

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, November 28, 2005

1:30 p.m.

Date: 05/11/28

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibility laid upon them. Give us all a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Hon. members, Mr. Paul Lorieau is with us today in the Speaker's gallery. He'll lead us in the singing of our national anthem. I'd invite all members and individuals in the gallery to join in the singing in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my great pleasure today to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House three very special guests, who are seated in your gallery. I see that they've risen. On my far right is Mr. Bart West, honorary colonel of the 408 Tactical Helicopter Squadron and co-chair of the Edmonton Salutes Committee and an ATCO volunteer supreme. Next to him there are Lieutenant Colonel Paul Keddy, commanding officer of the 408 Tactical Helicopter Squadron, who took over the command on June 30 of this year, and Squadron Chief Warrant Officer Brian Maudsley.

Mr. Speaker, Lieutenant Colonel Keddy held a senior position as the Canadian commander with NORAD for the four years after the 9/11 tragedy in the United States, for which he received the United States President's meritorious service medal. Beginning in 1974, Chief Warrant Officer Maudsley has had a long and distinguished career in the Canadian armed forces and has been involved overseas in operations in Cyprus and Egypt.

Mr. Speaker, this is truly a unique unit which is reflected through the members in the gallery in that they are the only air force unit in Canada that works on an army brigade base, our base here at the Edmonton Garrison. Approximately 100 helicopter tactical unit members will be leaving Edmonton for Afghanistan in February 2006 on peace support operations. I know that we wish them all well, and I would ask that we now thank them and warmly welcome them with our usual traditional applause. [applause]

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 42 enthusiastic grade 6 students along with their teachers, Natalie Gago-Esteves and Laurie Moreau, and parent helper Sabine Sintenis. The students are from Brander Gardens elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. They're here today to observe and learn with keen interest about government, although I can tell you that from the questioning I had shortly after pictures were taken today, many members of the House could go to school with them. I had questions about health care, about waiting lists, about the prosperity bonus, about gas prices, about numerous other very relevant issues. Earlier today they participated in decorating a tree in the pedway and took a tour of the legislative buildings. They're seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that they now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, I have great pleasure in introducing to you and through you to members of the Assembly four individuals formerly from Africa who are present here in the members' gallery today, three of whom have made Edmonton their home and one of whom is visiting from England. Originally from Kampala, Uganda, and presently living in England is Aruna Kara; originally from Kampala, Uganda, is Bena Pattni; from Tanga, Tanzania, is Arvind Pattni; and from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, is Mr. Naren Mehta. I see that they are now standing. Would all members please accord them the warm hospitality of the House.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two separate groups to introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly this afternoon. The first group is a group from Suzuki charter school in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. The group numbers 24 individuals. They are led by Mr. Ian Gray and Mrs. Roberta Stewart. They are accompanied by parents Mrs. Embree and Mrs. Hardy. It is always a pleasure to have Mr. Gray's class from Suzuki school join us here in the Legislative Assembly. Certainly, it is interesting to visit his class as the students are always polite and respectful, and they are very current on issues that happen in this Assembly. They are in the public gallery. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The second group that I would like to introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of this Assembly is from Forest Heights elementary school. This is a grade 6 class. There are 32 students, two teachers, and two parents here today. The teachers are Ms Amanda Burnett and Mrs. Judy Wiest. The parent helpers this afternoon are Mr. Keith McKinnon and Mr. Mohammed Kabir. Mr. Kabir and his two daughters, Hasina and Sulima, as well as two other students, Anosha and Tahmina, are new immigrants to Canada, originally from Afghanistan. They are also in the public gallery. I would now ask this group to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 32 bright-eyed students from Afton school of the arts, which is one of my favourite schools in Edmonton-Meadowlark. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Wendy Reddekopp, and parent helpers Mrs. Lisa Adam, Mrs. Darlene Schmidt, Ms Teresa Hyatt,

and Mr. Brad Larsen. I'd ask that they please stand and accept the traditional warm greeting of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Tracy Minnifée. Tracy is a second-year social work student at Grant MacEwan College. She's the proud single mother of her talented seven-year-old daughter, Akesha. Akesha is a rising swimming star in Alberta, who hopes to compete in the 2016 Olympic Games. We have been privileged and honoured to have had Tracy work in my constituency office since June. I now ask that Tracy rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly someone very special to me: my mother, Marion Eggen. Marion worked for 27 years at the Royal Alexandra hospital here in Edmonton. She is a tireless volunteer and community activist. She is seated in the public gallery. I would like everyone to please give her the traditional warm welcome.

head: **Ministerial Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Edmonton Eskimos

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I stand today to recognize a group of outstanding individuals who have made all Albertans proud in this our centennial year. I'm speaking, of course, about the Edmonton Eskimos. [applause] They have brought the Grey Cup home after the most exciting Grey Cup championship in years. The Eskimos' 38 to 35 victory over the Montreal Alouettes in overtime had fans across the country, including me, on the edge of our seats until the very end – I was, really – and it was a very exciting finish. In fact, I understand that it was the first time in over 40 years that the Grey Cup was decided in overtime.

