo is currently pursuing a master's of computing science at the University of Alberta – and Eva Cheung, who is from the summer of 1998. Eva graduated last year with a degree in civil engineering, currently working as a transport engineer for the city of Edmonton while pursuing a master's in construction engineering and management.

These women are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a gentleman by the name of Adrian Bohach. Adrian is the CEO of the Ability Society of Alberta. They have offices in Calgary and Edmonton and soon to be in Red Deer.

The Ability Society provides province-wide services for children, adults, and seniors with special needs in the area of assistive technology for employment, education, and quality of life. I invite Adrian to please stand – he's in the members' gallery – and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's also my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the chair for the Grande Prairie Catholic school board. My constituency is a very large area, but this person also is responsible for a very large area, including Peace-Wapiti, Grande Prairie-Smoky, and my area, Dunvegan-Central Peace. It's my pleasure to have her rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. It's Morag Mochan.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the very good fortune to attend the Premier's prayer breakfast this morning. The wonderful and uplifting event was made even more memorable by the presence of the two lovely ladies I was fortunate to be seated with. They have joined us this afternoon to observe the proceedings in the House and are seated in the public gallery. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature Mayor Judy Dahl from the town of Olds and Lorna Gresham from Innisfail. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

1:40

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House the parents of one of our pages. I'm speaking of our page Leslie Day, who is seated to your right. She has been with us for two years, and, unfortunately for us, she will be leaving after this session. She will in the fall enter the University of British Columbia, where she will major in physical education and minor in business. We congratulate her on her new venture and wish her all the best. Today her parents are here in the House. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I'd like to introduce her parents, Joan Copps and Sean Day, and I invite them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a school introduction of my own, as it were, this afternoon. It is my pleasure, in fact my very extreme pleasure, to be able to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House today some very, very good family friends, Jeff and Patty Marler and their four children, Justin, Bailey, Brianna, and Qiu. Qiu is the latest addition. She's almost three years old, and she joined the family two years ago from China. The Marlers are home-schooled. They're here today to educate the children about the good works of this Assembly, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warmest, traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly two women from Lethbridge,

Dorothy McKenna and Lisa Lambert. Dorothy is the long-serving heart and soul of Womanspace, a place for women to meet and work for social justice. Lisa, who is studying for her master's, has taken that concept to the Internet and has founded an unbelievably fast-growing and successful Internet site newsletter. This newsletter has now gone national. The name has been borrowed from the Premier. It's called Martha's Monthly. Lisa researches timely issues that affect women's and children's lives, shares that information, and encourages letter-writing campaigns to the politicians who make the decisions that do affect their lives. I would ask them now to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Georgina Szoke. Georgina is a cow-calf producer in Little Smoky. She is concerned with the government's position on BSE and other agricultural issues. She is here today to watch the proceedings of the Legislature, and I'd now ask that Georgina rise and receive the very traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. East/west relations play a very strong role in our national unity. East/west relations also play a strong role in our family clan unity. Today to you and through you I would like to introduce our cousin Thai Pham and her husband, Hai Huynh. Montrealers for a long time, this is the first time that they have ever visited the western part of Canada. I would like them to stand up and receive the warm welcome from the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a constituent of mine David Kolbuc. David is currently a guidance counsellor at Hilltop high school in Whitecourt and has been an educator and an active member of our community for almost 30 years. David and his wife, Sandra, raised four children in Whitecourt, and he is joined today in the members' gallery by his daughter Zoë. Zoë is another one of those bright Whitecourt-Ste. Anne homegrown residents that have such a positive impact on this province. She is presently serving as the executive assistant to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. I would ask them to please rise and accept the warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to other members of the Assembly Charan Khehra, director of special projects for the NDP opposition caucus. Charan received his education in India, England, and Scotland. He joined the NDP caucus in 1997 as a research and outreach associate and then served as leader Dr. Raj Pannu's executive assistant. He is retiring after eight years of outstanding service to our caucus. Charan is seated in the public gallery, and I now would ask him to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly a constituent of mine from the Strathmore-Brooks constituency. It's nice to see him here. The last time I saw him he was in full kilt regalia. I don't believe he is wearing that today, but I would ask Martin Shields to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Applewood Park Community Association

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in response to a question I raised regarding the prohibited transfer of Wild Rose grant funds from the Applewood Park Community Association, the Minister of Community Development stated, "We don't know what has been done until after we've had an audit of the procedures." But this transfer of funds has slipped through the audit procedures of the Wild Rose Foundation, the Department of Community Development, and the Auditor General's office itself not once but two years in a row. My questions are to the Minister of Community Development. Can the minister explain why his department's accountability functions failed to catch this transfer of funds?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, if the Leader of the Opposition has any evidence to suggest that what I am about to say is incorrect, then he should table it and provide it. What we have found in the documentation that we have reviewed is that the Vietnamese Cao Daist Cultural Society in fact raised \$20,000 and gave it to Applewood. Applewood was then a properly constated entity that was eligible for funds from the Wild Rose Foundation's international development fund. We have evidence of the bank transfers, that the money was then transferred from Applewood to the entities that were working in Vietnam to do these development projects.*

So, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has got the evidence all backwards. Applewood did not transfer the money to an unregistered corporation or society. The unregistered corporation or society in fact raised money, gave it to Applewood, which then was sent to Vietnam. If the Leader of the Opposition, as an example, wished to raise money for a good project in Vietnam, he would not have to be an incorporated society registered in this province. He could go out and raise the money and then transfer the money to an entity that was eligible for Wild Rose funding, and then that money could be sent to the place that he wished for those development projects to take place.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not so simple. The money was transferred back to the struck organization.

Again to the same minister: has this minister confirmed that the Canadian International Development Agency was actually involved in this project as he indicated yesterday?

Mr. Mar: In the past, Mr. Speaker, we have used CIDA as a third-party entity to in fact confirm that work which was to be done in another jurisdiction has in fact been done. In this particular case that has not yet been done. We do however have, in the submission of documents by Applewood, a complete accounting for how all the money has been spent. We believe that it was done in complete order.

Again I challenge the Leader of the Opposition: if he has evidence to the contrary, then he should table it rather than leave insinuations in the minds of those who may be listening.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister then request the Canadian International Development Agency to go ahead and confirm how this money was spent?

1:50

Mr. Mar: I would be pleased to do that, Mr. Speaker. But again I remind the hon. member that if he has evidence to the contrary, he should be tabling it.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Long-term Care Facility Standards

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue of appropriate use of medication for seniors is one that I brought to the attention of this House as recently as March. The Auditor General revealed that most facilities inspected did not meet the basic standards for medication administration, indicating specifically that there is inconsistent documentation surrounding the use of chemical restraints, and a gross lack of staffing may be the cause. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: I would like to know specifically what systems the government would put in place to guarantee complete documentation of the use of chemical or physical restraints.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've indicated before in the Assembly, the area of the Auditor General's report that refers to my ministry of seniors is through accommodation, which would include laundry, meals, utilities, et cetera. One of the areas, though, is not the issuance of medication, so I would refer that to the Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Then my questions will be to the minister of health. Perhaps it's a good argument for getting this stuff together.

Given that medications are used as a chemical restraint, will the minister immediately increase the number of staff in long-term care facilities?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports and the Ministry of Health and Wellness are working together and are quite clear on what they should do. Moreover, the report itself does delineate the responses and how we partner in some areas. In terms of actual care given to residents in the facilities – nursing care, the human service, the medication delivery – that is the responsibility of Health.

One of things that we have done is review our continuing care standards. Those standards in draft form will be released to Albertans through the members that I announced, Calgary-Lougheed and Lacombe-Ponoka. We will be moving through the province to the regional authorities, speaking to the providers of service. It will address everything from how medication is stored, how medication

*See p. 1526, left col., para. 1

is administered. Over and above that, if we need more efforts relative to the clinical management of psychotropics, that will come under a different form and standard.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. When that report is released in September or thereabouts, would the minister adjust staffing to achieve a proper ratio?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we will be looking at staffing among the many other issues. Although the regulation today says 1.9 hours per person within long-term care, we had moved from last year's 3.1 to 3.4 hours on average for every resident in a long-term care facility. I recognize that the hon. member has been asking about increasing over and above that average. We have to get a clearer picture on what some of the issues are, and we will be not only talking and listening to Albertans on this subject; we will be listening to all of the MLAs in this Assembly to hear what their particular issues and comments might be. It's gratifying to know that many of the responses we've received from the community have been positive about the level of care in their place. So we need to do more work to find out what it is.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Often standards in care facilities are not treated as minimums but as ceilings. For example, in some cases, like baths, residents are limited to having one bath per week. Long-term care facilities working their staff at maximum capacity are only able to provide baths based on facility resources rather than resident dignity and need. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the minister immediately establish a standard for personal hygiene of a minimum of two baths per week provided to residents?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the hon. member's question because it gives me a chance to respond this way: if somebody is incontinent, a standard of two baths per week would not be sufficient. The absolute must be that the patient's care plan must be deliberately structured to make sure that they have adequate and appropriate care to their needs. Particularly where they are incapacitated, there well may be a standard that would say that we would improve or increase from one to two baths a week, but there may be even more necessity to increase beyond that. I think it has to be a care plan focused on the patient and then delivered in a manner which is in their best interest.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that advocates tell us that in some long-term facilities when a resident can't supply shampoo, they don't get their hair washed, will the minister include hygiene supplies as a basic standard of care?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think that the Auditor General's report has illuminated a number of things about the systems and administration of long-term care centres. Some of the issues that are being raised by the hon. member opposite relate exactly to quality of care, how care is actually delivered from a nursing capacity. I am not familiar with whether or not it is a standard in some facilities not to provide supplies and in others that supplies are provided. It is not

clear in this report whether or not we're talking about private, nonprofit, public facilities, and there's no differentiation there. One of my obligations will be to do the evaluation about what is appropriate and determine clearly that if people are not being provided with resources that they need, they are provided with those resources to ensure their basic hygiene. I totally agree.

Ms Blakeman: To the same minister: why did the government choose to relinquish its responsibility to ensure that people in care have at least the dignity of personal hygiene? We need minimum standards that are reasonable for personal hygiene.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me phrase it a different way. I'm not sure that I would ever want to place my mother in a long-term care that had just a minimum standard. I want a standard of care that is particular to the needs that that person has, and every standard shall be modelled on that basis.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

Beef Marketing

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last year the Auditor General found that while Alberta cattle producers faced financial disaster, the profit margins of American packing companies had nearly quadrupled. Unfortunately, history seems to be repeating itself. Since early March when a Montana judge ruled that the border had to stay closed, packer margins have jumped to levels in some cases even higher than those found by the Auditor General in his report. My questions are to the minister of agriculture: what actions will the minister take to address the excessive profiteering of the two big American packing companies?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that a report was recently released by the federal investigators into whether or not unreasonable profits have been taken, and the findings were quite clear that that was not the case.

Certainly, the packing industry and the feeding industry and the primary production industry are an integrated industry in our province. Today they are working together to work our way through this situation until that border opens. We're of course waiting on the court case and working with the Alberta Beef Producers and the Canadian Cattlemen's Association on the amicus briefs that are being prepared for those court cases as we speak. We are also working very, very closely with the industry on the set-aside program, and that includes the processing industry, Mr. Speaker. Based on the regulated environment in which we live today, because of that set-aside program we are in fact controlling the market.

Mr. Mason: Producers are suffering, Mr. Speaker. When will the minister take action – take action – to protect Alberta producers from the dysfunctional market which is caused by the near monopoly of two large packing companies?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that the hon. member is a little bit behind the times here. The set-aside program that we are operating right now is doing exactly what he's asking us to do. The industry had requested us to extend that set-aside program and to work together with the producers on alternate plans.

We are doing that. We'll continue to do that. We're asking for the other provinces to actually join in our particular part of the plan, and that's the national basis program. We've requested that from the other provinces. We're very hopeful that they will join with us because the packers, the processors, and the producers agree that this is how we've been able to stabilize the price above what anyone would have thought it would be.

2:00

Mr. Mason: Given the extremely low prices that cattle producers are receiving for their beef, can the minister explain why beef at the supermarket remains at traditionally high levels?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we seem to be going over questions that I recall being in this House some time ago with regard to how the carcass of an animal is distributed and distributed by way of what used to have value in a carcass and what no longer has value in that carcass. We have also, as I said, talked about the set-aside program. We've talked about stabilizing the prices. Today they're in the 80- to 82-cent range. Those price ranges are fairly stable at this point in time, and we're going to continue to work with the industry because they know what is good for their industry.

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

Softwood Lumber Trade Dispute

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been numerous reports in the media about a meeting between Canada's International Trade minister and the new U.S. Trade Representative. One of the items discussed, apparently, was the U.S. administration's opposition to the Byrd amendment, which allows U.S. companies to profit from penalties levied on Canadian imports. My questions are for the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Can the minister confirm that this is the government of Alberta's understanding?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the U.S. administration continues to work opposing the Byrd amendment. Notwithstanding the fact that all evidence, even from the World Trade Organization, indicates that the Byrd amendment violates all international trade rules, the U.S. administration still has some difficulty convincing Congress to change its position.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Can the minister inform the House: has the federal government consulted with the government of Alberta on this issue?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the one federal minister that calls on a regular basis, Mr. Peterson, has contacted Alberta on a number of occasions, and we are working toward a pan-Canadian approach to this issue. We are working with the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development and the Alberta industry in trying to reach consensus on a position paper that was presented to the Americans about a week and a half to two weeks ago.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the minister. To the same minister: can he inform this House as to Alberta's position on the Byrd amendment and the resolution of the softwood lumber dispute?

Mr. Stelmach: Alberta's position, Mr. Speaker, is simply that we oppose it. It violates trade rules, and it is grossly unfair that the money we deposited in terms of a tariff can then be spent by the industry on the other side of the border working in direct conflict and in opposition to the industry north of the border. One of the reasons we're also opposing it is that the industry has told us that if we don't get back any of the \$4.3 billion that is rested with the American industry, then there's no basis for an agreement, and again we'll be back to the same position we were for the last 12, 14 years.

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

Allen Gray Continuing Care Centre

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have received an overwhelming amount of complaints regarding the care received at the Allen Gray long-term care facility. I personally witnessed the grief and tears from the residents and their families at a recent meeting, and these complaints are too numerous to state. The facility has even taken the extreme measure of banning the daughter of a resident since she had encouraged others to come forward with their complaints. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is this minister prepared to do to address the ongoing deficit of proper care received by the residents of this facility?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'll state it again in this House. If our Members of the Legislative Assembly or any other Albertan for that matter have a complaint about the level of care in any publicly funded facility in this province, then I believe they have a duty to let our office know so that we can do a proper follow-up. I can assure the hon. member that if there is some concern that a follow-up or inspection that's been done in the past has not been adequate, then all they have to do is provide that for the ministry of health, either to the deputy's office or to the regional health authority, clearly to my office. I would be very pleased, in fact privileged, to follow up in full detail on the issues that are raised.

Mr. Agnihotri: In that the CEO of Capital health has indicated to me in a letter that a detailed review of the facility is under way, can the minister tell this House when we can expect the results of this review?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, it would appear that the hon. member has had some response to his question from the regional health authority. I have a great deal of confidence in the regional health authority and the CEO. I look forward to hearing the response. I don't know, obviously, as much about the background on this issue, but if there has been some investigation done, perhaps the hon. member would like to table the letter so that we can regard it as well and take a look at it. I can only assume that if a timeline wasn't suggested by the CEO, we could ask for that timeline and it would be provided.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Minister. In that the daughter of one of the residents has been banned from the facility for voicing her concerns, will the minister intervene to restore her access to her own father?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, at this point in this Legislative Assembly there are allegations being tabled about a family matter within one of our facilities. I will do the necessary inquiries to determine

whether or not there is accuracy in the report that's being provided here in this very public Assembly.

I would also state this from my own experience in looking after people who are critically ill. Frequently the care plan that is provided for that resident might not make sense to other family members, but it is the duty of that person that signs that care plan along with the member that is housed in a long-term care facility to be fully prepared to meet the commitments of that care plan.

I would welcome the opportunity to do further follow-up or even speak to the member in private about these matters that seem to be of a personal family nature.

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

Trade Mission to United States

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Economic Development. At the end of April the minister announced that he was going to Texas and Colorado. According to a news release the trip focus was on Alberta's oil industry: its capacity, its investment opportunities, and its abilities to develop new technologies for use in extreme environments. The cost of the minister's trip was about \$5,900. What value did Alberta taxpayers get out of this expenditure?

Mr. Dunford: Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that travel is a cost of doing business. I might say to the members of the House that ministers travel I think primarily to achieve three objectives. The first one, of course, would be to gather information that can help us with the policy concerns that we have as a government here in Alberta, certainly to raise awareness of the world-class goods and services that Albertans can provide to the world, and also, of course, then to attract investment to create jobs.

Now, the focus of the trip to Texas, of course, was the Houston Offshore Technology Conference, about 50,000 delegates, if I remember that correctly. While I was there, a news conference. The Premier of Newfoundland, the Minister of Energy from Nova Scotia, and myself talked about the tremendous opportunities that were available to us. I was also able to speak to investors at a lunch.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. To the same minister: when you're meeting with American investors, what do you tell them about our province?

The Speaker: We have approximately 45 seconds.

Mr. Dunford: Okay. Great place to live. Great place to work. Great place to do business. Great place to visit. We've got the technology. We've got the product. We've got the people. A debt-free province gives us a whole new reason for investing in this province. People can be assured of low tax levels. So there we have it: security of supply, security of energy, security of the people. What a great place to represent.

2:10

Ms DeLong: I'm not done yet. Attracting investment will create opportunities for new companies. What about your responsibility for ensuring that Albertans and Alberta businesses are the main beneficiaries of the Alberta advantage?

Mr. Dunford: Well, there we have it. We get both ends of the tunnel on this situation. We're out there doing good things to bring

investment to this province, and we're out there doing great things to take Alberta out to the rest of the world. There were components of the mission that dealt with Alberta suppliers. Why are you yawning? This is Alberta. This is the western tiger – the western tiger – and they are yawning. Mr. Speaker, a little more respect, please, for the business environment in Alberta.

Speaker's Ruling Clarification

The Speaker: Methinks the hon. minister would want to correct something. As it is the tradition for the hon. member, when acknowledged, to speak through the chair, the suggestion might be that it was the chair that was yawning and, secondly, that the chair would have no respect. So let's clarify that. Okay?

Mr. Dunford: I'll be glad to clarify for all of the TV listeners and radio listeners, if that still happens, that it was not the Speaker of this House that was yawning. The Speaker of this House is a previous Minister of Economic Development. He knows the importance of Alberta.

The Speaker: So I take it now that it's my fault.

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

Children's Services Special Case Review

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberals have the highest regard for social workers who deal with very tough situations trying to aid Alberta's children. What makes their work even more difficult are huge caseloads, blocking opportunity to build relationships with the families they are serving. This problem was illustrated by the Nina Courtepatte case, where there have been suggestions that the case would have been better handled if just one worker was in charge of the whole case. To the Minister of Children's Services: is there any plan in place to improve the continuity social workers have in their work to allow them to maintain the same file as long as possible?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, three days in a row and three days of very similar questions. Again I'm not going to comment specifically on the tragic death of the 13-year-old that was murdered other than to say that our hearts go out to her family.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition member has indicated the hard work that the social workers do in this province. I think it's important that the Assembly understands the difficult cases that these social workers face on a daily basis. I can tell the opposition member that the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, that was brought forward in November of last year, was exciting to all of the social workers in this province and well received. We're excited about the act and what it's doing for the families and children in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given the inconsistent qualifications across the province, will the minister commit to creating one set of qualifications for family enhancement workers in all regions so that all families receive the same standard of help and all workers are qualified to do that job?

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Speaker, the social workers in this province do an unbelievable job. I think, again, what is important for the opposition member to understand is that after we proclaimed

the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, those social workers are doing what they should be doing, and that's providing compassionate care to all the families in this province, and they all do an unbelievable, fantastic job.

Mrs. Mather: Well, to the same minister: will the results and recommendations of the internal investigation into the Nina Courtepatte case be revealed to the public?