It was a fitting end to a fantastic season for the Eskimos and their fans throughout Alberta and across the country, including the Minister of Finance. In a province where we are blessed – and indeed we are – to have two outstanding CFL teams, we always come together at Grey Cup time to wave the Alberta banner high and loudly cheer our team on to victory. As Premier of this great province I am proud to say that I cheered as loudly as anyone in Vancouver yesterday. I might add: maybe not louder than Lynn Hall in my office. I could hear her all the way to Vancouver. But I was cheering pretty loudly, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that Edmonton's mayor, Stephen Mandel, is just as thrilled to know that his Montreal counterpart will wear the Eskimos' uniform today as a symbol of Edmonton's football supremacy.

Congratulations to coach Danny Maciocia – I had the opportunity of meeting him, and he makes me feel old – also to quarterback and most valuable player, Ricky Ray; our outstanding Canadian, Mike Mauer; all the Eskimo players; Hugh Campbell; Rick LeLacheur; and all those in the Eskimo organization.

I know that the team just arrived home a short time ago to a championship welcome at the airport, and I encourage all Edmonton

Eskimo fans to cheer on the team at their official championship celebration in downtown Edmonton tomorrow.

So congratulations to the Edmonton Eskimos on winning the 93rd Grey Cup championship and showing all of Canada why Edmonton is called the city of champions.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciated the comments from the Premier. Like most Albertans yesterday, I'm sure, I sat with family and friends to watch our Eskimos battle it out for the 93rd annual Grey Cup in Vancouver. The Eskimos were in fine form as they claimed their second Grey Cup title in three years with the overtime win, and I think it's their 13th Grey Cup title in total. I'm sure that everyone here will agree that this was probably the hardest fought Grey Cup victory in history. It was only the second time in the CFL's 93 years that the Grey Cup was awarded in overtime. The last time was in 1961, when Winnipeg defeated the Tiger-Cats from Hamilton.

The Eskimos are great representatives of Edmonton. They remind all Canadians where the City of Champions is, and they work tirelessly in our city with community groups. It's clear that they're committed to serving Edmonton, whether it's raising money for local food banks, participating in Read In week programs in schools, or visiting kids in the hospital. For that we should all be very, very proud.

A big thank you to rookie coach, Danny Maciocia, for a job well done as well as to the Grey Cup MVP, Ricky Ray, for his outstanding performance. I have to mention Jason Maas, who conducted himself with incredible class through the whole season. As well, there was the outstanding Canadian, a good prairie boy, Mike Mauer, and let's not forget the record set by Tony Tompkins for his longest punt return in Grey Cup history.

Vancouver should be commended for its efforts in hosting the event for the sold-out crowd of 60,000 fans. I'm sure that there were many Edmontonians in the audience. Unfortunately, I wasn't among them, but we were all cheering on the Green and Gold.

The Grey Cup is one of the greatest Canadian traditions, one that brings everyone together to celebrate our very best in football. I'd like to congratulate and all MLAs I'm sure would like to congratulate the entire Edmonton Eskimos team, coaches, staff, and families for bringing the Grey Cup back to where it belongs, right here in Edmonton.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I suspect the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview would like to seek unanimous consent of the Assembly to allow his leader to participate, and I suspect that that would be given.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that, to all members of the House. On behalf of the NDP opposition I want to add my congratulations to the 2005 Grey Cup winners, the Edmonton Eskimos. When it comes to excellence in professional sports, it's hard to beat the record of excellence of the Edmonton Eskimos CFL franchise. The Eskimos haven't missed the playoffs in well over 30 years, Mr. Speaker. During that time the Eskimos have won 10 Grey Cups, including a record five in a row, and now two Grey Cups in the last three years.

We all know that the CFL game is the most exciting brand of football in North America, Mr. Speaker, and yesterday's Grey Cup ranked right up there as one of the most exciting cups ever. It really did have all of us on the edge of our seats. I'm sure I'm not the only one to have provided my television set with a great deal of coaching advice during the game.