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, I can say yes to that. After all of the things that have gone through the criminal case, and if need be, if it goes to a fatality inquiry, we'd be pleased to provide our special case review recommendations on this particular file. Let's be honest here: what comes out of the special case will only make our department better and provide better care to all the families in this province.

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

Calgary Catholic School Board Funding

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Parents and teachers in my constituency are getting nervous after hearing reports that the Calgary Catholic board is anticipating a budget shortfall of about \$4 million. They fear that if a shortfall is imminent for the '05-06 school year, teachers or other employees may be let go. My questions are for the Minister of Education. Is it true that you are underfunding the Calgary Catholic school board?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly hope not because all school boards have been given some significant increases not only this year but for the past couple of years. I think one of the key points here is that budget discussions that are going on right now are very much of a preliminary nature. Final budgets, as we all know here, come in to us around the last week of June. So any proposed numbers that are being talked about now or any proposed budget shortfalls are just that: they're speculative in nature. I would hope that money can be found from within the existing budget to cover any of those anticipated troubles.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. To the same minister: how much of an increase was provided to the Calgary Catholic school board, and why does it appear to not be enough?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, funding for general and basic instruction went up by about 9.5 per cent overall, and that includes everything from the per-student grant rate to the health rates to our ESL rates to the severe special-needs rate and so on. That accounted for about \$234 million new dollars.

Now, specific to Calgary Catholic, which I believe is the question, their grant rate would have gone up probably from about \$260 million to about \$270 million this year alone, and that's a pretty significant increase. Those deliberations will take that increase into account, I'm sure.

Mrs. Ady: My final supplementary to the same minister: what are you prepared to do to help the Calgary Catholic school board with their anticipated budget difficulties?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, if in fact the final budget that comes in at the end of June or thereabouts shows that there are some

difficulties, obviously we would need to have my officials meet with their officials and find out where the miscalculations, perhaps, occurred or if there were some other anomalies such as a sudden jump in student population. I know that Calgary Catholic has experienced something like a jump in the rate of 5 to 10 per cent or whatever it was. I met with them in June, and I can't recall the exact number. If anomalies like that were to be there and were to be presented, then surely we would be able to take a look and see what could be done about them, and I would undertake to do that. But right now we're talking about a preliminary set of numbers, so let's wait and see what happens.

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

Technology Funding

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In today's competitive, fast-paced economy timing can be everything. It's vital that emerging technologies and companies get the support they need to flourish, particularly when they're part of strategically important industrial clusters like biomedicine and biotechnology. Timely support from this government is too often lacking. My questions are all to the Minister of Innovation and Science. Given that this area has been identified as an emerging industrial cluster for the city of Edmonton, when will this government commit its share of the necessary funding for the proposed wet lab so desperately needed by these emerging companies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, part of Innovation and Science is clearly focused on key strategic thrusts for innovation and science in the province of Alberta. We have picked the area of energy, life sciences, and ICT. The wet lab the hon. member is referring to fits in the category, I think, of the life sciences area and is one that we are currently considering.

2:20

Mr. Elsalhy: Given that the feasibility study was completed almost two years ago and the funding from the city and the federal government has been in place for months, can the hon. minister explain the delay in the approval process, please?

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, there are many factors involved in a decision of this nature. Now, one is to develop partnerships and support from industry, to develop support and partnerships with municipalities, with the federal government as we're all interested in developing these kinds of vital industries in our province. As I've indicated, we are seriously looking at this matter right at the moment.

Mr. Elsalhy: Mr. Speaker, given that further delays could lead to the redirection or removal of funding previously committed by our federal and municipal partners, will this minister commit to releasing the necessary provincial funding share now?

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, what I will commit to is the fact that we are taking a very serious look at this particular proposal and many others. It will get the consideration and the examination that it requires, and if it fits our strategic priorities and fits within the framework of getting the best development of innovation and technology in this province, we will follow through with the funding.

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

Sale of Social Housing Corporation Land

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The sale last fall by the Alberta Social Housing Corporation of two lots of land totalling 927 acres in the Timberlea area of Fort McMurray seems irregular, to say the least. Instead of a public tender, open-bid process that treats all developers equally, the two parcels were apparently sold in a private deal to a company called Timberlea Consortium Incorporated. A caveat referencing the agreement for sale was filed with land titles on December 15, 2004. I've alerted the minister of seniors that these questions were coming, so my question is to the minister of seniors. Is it true that the two parcels were sold through an agreement for sale without a public tender or open-bid process, and if so, why?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate that the member did let me know that this question would be in the House today because I want to clarify that under legislation through the Alberta Housing Act, section 18(b) states that we do have the authority to transfer land to the Alberta Social Housing Corporation and that that transfer of lands can be done in a number of ways. It's very clear in the legislation. That is through a nominal sum process or through direct sale or through tender. As the member did mention, this was through a direct sale. In the case that the member is referring to, my understanding is that that land was a direct sale, and the appraised value of the land was what was taken into consideration. It was through consultation with the municipality of Wood Buffalo as well as house builders in the area.

You know, Mr. Speaker, it seems that that has assisted in meeting the needs of Fort McMurray for housing as there is construction occurring on the land currently, and there will be more lots brought on in the fall.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, there could be a debate about the market value of this, but my question, then, to go at it in a different way: why would these properties have been sold by way of an agreement for sale rather than by requiring Timberlea Consortium Incorporated to arrange its own financing and pay the entire purchase price in cash for the two lots, as seems to be the case in all the other properties?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't comment on the full sale and the way in which it occurred except to say that it was a direct sale; it was at the appraised value; it did meet the legislation requirements that are in the Alberta Housing Act. Also, it did ensure that the needs of Fort McMurray, through the municipality and as well through the Home Builders' Association, are being met.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, to clear the air, then, will the minister commit to tabling in this Assembly the agreement for sale with Timberlea Consortium Incorporated for these properties, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know if that's the usual practice, to table agreements for the sale of land. We, you know, sell land through – I know in the communities of Banff,

Canmore, high-needs communities, we do it in the ways that have the legal process in place through legislation, which as I indicated, hon. member, is through a nominal sum process or through direct sale or through tender.

Mr. Speaker, it should be known as well that we have assisted Fort McMurray in other ways through this legislation process. For example, with the nominal sum that's in place, the transfer of lands, we've put in place with the Wood Buffalo municipality a site for a school, a site for a fire hall, a police site. There are processes, and this is one that the member has mentioned.

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

Interpretation Services in Courts

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The service of language interpreters in Alberta's courts has become very important not only as a provision of equal access to fair trial but, more importantly, as a deterrent and prevention factor through understanding the laws of our land. A group of court interpreters presented to me their concern about the very low rate of pay for the important work and special qualifications, particularly compared with other jurisdictions such as the RCMP or the WCB. So reflecting their concerns, my question is to the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Can the minister advise the members of the Assembly what the current fee structure is for the court interpreters?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This hon. member should be congratulated for tenacity. I believe for the last several years he has pursued this matter in question period, and I'm very pleased to say that in this particular budget year we were able to increase the hourly rate threefold for the interpreter fees in our courts, from \$15 to \$45 per hour.

Under the Constitution the province is responsible for the administration of justice, and in this particular case what we're talking about are interpreter fees with respect to criminal matters prosecuted by the province. It is important that people who have difficulty with language or, basically, impairment of language have the interpretive skills available in court so that the court can understand and so that they can understand what is going on. It's all part of fairness of justice, and I'm pleased to say that the increase in the hourly rate will allow us to ensure that we have appropriate interpreters in our courts going forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. That answer clears all the matters. Thank you.

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

First Nations Land Claims

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's obligation and ability to manage the affairs of the province is compromised when outstanding land claims issues like those of the Lubicon are not dealt with. The issues surrounding outstanding land claims need to be resolved, so that orderly development of Alberta's economic potential can take place. Until outstanding land claims are resolved, Alberta will continue to have upheaval in northern aboriginal

communities. These questions are for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Given that development on disputed territory is occurring without proper approval from the EUB, will the minister now commit to stopping all unapproved developments on disputed land?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, that's the reason why we've been working on a consultation policy, to be able to look at how we can begin to work with the First Nations and how they can also benefit from what's happening on an economic basis with anything to do with resource development. That policy will be able to outline how they can be involved not only from an economic side but also how the resource development may impact their treaty and aboriginal rights. That's the reason why we have to be able to place that policy and look at the guidelines that will be able to address those very issues that you're bringing to the table.

Mr. Tougas: Well, with \$6.8 million set aside for the consultation process, is this government any closer to settling those land claim disputes for the benefit of First Nations, industry, and the province in general?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, on the land claim issue we have been very successful. Since 1986 I think we've done about 11 different land claims, and those land claims have been very helpful for First Nations. What it does is that we have now provided dollars not only from the federal government but also the provincial government to be able to pay for some of the areas of concern that they have as if no one has ever been on that land. So what we've done are the negotiations with 11, actually, of the different First Nations. With those land claims what we've been able to do is encourage a lot of economic development to happen.

We continue to work on the land claims so that we can also deal with the issue of land claims that are outstanding but also be able to look at the economic side for the First Nations.

2:30

Mr. Tougas: Well, given that the province holds all disputed lands in trust, will the minister commit to ensuring that the millions of dollars in royalties from oil and gas extracted from disputed territory is also held in trust?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me, first of all, talk about the land claim process. The First Nations have to first of all be recognized by the federal government that they do have a land claim. When that land claim has been recognized by the federal government, the province then gets invited into the negotiations. At that point, then, we begin to look at everything that's brought forward, whether it's any kind of activity that could happen and impact the First Nations. We'd then deal with that in a negotiated process. With that comes the information as to how, then, we address the very concerns from an economic base with the First Nations but also with Canada so that we're all together in this negotiation so that we can begin to address those very concerns that have been outstanding for a long time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Federal Transfer Payments

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations informed

this Assembly that Albertans contribute nearly \$9 billion more in taxes to Ottawa than we receive in services, pensions, and transfers. This is much more than the residents of Ontario contribute on a per capita basis. My question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. My constituents want to know what the Alberta government is doing to narrow the gap with these sudden Santos in Ottawa.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the rush by the Prime Minister to make these special deals indicates that we do have a federal government that's in crisis. Just looking at the latest agreement with Ontario, and not having all of the specifics as yet, we know that in one area – that is, the settlement with respect to immigrants – Ontario got a substantial increase to about \$3,400 per immigrant. Presently Alberta receives about \$918 per immigrant. We're going to be asking Ottawa for the difference, which to Alberta will be about \$40 million.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister indicate if there are specific programs where Alberta is not treated fairly that contribute to the Alberta gap?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that Albertans are proud to contribute to and help other Canadians through the equalization program. That's a given. But there are a couple of programs where we are not treated fairly. One of them is the CST/CHT transfer, and that in itself is somewhere in the area of \$300 million to \$400 million more that should come to Alberta given this last agreement with Ontario.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: are there any good reasons that Alberta would refuse federal transfers even if it perpetuates the gap?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the agreement does not respect the values and priorities of Albertans, we won't sign it. One example is the current negotiations going on between the Minister of Children's Services and the federal minister with respect to the child care agreement. Again, I assume that if at the end of the day Albertans don't see value in the agreement and don't receive parental choice, why would we sign an agreement just for a few pennies to come to Alberta? We want to see benefit and also parental choice in that particular agreement. That's just one example.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Edmonton Police Service Investigation

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 5, 2002, Randy Fryingpan was tasered six times in the back seat of a car by a member of the Edmonton Police Service. Judge Easton commented on these police actions that, quote, they were an abuse of force and cruel and unusual treatment. However, the Calgary prosecutors' office has now decided not to proceed with charges and has sent the matter back to the Edmonton Police Service to deal with. Justice has been denied for Randy Fryingpan. My question is to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Can the minister explain to the public

and to this House how, despite clear physical evidence of Randy Fryingpan being tasered six times in 66 seconds, the Crown decided there was insufficient evidence to proceed with charges?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the outset this matter became public two days ago in the sense that it was at that point in time that the Crown's advice to the Edmonton Police Service with respect to potential charges regarding the incident that the hon. member has referred to was made public. At that point in time an information bulletin from Alberta Justice was provided. It was put on the website. One hour following that a media availability and press conference was held with the chief Crown prosecutor from Calgary, who was the individual responsible for rendering this opinion. So the material with respect to this matter is on the website. It was produced two days ago. For those who wish to follow up and obtain the full particulars, that is how they can do it.

Now, with respect to this matter, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that the Crown takes their obligation of providing opinions with respect to potential charges very seriously, and when it involves a situation of charges against the police, it is understood that the public will be providing additional scrutiny with respect to the matter.

There were in this particular case three Crown prosecutors, all senior, including the chief Crown in Calgary who reviewed this particular matter. They reviewed it independently, and each of them came up with the same conclusion based on a standard test which is applied to proceeding with charges, that test being a reasonable likelihood of conviction. In other words, there must be a reasonable likelihood of conviction. Each of them came up with the conclusion in this particular case that there was no reasonable likelihood of conviction. That is a fundamental test that must be applied. As a result, the recommendation to the Edmonton Police Service was that charges should not be laid.

Dr. B. Miller: Given the dissatisfaction of Randy Fryingpan's family and his lawyer and the public with this decision, will the minister initiate a review of the inconsistencies in the Crown's interpretation of the evidence?

Mr. Stevens: I'm very surprised that the Justice critic with the Official Opposition, Mr. Speaker, would decide that justice should be determined on the basis of the dissatisfaction of someone. The fact of the matter is that we have fundamental tests; we have rule of law. Those are the things that ensure that there is not rough justice in this province, in this country. This particular member ought to understand that.

In this particular case, once again, Mr. Speaker, it was a fundamental test, that being the reasonable likelihood of conviction, that was applied. It was applied to the particular case by three senior Crown prosecutors in Calgary, and in each case they came to the same conclusion, that there could not be a reasonable likelihood of conviction and that charges should not be laid.

Dr. B. Miller: My final supplemental is to the Solicitor General. This file has gone back to the Edmonton Police Service. How can the Solicitor General satisfy the public's desire for a credible, independent, and impartial review of the evidence when the police are just going to continue to have internal investigations of police?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, as there are no charges laid, the internal investigation regarding the actions or the allegations of actions under the Police Act regulations, if they were contravened,

will be going ahead and moving forward by the internal affairs section of the Edmonton Police Service. That's why we have Bill 36 before this Assembly in third reading. In fact, we will be providing new opportunities, new civilian oversight, regarding serious incidents related to police issues or police complaints regarding more serious issues than what we can afford right now in the present Police Act. So the amendments have come forward, the bill is in third reading, and I would hope that the hon. members from the opposition support it in third reading.

2:40

The Clerk: Members' Statements.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now I'll call on one of six to participate, but might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

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

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In my first introduction I neglected to introduce to you and through you another gentleman who came with Martin Shields. This gentleman is George Berg. They have driven a bus up full of students who will be attending the Legislature tomorrow. I would ask George Berg to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

Vignettes from Alberta's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, parliamentary junkies may find today's historical vignette rather interesting. It takes us back to Alberta's golden jubilee year. On May 12, 1955, the Third Session of the 12th Legislature was prorogued. At that point in time, meaning in the first 50 years of the service of this Assembly, the Legislative Assembly of Alberta had seen itself sit for 1,873 sitting days for a total of 402,673 minutes, and it passed 3,874 bills.

We are now here, 50 years later to the day, sitting in the First Session of Alberta's 26th Legislature. Over the past 50 years, current as of 11:34 last night, this Assembly had passed 4,220 bills during 2,833 sitting days, with a total of 722,946 sitting minutes.

Hon. members, in the last 100 years, the first 100 years of this Assembly in the province, this Assembly has sat for 4,706 days. Now, in the 100 years there were 36,500 days, and this Assembly sat for 4,706 days for a total of 1,125,619 minutes and has passed 8,094 bills.

Please, don't anybody say that I must be really bored to have time to figure this out. This is pure historical science.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

Positive Influence of Teachers

Ms Haley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be able to rise today and speak about the excellence in teaching awards. As these awards are meant to recognize the best teachers in this province, I thought it might be a nice opportunity to recognize some of the teachers who had a profound impact on my life. Please consider these my excellence in teaching awards.

As a child I had both the opportunity and the challenge of moving frequently around the province. Growing up in the oil patch meant that there were many times when we would move to a new well site every six weeks. I was very fortunate over the years to meet many dedicated teachers who would take the time to find out what my brother and I had learned in our last three or four schools that year. This allowed them to adjust their programs to our specific needs.

I had three favourite teachers, Mr. Speaker. The first of them was Mrs. Dench in Crossfield. The second was Mrs. Hahn in Blackfalds, who single-handedly made it possible for me to add numbers quickly and accurately. Her trick was that every student that finished first Monday through Thursday and got the answers right would win a dime. Thus, my profit motivation appeared to me right in grade 5. The third teacher was Mr. Woodard in Slave Lake, just a great guy, who was my homeroom teacher. He also took the time to coach basketball, curling, and volleyball as well as drive the team bus all over northern Alberta and let us sing on all of the trips.

These individuals and many more had a profound impact on my life, Mr. Speaker. Notable mentions on my list of teacher excellence, because every child has a bad day from time to time – I know that I did – were two very special ladies, Mother Mary and Sister Etienne, both of the Daughters of Wisdom convent in Slave Lake. These two wonderful women always had time for me when I just needed a place to hang out. Sister Etienne taught French, and Mother Mary was the home ec teacher. While she was never successful in teaching me how to measure ingredients, she would always encourage us to just try new things.

Just like today teachers all over our province are helping, guiding, and educating our children.

I would like to congratulate the winners of the excellence awards as well as acknowledge the nominees and all of those unsung heroes in our schools who make a difference in the lives of our children yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Grant MacEwan College Learning Centre

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning Grant MacEwan College unveiled plans for its new health care learning centre. I had the pleasure of joining the hon. ministers of Infrastructure and Transportation, Advanced Education, Health and Wellness, and Education and the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon at the college's city centre campus to announce that the Alberta government will contribute \$46.1 million towards the \$58 million project.

Grant MacEwan College should be commended and congratulated for their vision and perseverance in bringing this project to life and for working closely with the Alberta government to make this centre the place to go for innovative health care learning. MacEwan's health care learning centre will reinforce Alberta as a leader in health care learning and delivery, and it's exciting to see the innovation take flight.

Mr. Speaker, the centre will provide expanded classroom and laboratory space for the college's nursing and health sciences programs. Construction of the facility will soon commence, and once it is up and running, the new 240,000 square foot facility will be able to accommodate an additional 2,000 full- and part-time students. These students will have access to the latest technology, including state-of-the-art simulation tools and Alberta's SuperNet, which will help provide enhanced distance delivery programs. These students will benefit from learning technologies that will

foster innovative teaching and curriculum that will help them become talented and skilled professionals ready to join Alberta's booming workforce.

Mr. Speaker, the demand for health care providers in Alberta is growing, a trend that is not expected to slow down any time soon. The centre will help the province meet the demand of health care providers and ensure that Albertans continue to receive outstanding care from outstanding professionals.

I applaud both Grant MacEwan College and the government for forming a partnership that will benefit not only the postsecondary and health care systems but all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Royal Alberta Museum

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Provincial Museum of Alberta will become the Royal Alberta Museum when Her Majesty visits later this month. I rise today to recognize that the renewal accompanying the royal designation is moving forward from a vision to reality. This week our government committed \$150 million to the project. I cannot think of a more fitting centennial legacy gift to all Albertans that honours our first 100 years as a province.

The museum will be renewed in its current location. It is a beautiful site that has served the museum well for almost 40 years and has more than enough room for it to become an architectural icon. The renewal will be a huge step forward in the museum's ability to tell the story of Alberta. The plans will double the space available for exhibits, create an interactive children's museum, allow Alberta's story to go outside the capital city through travelling exhibits and outreach programs, include a feature exhibit hall that will draw the best travelling exhibits in the world, and move parking underground and replace existing parking with an urban park.

Mr. Speaker, the Provincial Museum of Alberta belongs to each and every Albertan. The renewal and redesignation of it to the Royal Alberta Museum will make us all proud.

Thank you.