I also want to give recognition to the Montreal Alouettes and congratulate them on being such worthy opponents, thereby making the Eskimos' victory all that much sweeter.

So congratulations to President Hugh Campbell, Head Coach Danny Maciocia, MVP Ricky Ray, and all of the Eskimo players and coaches. You should feel justifiably proud of your accomplishments in going from a third-place finish to sipping champagne from the Grey Cup.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner would like to seek unanimous consent of the Assembly to participate as well.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It truly is a great privilege to stand. I was born here in Edmonton. I've been an Eskimo fan all my life. [interjections] Good roots.

It was a true privilege to watch yesterday as they put on a superb team effort under the leadership of Ricky Ray and as they forged ahead many times, not showing any discouragement, knowing that they were true champions.

It's a pleasure to be from Alberta, to be able to stand proud and to say that we put in our 100 per cent effort here. It's my hope that we'll follow the leadership of the championships of the sports teams in this province and continue to forge on and to be a leading province in not only Canada but the world in all the things that we do and the efforts that we make.

Thank you, and congratulations once again to the Eskimos for their superb effort.

The Speaker: Well, thank you all very much. In that spirit of harmony I truly am going to look forward to question period.

I would also like to acknowledge the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, who did carry through in the direction given to him by the chair the other day to provide all members with an Edmonton Eskimos T-shirt. That's the source.

head: 1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Securities Commission

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to my questions in previous weeks and months regarding enforcement problems at the Alberta Securities Commission, the Minister of Finance has made repeated requests for specific concerns. My question is to the Minister of Finance. Given that Lancer funds purchased 49 per cent of Zi Corporation's equity without the ASC ringing any alarms about insiders, why should investors be confident in the ASC enforcement processes?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, to put it simply, the Auditor General has reviewed the work at the Alberta Securities Commission. He

had full access to all files, and while he did raise concerns about proper documentation, he did not find evidence that any of those files should be reopened.

I have complete confidence in the Auditor General's review of the Alberta Securities Commission. I have complete confidence that the Alberta Securities Commission has stated very clearly in their management response to his report that they will follow up on all of the Auditor General's recommendations immediately, with the exception of one in which they requested a bit more time to review policies across Canada before coming back with a final plan.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that a Zi Corporation shareholder complained to the ASC, seeking action against Zi's violation, why was the ASC in a letter to the shareholder, which I will table, so content to quickly close its file on Zi without a thorough investigation?

Mrs. McClellan: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the hon. member knows very clearly that the Minister of Finance, to whom the Alberta Securities Commission reports, does not involve herself in the day-to-day operations of the Alberta Securities Commission and their handling of files. However, it is my responsibility to ensure that those files are handled appropriately. The Auditor General has made recommendations that will improve the documentation supporting their decisions. The Alberta Securities Commission has agreed that that should happen, and in fact that is in process now.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister wanted specifics, so to the same minister: given that 11 and a half per cent of Zi Corporation's shares were sold with neither the buyer nor the seller filing anything with the ASC, which is a breach of Canadian securities law, why should investors be confident in the ASC's enforcement procedures?

Mrs. McClellan: Again, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has reviewed all of the Alberta Securities Commission's enforcement procedures. They have made recommendations. The Auditor General has made very specific recommendations on how to ensure that proper documentation follows every file. The Alberta Securities Commission has responded in their management response saying clearly that they will put those processes in place, that the Auditor General again will follow up as part of any special audit, meeting with the Alberta Securities Commission at an appropriate time to ensure that that is happening. Surely, the hon. member opposite does not believe that this Legislature is going to take on the job of investigating files.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to my questions last week concerning possible political interference in the Alberta Securities Commission, the minister made it clear that she had never interfered in the commission. She was equally clear that she could not speak for anyone else, for other ministers. My questions are to the Minister of Finance. In the days that have passed since my question, has the minister shown the initiative to ask other current and former members of cabinet if they have ever intervened in the operations of the Alberta Securities Commission?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, if I could go back to *Hansard* of Thursday, I answered this question by telling the hon. member that I could tell him “unequivocally that I have never called to influence any case.” I don’t think it would be appropriate for me to comment on other members, some of which I may not even know, depending on how far back you want to go. However, I did say that rather than casting aspersions on members of this House, past or present, if the hon. member had any – any – real, factual information on this rather than suggestions and innuendo, then he should bring them forward. I stand by that statement.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Finance. Since she is the minister responsible for the Alberta Securities Commission, can the minister now assure the Assembly that no other cabinet ministers in this government, current or previous, have interfered in the operations of the Alberta Securities Commission? Can she give us that assurance?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, again – again – as I said last week, I find this line of questioning quite distasteful because day after day, week after week this hon. member has cast suspicion, hints of doubt, maybes, unnamed sources, and when sources are named, unknown persons who might have done these things.