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

Canada Health Day

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, May 12, is Canada Health Day. This is a very special and important day, which is celebrated each year on the anniversary of the birth of Florence Nightingale, a pioneer of nursing and a reformer of hospital sanitation methods.

We all know how many people spend their health for wealth and are then forced to spend their wealth for health. People do live longer nowadays, but morbidity is a growing concern. Obesity, smoking, sedentary lifestyles, chronic disease, and infectious outbreaks like SARS and avian flu are issues which we all think about.

This year's theme, The Public's Health, reflects a focus on communities and individuals to prevent disease and promote healthier living. While this day is dedicated to recognizing new developments in public health care fields, showing our appreciation for the wonderful people who deliver public health services, and reflecting upon ways we can improve our health care system, it is also an opportunity to evaluate our role in shaping the type of health care system we want and that best serves the needs of all Albertans.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, may I suggest today a different P3 model for this government to consider? I am proposing a philosophy or direction

which emphasizes preparation, prevention, and protection. It is important that while we look for ways to reform our health care system, we must also recognize that it is an essential service that cannot and must not be commoditized. To implement any kind of change to our health care system without an adequate plan undermines the public support that is required if we're going to achieve any lasting improvement to our health care system. Public input and support is needed at every stage of the decision-making process to ensure that our health care system remains sustainable, universally accessible, and affordable.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage all Albertans to celebrate Canada Health Day by thinking about their own health as well as that of their neighbours, communities, and the environment. I also invite my hon. colleagues in the Legislature to join me in recognizing this important day.

Thank you.

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

Public Education Stressors

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Despite the government's gradual implementation of the Learning Commission's recommendations, May and June continue to be highly stressful months for parents, teachers, pupils, school secretaries, support staff, and school trustees.

Parents have a variety of concerns. Will they finally get their kids off the bus with a new school built in their no longer outlying suburban community, or will their now-considered inner-city school be spared closure? Parents of English as a Second Language and special-needs children wonder whether the program support their children received, no matter how small, due to the ever-present budget cuts will continue next year. Parents of students in grades 3, 6, and 9, especially if their children fall into the previously mentioned needs categories, are concerned about how their children will do on the government-forced achievement tests, knowing that their school's results will be plastered in the press with Fraser Institute rankings the following year.

Teacher administrators along with their staffs, despite glowing government budget announcements to the contrary, are forced to play the school survivor game of eliminating people and programs. The people and programs that are the most vulnerable to cutbacks, especially at the junior high level, are guidance, teacher-librarians, resource teachers, second language and fine arts programs. Despite the government's claim to support arts and culture, it is these programs together with the learning-support provisions that are the first to go.

In 2002 the drama program was cut at my previous junior high school, F.E. Osborne, in Calgary-Varsity. The following year the music program was severely cut. This year at another junior high school in Calgary-Varsity, Simon Fraser, the band program has been cut completely. At the junior high level, especially for students at risk, it is the option programs and the extracurricular staff support that keep the students coming to school.

Given this province's resource wealth, public education must become a higher priority for this government. The continuing cycle of government-imposed year-end education stress needs to be eliminated through long-term vision and funding.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Charan Khehra

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to recognize Charan Khehra for his contributions to the Alberta NDP opposition caucus as executive assistant to Dr. Pannu and the director of special projects.

Charan came to us with considerable experience as an educator, public administrator, researcher, and community builder. He was an assistant professor of political science in India, an executive officer with the British civil service, and then for 13 years was with the Alberta department of labour as a senior economist, providing research support to the department of labour, the Alberta Human Rights Commission, and the Alberta Labour Relations Board.

Charan has deep-rooted interests in labour management relations and human rights. He held various elected positions in the Whitley Council and civil service unions in England and community relations organizations. He was actively involved with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees and was elected a life member.

As an NDP caucus staff member Charan has shared his enthusiasm and passion for public service, considering politics to be the highest calling and privilege of a person. He was our provincial candidate in 1997. He is a founding member of the Sahaara, a community service organization in Edmonton, and was the chair of the Mill Woods Community Health Council.

Charan has a lovely family, Mr. Speaker. He's married to Surender and has two daughters, Mona Bhullar and Nina Khehra. He's also a proud grandfather to Jordan and Alex.

Charan Khehra is a person of vision and compassion and supports various nonprofit organizations and other causes promoting multiculturalism, human rights, social justice, and peace. He is our making-it-happen person. Although Charan Khehra is retiring shortly, I'm sure Charan will continue to make things happen wherever he goes.

On behalf of the caucus I wish Charan and his family the best of everything. We are indeed grateful for his outstanding contribution to our caucus, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker's Ruling Referring to Members by Name

The Speaker: Now I have to ask the leader of the third party a question.

Mr. Mason: What did I do now, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Twice today you violated the rule about naming members. You did it twice today. Now, was it because the hon. leader doesn't know the rule, has forgotten the rule, or has been lazy with the rule?

Mr. Mason: Or just reading, Mr. Speaker. I apologize.

The Speaker: Thank you very much, because we know it's a no-no.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition with 612 signatures. The petition calls for increased funding for improvements to highway 63. The total number of signatures on this petition so far is 3,409.

I would also like to table a petition signed by 339 individuals who would like to see immediate tuition relief for students attending postsecondary institutions in Alberta.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise with a petition from 104 good Albertans from the communities of Stony Plain, Gibbons, Lamont, Sylvan Lake, Redwater, Spruce Grove, and the host of the Canadian Finals Rodeo, the vibrant city of Edmonton. It reads:

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

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition that is in order to present to the Legislative Assembly, and it reads:

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

This petition is signed by 100 citizens of the province, and they come from all over, including Edmonton and Stony Plain, to mention just but a couple.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition prepared by the McKenzie Towne public school committee, and it states: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to support the building of schools in new communities in the City of Calgary."

head:

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

I'm also giving notice that on that same day, Monday, I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do also stand and retain their places.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Bill 41 Appropriation Act, 2005

Mrs. McClellan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 41, the Appropriation Act, 2005. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having

been informed of the contents of the bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the contents of this bill are self-explanatory as we have debated them for the last 24 budget days.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 41 read a first time]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. Deputy Premier, do you have a tabling?

Mrs. McClellan: I do, sir. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table today supplementary responses to questions raised during third reading of Bill 37, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2005. I have faxed those responses to the respective members' offices earlier today. I wanted to have them in so members could peruse the answers.

Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today five copies of the supplementary responses to questions raised during the Seniors and Community Supports estimates on April 19, 2005. These responses have already been sent to the appropriate members of the Liberal opposition and the ND opposition. As I indicated during estimates, I am pleased to provide these responses.

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 is a letter to the offices of the mayor and councillors of the city of Edmonton. It is from the South East Community Leagues Association. This letter is dated March 30, 2005, and it is in regard to the proposed Wal-Mart relocation to 49th Street and 90th Avenue in Lambton industrial park in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar.

The second tabling I have, Mr. Speaker, is the memorandum of decision by the honourable justice that was heard in the Court of Queen's Bench on May 10 in regard to parents from Strathearn, North Edmonton, Wellington, and the Edmonton public school board district No. 7.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have the first of five letters I wish to table today from dismayed Calgary-Varsity constituency parents Kathy White, Tamma and Andrew Arthur, Paula Emery, Evelyn Cone, and Shelley and Robert Ferguson regarding the cancellation of the highly attended and well-respected Simon Fraser junior high school band program due to the financial shortfalls that Alberta schools are faced with as a result of inadequate provincial education funding.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As indicated in the private member's statement I delivered last Thursday, I am tabling today the appropriate number of copies of some 65 mock invoices which the

Official Opposition received from attendance at and organizers of the midwifery rally on May 5. These invoices are being presented to the attention of the Legislative Assembly and the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness in hopes that they may convince the government to follow Manitoba's example and fully fund midwifery.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the appropriate number of copies of four letters and one report. The four letters are from good Albertans speaking to the issues of foreign replacement workers, apprenticeship ratios, and the deskilling of the trades. The report is the monitoring report on Canadian College International, Edmonton of August 2004.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of a land titles certificate showing the sale of 927 acres from the Alberta Social Housing Corporation to Timberlea Consortium Inc. in the Fort McMurray area.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Cardinal, Minister of Human Resources and Employment: the Alberta Association of Architects 2004 annual report; APEGGA, Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists, and Geophysicists of Alberta, annual report 2004; Alberta Land Surveyors' Association report of proceedings of the 95th annual general meeting; College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists 2004 annual report; the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, radiation protection program, 2003 annual report; the Alberta Dental Association and College, radiation health and safety program annual report 2003; University of Calgary Radiation Health Administration Organization annual report for the period April 1, 2003, to March 31, 2004; University of Alberta Authorized Radiation Health Administrative Organization annual report 2003-2004; the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta Radiation Health Administrative Organization annual report for the period April 1, 2003, to March 31, 2004.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Municipal Affairs, responses to questions raised by several Members of the Legislative Assembly on May 5, 2005, Department of Municipal Affairs 2005-06 Committee of Supply debate.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 7(5) I'm asking the Deputy Government House Leader to please share with us the projected government business for the week of May 16 to 19.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, May 16, in the afternoon we hope to introduce Bill 42, the Miscellaneous

Statutes Amendment Act, 2005, and then we'll proceed with private members' business. In the evening at 8 o'clock, of course, will be Motions Other than Government Motions. At 9 p.m. we'll deal with Government Bills and Orders. I anticipate it'll be second reading of Bill 41, the Appropriation Act, 2005; third reading of Bill Pr. 1, Bill Pr. 2, and Bill Pr. 3; then Committee of the Whole for Bill 38, the Pharmacy and Drug Amendment Act, 2005; Bill 14, the Student Financial Assistance Amendment Act, 2005; and Bill 9, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2005; and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, May 17, in the afternoon we should be able to do second reading of Bill 42, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2005, and third reading on any and all remaining third readings that might be required at the time. In the evening Committee of the Whole should be able to deal with Bill 41; Bill 42, which is the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2005; Bill 9, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2005; Bill 14; and Bill 15, the Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2005; and any remaining Committee of the Whole bills as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, May 19, in the afternoon third reading on Bill 41 and Bill 42 and any and all remaining third readings. On Wednesday evening third reading for Bill 41 is repeated on my script, just in case it should become necessary to do that, and Committee of the Whole and third reading on any and all remaining Committee of the Whole or third reading bills.

Thursday afternoon would be otherwise as scheduled per the Order Paper.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Private Bills
Second Reading**

**Bill Pr. 1
Bow Valley Community Foundation Act**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill Pr. 1, the Bow Valley Community Foundation Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill incorporates the Bow Valley Community Foundation and empowers it to receive and administer donations in trust for charitable purposes. I would encourage all members to support it.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr.1 read a second time]

**Bill Pr. 2
Camrose Lutheran College Corporation Act**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka on behalf of the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased on behalf of the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose to move second reading of Bill Pr. 2, Camrose Lutheran College Corporation Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is being proposed as a result of the merger of Augustana University College with the University of Alberta. The Camrose Lutheran College Corporation no longer owns and operates the college. The new role of the corporation would be to provide support to the Augustana Faculty within the University of Alberta. This could be mainly to preserve the Lutheran and

Scandinavian history and traditions of Augustana within the faculty. So I would encourage all members to support this bill.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a second time]

**Bill Pr. 3
Medicine Hat Community Foundation
Amendment Act, 2005**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River on behalf of the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to move second reading of Bill Pr. 3, Medicine Hat Community Foundation Amendment Act, 2005.

Mr. Speaker, the passage of this bill would allow this organization to expand its reach and good works beyond the boundaries of Medicine Hat. It would include the surrounding towns and rural municipalities in a regional foundation. This bill has been recommended by the Standing Committee on Private Bills, and it has received the approval of the existing foundation board.

On behalf of the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat I respectfully urge the support of all members of this Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a second time]

head: 3:10
**Private Bills
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

**Bill Pr. 1
Bow Valley Community Foundation Act**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

**Bill Pr. 2
Camrose Lutheran College Corporation Act**

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose I'd move that Bill Pr. 2 be amended as follows. I think the amendment has been passed around. The main purpose of the amendment is to change the word "nominating" to "search" and "City of Camrose" to "Faculty," a couple of simple amendments.

I don't have too much more to comment on it, but if there are questions, I can answer them. Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 2 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

**Bill Pr. 3
Medicine Hat Community Foundation
Amendment Act, 2005**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 3 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would move that the Committee of the Whole now rise and report bills Pr. 1, Pr. 2, and Pr. 3.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill Pr. 1 and Bill Pr. 3. The committee reports the following bill with some amendment, and that is Bill Pr. 2. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

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

**Bill 29
Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped
Amendment Act, 2005**

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a member of the MLA AISH Review Committee it's an honour and a privilege for me to

move third reading of Bill 29, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Amendment Act, 2005.

We've had a good discussion on this bill, and I believe that I'm correct in saying that thus far all members of the House have agreed that this amendment is needed and advisable and that this amendment will make a significant difference to AISH recipients.

This amendment will provide supplementary benefits for AISH recipients. Those supplementary benefits will renew the AISH program by making the program more flexible. It will provide the ability to help AISH recipients with extra benefits for things like school supplies for children, special transportation, replacement wheelchair batteries, diabetic and special diets for specific health conditions.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate and respect the debate and discussion we've had and would ask all members of the House to support Bill 29, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Amendment Act.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through discussions with one of my constituents who has an issue relative to spina bifida – this particular person has an 18-month-old child and a three-year-old child. She has spina bifida, and the bill seems to lack the scope to cover her needs. I'm standing in terms of asking if the bill could be enlarged to encompass what they call the nurturing assistance program for persons who have this particular disability.

In light of that, I'm hoping that the bill or the committee can maybe address that. The good member from I believe Calgary mentioned that maybe they can have some kind of investigation to include the nurturing assistance program so people with the handicap of spina bifida, with the problems that this particular person has, can receive some assistance.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to mention that in discussion regarding the bill. Thank you.

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

3:20

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am pleased to get an opportunity to speak in regard to Bill 29, the AISH Amendment Act, 2005. Certainly, this bill provides the government, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill has indicated, with the authority to develop regulations to allow for the provision of supplemental benefits. The hon. member outlined that. It certainly is needed. It certainly is welcomed by those in the AISH community. When we look at this, it is a step certainly in the right direction. It has been a long time in coming. We have to recognize that there are many people in this province who cannot, through no fault of their own, participate in this unprecedented economic boom, and we have a duty, we have an obligation to provide for their basic essential needs. This is, as I said, a step in the right direction, but there is still much work to be done.

If you look at the annual report of Human Resources and Employment from 2003-04 and you look at the number of caseloads for AISH clients, there has been a modest increase between 2001-02 and 2003-04. There has been roughly an increase of 2,400 caseloads. When we look at the focus that this group of caseloads has had on government policy, we can't forget the supports for independence, or the SFI, caseloads. Now, Mr. Speaker, they're roughly the same. For instance, in the last fiscal year that I have the annual report for, there were roughly 30,862 files or caseloads for AISH and about 29,200 for supports for independence.

Now, if we look, Mr. Speaker, at this year's budget in Human Resources and Employment – and we know that all the AISH files

have been moved over to another department. AISH is gone, but the SFI caseloads are still with Human Resources and Employment. I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to do the same thing for those Albertans as we have done for our AISH caseloads.

I would even go one step further. I would never dare hold up this bill in third reading, Mr. Speaker, but we should consider an annual review of all these support programs. I don't see that in this bill, but what I do see is a real need in the community of Edmonton-Gold Bar for adequate support programs for SFI clients.

If you look at the budget, you see last year that there was a line item for \$290 million. This year it's \$295 million. If we look at the number of caseloads in regard to these people – and I'm referring to this year's budget – people expected to work, about half of them are expected to find work of one sort or another. For people not expected to work, there are over 9,000 caseloads, Mr. Speaker, and that's going to go up. The government's forecast is that this is going to at least increase by another 2,000 caseloads. These are people who are not expected to work.

I don't know what percentage of these caseloads would have children in those households. I do know that in some cases with AISH clients there are children living in those homes, and we have to, Mr. Speaker, think of the children as well, not only the adults but the dependent children. It is quite unsettling, to say the least, with our economic prosperity to visit a temporary shelter in the community of Edmonton-Gold Bar.

It is unsettling, but at the same time when one enters the shelter, you have to admire the many volunteers who are there, Mr. Speaker, doing their very, very best to volunteer their time and their resources to provide warm shelter and a healthy meal for many people who cannot provide one for themselves or their children. This is what's shocking about this, to see children coming in routinely to shelters and soup kitchens and different organizations that provide meals for those who have no money or no means to make a meal for themselves.

I think we can do better, and that's why I would urge, as we conclude at this time third reading on this bill, that we don't forget about the other group. This is a much-needed advancement, and it's not the end of this for AISH clients because certainly an annual review I think is needed, but we cannot forget the 30,000 files that to date have not seen any increase in their monthly benefits.

Some people can have the attitude, "Well, let them look after themselves," but I would refer all hon. members to the fact that in Human Resources and Employment's business plan for 2005-06 better than 9,000 of these people are not expected to work. I wish, Mr. Speaker, I knew how many children would be involved in that number, but for the sake of the children let's look at improving their lives through increased and better benefits. If we have to cut other programs, so be it. Certainly, the first program that I would urge the government to cut is in the department of gambling, and that's this horse-racing renewal. No child in this province should be going to a temporary shelter to get a bite to eat while we are giving in excess of \$40 million to horse-racing renewal. It just doesn't make sense.

I would welcome all hon. members of this Assembly, when the recess does occur, to visit Edmonton-Gold Bar, the north end of our constituency, and they can see first-hand what I mean when I say that children are going to shelters for breakfast before they go to school. This is not an Alberta advantage, and I think we have an opportunity now, a real opportunity, to improve that.

In conclusion, let's not rest with Bill 29 with some improvements to the AISH program. Let's look at improving our SFI benefits and our delivery programs as well. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The bill, as mentioned, we'll certainly support because it's obviously a step in the right direction. But there are some concerns with the announcement, and they're not new. We've had a number of reviews, and finally there is going to be an increase for recipients that I guess is long overdue. We think it's still not enough because if you look back to '93, if you use inflated dollars, AISH recipients are still not back to where they were even at that particular time. In other words, their standard of living has gone down, Mr. Speaker.

3:30

I appreciate the fact that with this bill there are some new medical benefits, and that is an important step forward. No doubt about that, Mr. Speaker. I would be interested in how the government is going to make the recipients aware of it because sometimes we're dealing with some severely handicapped people. I think there has to be a special effort to make sure they know exactly and precisely what they're eligible for. I expect that all our constituency assistants will have to be on top of this too.

The other important thing that the government did – again, another step in the right direction – is double the amount to \$400 that recipients are allowed to earn before getting AISH clawed back.

Mr. Speaker, the written questions that I asked were trying to figure out precisely – it was amended, and we didn't get it – how many people do get the maximum amount. Through word of mouth in the AISH community many people are saying that it's not that many, but we were unable to go that way, so we don't know.

Mr. Speaker, to come back specifically to the bill in terms of the new medical benefits, I mentioned that there has to be a special effort, I think, to get out what people are eligible for. The problem that I have to some degree with this is that according to the minister, they will be dispensed on a case-by-case basis. Again, as I said, I think it should have to be a lot more universal than that. Depending on how good a lobbyist you are or how many people you have lobbying for you, you're going to know more about these programs, and you're going to be able to lobby. What about if you don't have that same ability?

The case-by-case basis, it seems to me, Mr. Speaker, could create problems. Some people who deserve it might not get it, and others who are able to lobby may. I don't understand why the program isn't made more universal so it's clear who should get it. If you do it on a case-by-case basis, it could depend, for example, on who your social worker is whether you get that particular amount get that medical benefit or not. It may be just luck of the draw is what I'm saying.

So when we bring in a piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that we should be making it clear and not having it sort of the luck of the draw or the luck of the social worker or whatever. I stress that we have to bear in mind that in some cases this is the severely handicapped people, who may not be able to advocate for themselves. I really suggest that on this case-by-case basis we're giving people more bureaucracy to navigate, and I really don't think that that's the answer.

As I said, we're happy about the increases that they're getting, and I alluded to this. But just to give you some figures, Mr. Speaker, since 1993 AISH recipients have lost 23 per cent of their income to inflation. These increases mean a 15 per cent increase, and that's after the final payment comes due. In other words, to put it in figures, your purchasing power is 8 per cent less than it was in 1993. In a rich province like this, hardly the Alberta advantage, if I can put it that way.

Mr. Speaker, our position was to raise, whether this is enough or not, AISH to \$1,050 immediately. That would've at least put them back to the 1993 levels, which was lost to inflation over the last 12 years. Then we strongly suggested – and I'm disappointed that the

government didn't do this – that it be indexed to the cost of living using a market-basket measure. That would ensure that the severely handicapped would be able to meet their needs with this program.

We all know, Mr. Speaker, that MLAs' salaries are indexed to . . .

Dr. Brown: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

Dr. Brown: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, but I'm calling the hon. member on a point of relevance. This bill is a very simple bill. It's one clause which enables a supplemental benefit to be paid in addition to the monthly benefit. The hon. member is telling us about what his party would propose to do with the monthly benefit, which is not even part of this bill. So it's clearly not relevant to the issue and the bill that we have before us this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker: No citation has been provided.

Mr. MacDonald: Exactly. Mr. Speaker, I was going to ask for your guidance on this. Hon. member, there was no citation. There's no point of order.

The Acting Speaker: There was no citation provided, so we'll proceed with the debate.

Mr. Martin: I didn't think I'd get the hon. member so exercised over this. It seems that every time I stand up, I get a point of order, you know. Mind you, I was glad the other day when Minister Hancock pointed out that it made . . . [interjections] I love this, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, it was just after question period that the Speaker admonished the leader of the third party about naming an individual in this Assembly. You know that that's not the practice.

Mr. Martin: Yes.

The Acting Speaker: Please.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take your guidance on that matter.

Debate Continued

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the point that I'm trying to make is that this is part of the bill. It's part of the budget. The bill has to do with the medical benefits, but along with the medical benefits came the amount of money that was increased with AISH. What I'm saying is that it was inadequate. It did not even live up to the inflation level. They're not better off than they were in '93. I would think all hon. members would be interested in that when we're dealing with the most vulnerable people in society. I think that's pretty relevant to those people.

Mr. Speaker, just to conclude, the government has committed to reviewing AISH every two years, and it seems to me that this is not enough. We've had AISH reviews over a number of years – I don't know how many times: eight or nine – and generally it has not worked out well for those people. I think we need the inflation. We need to work on increasing these medical benefits. We need to certainly move away from the case-by-case basis.

At least this bill, Mr. Speaker, is a step in the right direction, and for that reason we will support it. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, are you rising on a point of order again?

**Point of Order
Clarification**

Dr. Brown: Yes. Simply, the hon. member had requested the citation. It's *Beauchesne* 459. Again, the relevance of whether or not the benefit is indexed or whether or not the monthly benefit should be a different number is not related to the content of the bill in any way.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill had risen first on a point of order without having provided a citation, so we did not proceed with that. I don't know whether it's in order to rise a second time on the same subject. If it is, we will call on the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview if he wants to participate in this point of order as being cited.

Mr. Martin: I'm sorry. I had more important things to look at. I didn't hear him. So that's fine. Whatever he wants to do.

An Hon. Member: It's a moot point.

Mr. Martin: It's a moot point.

I've said what I wanted to say anyhow. The member helped me out, and I greatly appreciate it. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. I hope that the explanation provided by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview lends clarification to what has transpired. We will put this matter to rest.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

3:40

Debate Continued

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in support of this bill. I think it's been a long time in coming. It certainly speaks to what the Liberal opposition has been asking for for quite some time as well as the government committee that has looked into the AISH benefit question.

You know, in speaking in third reading to the effect of this bill, just a little bit of explanatory notes about how it affects some people I know in Alberta and some members of my riding. Martha and Henry are often put out to be a description of somebody who is an average Albertan. Martha, to me, is an AISH recipient in my riding of Edmonton-Manning who would love to work, who is a dear person who likes to volunteer but cannot work because of medical conditions, and her physician has indeed endorsed that. She and her husband, who is also usually on AISH and does try to work whenever he can, try to make do on the meagre sums that are available in AISH.

In talking to her, quite often she says that she's very pleased to be on AISH. Compared to what some people might be able to get on other benefits from the human resources department for those who cannot work, AISH is often better and at least assured. It's kind of sad in our society that these meagre benefits, which are something that pretty much these folks are destined to have for their entire lives, are what they are. I'm disappointed that, in the effect of this bill, it did not take the committee's recommendation to raise it to \$1,000 and to the minimum amount of \$1,025 in April 2006. Only raising it to \$950, a hundred dollars a month, I don't think is quite enough for Martha and the other AISH recipients in my riding.

A lot of people who are on AISH are not necessarily only in certain communities. You find them all through the communities in my riding, which has quite a range of demographics. The importance of it to all communities I think must be recognized and the importance of it to our general society in the way that we treat those that are disadvantaged, those that have things happen to them that, but for the sake of God, might happen to any of us.

In terms of the increases to the exemptions I think they're very well taken, very well put forward. I think, you know, they could even be a little higher. Sometimes those people on AISH, if they could somehow find some ways to make some more money – many of them are still quite vibrant, and if there was some way that they could find a way out of their predicament, they would certainly like to do so.

I talked about Martha and Henry. My cousin Henry is actually from Rimbey. Now, he's not on AISH. He's a pipe fitter, as a matter of fact. He's been quite affected by the operation of Alberta's labour laws, and it's restricted the amount of work and the amount of income he could make. But I won't go on about Martha and Henry because this is about Martha on AISH, which to me is that Martha. Henry is my cousin from Rimbey, who is affected by the labour laws in this province.

The importance of AISH is clear as a way to deal with the disadvantaged in our province, and I'm pleased to speak in favour of this, Mr. Speaker. The increased benefits in terms of some of the medical benefits are also very timely, and the fact that these benefits are insured does bring some peace of mind to these people that are AISH.

You know, in talking to a number of AISH recipients, the fact that they are on this lifelong sentence, almost, one thing is the lack of security in their old age. Somehow, you know, they have no hope of gaining a pension. They have no hope of gaining an RRSP because they cannot save. Martha tells me that sometimes they skip certain months for the bus pass because they cannot afford it. This is their transportation. They do not have the ability to buy a computer and access and get into some of the modern-day communications, modern-day information, modern ways of learning that we, in fact most families, I think, take for granted. Those are things that I think are crucial. Somehow in this society we must be looking at ways to enrich the lives of those on AISH, and not just leave them to a meagre existence.

I support this bill, Mr. Speaker, and I ask, of course, that everybody support it in third reading, as they will, but with the clear reservations that I think it could have been improved. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Anybody else?

Hon. Member for Calgary Nose-Hill, would you like to close on behalf of the minister of seniors.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now rise to move third reading of the bill, that it be now read a third time and passed.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a third time]

Bill 10

Residential Tenancies Amendment Act, 2005

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

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move third reading of Bill 10, the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act, 2005, which was amended in the spring of 2004.

Further amendments were requested to clarify the process that tenants must take to move out of their unhealthy or unsafe housing,

to prohibit tenants from objections if they're being evicted for not paying the rent, to permit landlords to return security deposits by regular mail. The Alberta Advisory Committee on Residential Tenancies supports those proposed amendments. The amendments will ensure that Alberta residential tenancy legislation works effectively for both landlords and tenants and remains balanced.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for West Yellowhead, I presume that you were moving this bill. Right?

Mr. Strang: Moving it. Yes. I moved it.

The Acting Speaker: Okay.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak in favour of the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act. I did speak to this, however, in second reading or Committee of the Whole and did say that there are, you know, a number of effects of the Residential Tenancies Act. It's one of the areas that really comes through my constituency office doors on quite a number of occasions. There are difficulties yet from both sides, and there are still some things that I think could have been addressed in this bill. In any case, I do speak in favour of it, and the Official Opposition supports this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Anybody else?

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead to close debate.

Mr. Strang: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a third time]

3:50

Bill 17

Agrology Profession Act

Mr. Knight: On behalf of the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul I would like to move Bill 17, Agrology Profession Act.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise in support of this act. To quote the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, Alberta's 1,500 professional agrologists "provide professional services in agriculture and in the environmental sector, which are vital to our Alberta's economy." They are vital to the Alberta economy. This is an important piece of legislation that recognizes and updates the operation of the profession within Alberta, and the Official Opposition supports this.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a third time]

Bill 26

Corporate Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2005

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I move Bill 26, Corporate Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2005, for third reading.

The Acting Speaker: Anybody else?

Hon. Minister of Finance, would you like to close debate?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I would just thank all hon. members for their input into this bill. I would thank my colleague from

Leduc-Beaumont-Devon for his participation in this debate and his quickness in getting answers to the questions that our various members have raised. If we have missed any, we will ensure that all those are dealt with. I did review *Hansard* and couldn't see anything that we had not brought forward in committee. Again, thanking the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, I move third reading of Bill 26.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a third time]

Bill 34

Insurance Amendment Act, 2005

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand today and move third reading of Bill 34, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2005.

As I've stated throughout the legislative process, this government is standing by its commitment to allow public auto insurers to operate in this province, allowing that they must follow the same rules and regulations that private insurers abide by. During the other steps in the process there have been a lot of questions regarding the section that outlines that insurance companies are not entitled to compensation for lost revenue. This aspect of the reforms was part of the ongoing negotiations the government had with the insurance companies, Mr. Speaker.

The bill also clearly indicates that the all-comers rule, which doesn't allow an insurance company to refuse insurance for an individual or cancel a policy, covers insurance on private passenger vehicles only. The bill also allows for a three-step resolution process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Official Opposition I'd like to rise and speak against this bill. Certainly, I think this could be improved in many ways. You know, we've had representation from a number of members of the legal community, quite a few, even the Alberta Civil Trial Lawyers Association on a number of issues. It really does not speak to the flaws inherent in the government's auto legislation and auto insurance reforms. It does not address the problems that we have in terms of—you know, there should not be, really, the subrogation of some of the insurance claims that may be made. The accountability is diminished by removing responsibility to the superintendent and not having these changes actually debated in the Legislature.

There were a number of issues raised in the earlier parts of this debate by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, and on behalf of the Official Opposition we find that we cannot support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I certainly hope that Bill 34 will result in greater competition in the Alberta auto insurance marketplace. I suspect that if Saskatchewan Government Insurance, for instance, decided to set up shop in Alberta, a lot of Albertans might well sign up with SGI just to spite their home insurance company, so some of the money will go to the Saskatchewan government rather than to the already obscenely, profitable private insurance companies. We should caution Albertans, though,

to be aware that they can't expect to pay Saskatchewan rates just because they've signed up with Saskatchewan Government Insurance. To do that you have to move to Saskatchewan, which is simply too high a price to pay to save on insurance.

As we've mentioned many times, though – and I'll be brief – our concern is with the Crown immunity in this bill. Protecting the government from potential liability arising from auto insurance reforms is somewhat of a draconian measure. By including this provision in Bill 34, the government has basically set itself up as judge, jury, and executioner. While the provision has been written to make it appear to include all insurance companies, the only apparent reason has been to quash one single solitary lawsuit.

This sends a chilling message to the business community in Alberta. It says: "Don't mess with us. We hold all the cards. We set the rules, and if you don't like the way the game is being played, we'll change the rules in mid-game." So I find this part of the bill quite disturbing. Therefore, we really can't support this bill at this time.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's ironic to say the least when this government, that refuses to look at public insurance for the people in Alberta, goes ahead and under the guise of so-called competition invites public insurers from other provinces into the province. Now, that makes not a lot of sense to me at all.

If they think public insurance works and works well, Mr. Speaker, then it seems to me that we'd be looking at it here if there's a way of driving down the rates for ordinary drivers. This idea that somehow because we don't have enough competition and insurance profits are skyrocketing, the government is feeling the political pressure – gee, what do we do? Oh well, maybe we'd better look like we're having more competition, so we'll invite in the public insurers from other provinces.

Well, Mr. Speaker, even if they come in, as a member previously talked about, they're not going to offer the same rates there. If they're public insurers coming in, they're going to try to make money here in Alberta. They're going to compete with the private-sector people. So that's not going to have much to do – in fact, if I were a Saskatchewan taxpayer or a B.C. taxpayer, I'd be demanding they do that. The reality is that this is not going to impact the price of insurance down the way, I don't believe, at all.

It seems to me that we have this sort of triumph of ideology over common sense. We sort of know that maybe we should be moving towards public insurance, but, gee, we can't do that because supposedly, you know, we're great free enterprisers. We'd rather have monopolies in the insurance industry than public insurance, Mr. Speaker, even if we know that public insurance is cheaper, works better. So we come in, if I may say, with a silly bill like this.

4:00

An Hon. Member: Give it to us, Ray.

Mr. Martin: I thought you were great today, by the way.

Mr. Speaker, for that reason, as I say, I don't think this is going to have a major impact at all in terms of lowering rates, which I suppose is the purpose of Bill 34.

You know, I have no great love for the insurance industry because I think that as consumers we've been ripped off dramatically. I always worry when we take away, whether it's an individual's rights, as with the bill on workers' compensation, or anybody else's

rights, access to the courts. I think that is quite draconian, and I'm not sure that it works over the long haul. I guess if you can do that for one group that's relatively unpopular, it's easy to take away other people's rights. I think the point that the previous member made is an important one.

Mr. Speaker, I said this before. The fact that government insurance is compulsory – you know, we talk about the market. The market works well when there's legitimate competition, but when it's a monopoly situation and people need it, then that's when it runs out of control. Clearly, public enterprise does the job much better.

I find this so ironic that in the guise of competition we're trying to bring in, whether that'll come or not, public insurance from other provinces. I think it's, quite frankly, the height of hypocrisy, Mr. Speaker. As I say, the bill I don't think is going to have that much of a major impact on consumers at all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any questions?

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, did you want to participate in the debate?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate on Bill 34 at this time. Certainly, we have talked a lot in the last three years in this Legislative Assembly about insurance and insurance reforms in this province, and I'm disappointed to rise and say that the government still has not gotten it right. This was yet another opportunity to do the right thing, but I am not convinced that this is in the best interests of consumers.

It's certainly not going to provide, as previous speakers have stated, better protection for consumers. We need a consumer dispute resolution system that consumers can have confidence in, but I am not convinced that this is going to make any difference at all. Consumers have been in the past very, very frustrated. Maybe this is a step in the right direction. Who's to say? I guess time may prove me wrong, but certainly in the past consumers have been very, very frustrated.

We have made suggestions on this side of the Legislative Assembly – I think they were thoughtful suggestions – on how to improve the system, but the government has difficulty with the whole notion of consumer protection. It doesn't matter whether it's insurance or natural gas or even electricity or pine shakes. Consumer protection is a simple second thought. It doesn't really show up on this government's radar screen. This is, unfortunately, yet another example of this in Bill 34.

Consumers have been frustrated. It doesn't matter which insurance district they're in. Whether they're in Calgary or whether they're in the rural area or whether they're in Edmonton or whether they're in the northern district, consumers are frustrated. Their relationship with their insurance broker is sometimes difficult. Disputes go on and on and on, and nothing seems to work.

We have the opportunity to implement public auto insurance. I actually thought from what I had heard that if these insurance reforms didn't work, this government was going to implement public auto insurance similar to what they do for crop insurance. But this public auto insurance policy would be self-sustaining, certainly similar to the one that the B.C. government has. We know the different models in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, but the B.C. government has a very, very good model.

In fact, I was in the library downstairs the other day reading how the profits from ICBC – the profits – were being invested, and

invested wisely, in improved safety programs for motorists in that province. Nothing of that nature seems to happen here. We see the amount of money that we are collecting on insurance premiums in this province. Perhaps all hon. members of this Assembly would be better served if we were to take a wee bit of that money, not all, and use it for consumer education and consumer protection programs.

We could have programs, for instance, to change our habits in regard to headrests so that we all would have our headrests adjusted properly. For the life of me I can't see how the insurance industry makes such a fuss about soft tissue injuries and how much they drive up claims costs, yet nothing seems to be done to educate motorists on the importance of having a headrest that is adjusted properly to prevent whiplash in case of a car crash or a rear-end accident. I don't understand this. That would be real consumer protection.

If we were contemplating other changes to the Insurance Act and we were going to have these protections where we're going to improve the lot of consumers, well, we could also look at a program to have younger drivers operating their vehicles in a more safe manner. We could look at seat belt use. We could look at the difference between rural and urban settings and the use of seat belts and why there is such a high number of fatalities in rural areas and the reverse applies in urban areas, where there are a high number of car crashes but a significantly reduced number of fatalities. In fact, Mr. Speaker, 80 per cent of the crashes are occurring in urban areas, but 80 per cent of the fatalities are occurring in rural areas, where there's significantly less population. There are matters of density and driving habits and whatnot. There's a lot of work to be done, and I certainly don't think this bill is addressing that.

Now, with this idea of allowing public auto insurers into the province, in the height of the debate two years ago auto insurers from the provinces where we have public insurance indicated that they would come into Alberta, but they would operate under the same rules as the private operators. So until we have the single model of delivery for third-party liability insurance, we are not going to see a significant reduction in premium rates. If we were to adopt public auto insurance, I don't think there would be one job lost in the industry. There are those that say that there would be job losses, but I'm not convinced there would be. We would need those people to help deliver the public auto insurance system.

4:10

I think we should be very cautious about moving forward with this bill at this time. Maybe time will prove me wrong, Mr. Speaker. Maybe Bill 34 is the answer, but I'm not convinced, and I cannot support this bill in this form at this time. I would caution all hon. members of this Assembly that these are not the insurance amendments that we need or want.

The majority of motorists, whether they're polled by a newspaper or whether they're polled by a national outfit, have indicated that they want public auto insurance. They want public auto insurance because they know that it is more efficient and it is more economical than the current system that we have, where we have over 70 different companies supposedly competing – but I'm not so sure that they do compete – for our insurance policies. There are a shocking number of them that control a significant amount of the auto insurance market, and that market share seems to be growing, so I don't think that is very competitive.

Sometimes I think the hon. Member for Peace River would be better served by taking the revolutionary step – if we're not going to

have public auto insurance and if this government is not going to allow the real deal with public auto insurance, perhaps the hon. member would be serving consumers better, Mr. Speaker, if we were to allow the banks, yes, the chartered banks, to sell auto insurance. If we're going to have a competitive market – and hon. members on the government side are always talking about competition – well, perhaps we should allow the banks to sell auto insurance.

So let's say that the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky buys another car and decides he's going to go to the bank and arrange insurance. He wouldn't have to go to a broker. Just go to the friendly CIBC or the Bank of Nova Scotia. Or let's say that a consumer from Edmonton-Gold Bar . . .

Mr. Martin: What about the credit union?

Mr. MacDonald: They could go to the credit union too. The credit union could perhaps sell insurance. As well as arranging financing for their new vehicle, they could arrange insurance.

I know that the banks are involved in the insurance industry, and they certainly are aggressively pursuing companies. But if we're not going to allow public insurance – and I'm not convinced this system is working – why do we not then allow the banks? They're selling everything else these days. Why not allow them to sell car insurance directly? If we're going to believe in competition and free enterprise, let's try that and see what happens. That would be an insurance reform that I would certainly have to study and contemplate.

At this time I can't support this bill because I don't think it's adequate. It doesn't do anything for consumers. It doesn't do anything to help the legal profession with their concerns over previous reforms, and I don't think it helps the public auto insurance providers in other provinces. So, with that, I will take my seat.

Mr. Speaker, if I did in error misquote the bank, I will retract that. For the record it was the CIBC. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

The hon. Member for Peace River to close debate.

Mr. Oberle: I'll call the question, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a third time]

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This has been just an extremely productive week, as all members here would agree, and we're very delighted with the co-operation that we've received. The spirit was truly remarkable. The day had a good start with the Premier's breakfast, which, I might add, was attended by members from all sides of the House. That was much appreciated. We heard the song *Alberta*. The song talks about how lovely this province is, and I think it's time that we all got out there and had a look for ourselves and just remind ourselves of the privileges we have.

With that, I would move that this House now stand adjourned until Monday at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; at 4:17 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