If you have any – any – factual information, you have a responsibility, I believe, hon. member, to bring it forward. I have no information that would suggest that.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My previous question had plenty of specific information, and she sloughed it off.

An Hon. Member: Where is it?

Dr. Taft: Read the *Hansard*. Read the *Hansard*.

To the same minister: can the minister assure the Assembly that no staff of cabinet ministers have interfered in the operations of the Securities Commission? Give us the assurance.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I have stated very clearly in this House that I have not interfered. To the best of my knowledge my staff has not and would not interfere. I can think of no reason why they would.

Again, I find it very distasteful. I find it demeaning to this House that day after day after day there are allegations, suspicions, hints, and maybes that cast, I think, doubtful aspersions on members of this House, past and present.

On the issue of staff, again, Mr. Speaker, I have no reason to believe that any of my staff would have interfered.

The Speaker: Third official opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Teachers’ Unfunded Pension Liability

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 1992 Alberta teachers were stuck with a bad pension deal. While the Conservatives like to boast that the two-thirds/one-third deal is acceptable, frankly, it is not. The \$6 billion unfunded liability is leaving an unreasonable share of the burden on the backs of our children’s teachers. My first question is for the Education minister. Given that the Education minister said in this House on November 17 that he cannot enter into discussions right now and that it’s not even on the

government’s radar, what is it that’s preventing this government from opening new pension negotiations with Alberta’s teachers immediately? What are you waiting for?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, my comment was in reference to that specific moment during the debate. This has been an issue that we’ve talked about very openly, in fact, with teachers and with schools boards. We discussed it with some of the school boards just recently both at the ASBA conference and in some of the 62 school board meetings I had. The simple fact is that there was an agreement that was signed by the teachers through their ATA and by the government through the minister of the day and the Premier of the day to ensure that the unfunded pension liability would be addressed. The government assumed two-thirds of the responsibility; that’s \$4 billion. Teachers agreed to look after the other one-third, or the \$2 billion.

We’re working on trying to open up some of those chats again because we do recognize that there are impacts on this particular issue for the recruitment of new teachers and for sustaining the ones that we have. It’s a very serious issue, and it’s one that I have undertaken to comment on further in the new year. That’s what I plan to do.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you. My question is for the Minister of Finance. Why does this minister think that it’s such a good deal for Alberta taxpayers to pay more than \$30 billion over the next 55 years instead of the \$4 billion it’s owed today?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don’t remember saying that. Again, I don’t remember saying that this is such a good deal. But what I do know is that two parties made an agreement some years ago and signed on to this agreement. I think the Minister of Education has very clearly laid out that this is not a subject that we are averse to speaking about. I think that each one of us in here, in this Assembly, that has ATA representatives has talked about this. I know that I do with mine and talk about possible solutions in the future. But please don’t attribute that I said that this was such a good deal. I don’t remember saying that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister please tell the 30,000 Alberta teachers and their families as well as all of the outstanding students considering a career as a teacher why they should be paying the equivalent of a new car payment every month for the rest of their working lives for an unfunded liability that they did not create?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, when this was discussed and an agreement put together some years ago, there were two parties that assumed responsibility for this. Two parties. So it will be the two parties, and it will be our Minister of Education that engages the other party in this discussion.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Securities Commission (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Whitewash, snow job, smokescreen, ongoing cover-up are just a few of the words that spring to mind after reading the Alberta Securities Commission

November 23 chronology involving its director of enforcement's speculative trading activities. While the government continues to defend the ASC's handling of the matter, the assistant dean of U of T's Rotman School of Management is asking: "How can they let this guy keep his job? It doesn't make any sense at all." To the Minister of Finance: why is the director of enforcement not being required to step aside while his trading activities are independently investigated?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, there has been a review of that. It is outlined very clearly in the document that I provided to the House, a letter from the Alberta Securities Commission, from the chair. It does outline entirely how this trade occurred. I don't think I'll take the House's time to read this again. I don't see anything that would suggest that there's a cover-up. It's here in black and white, and it's quite lengthy.

So, Mr. Speaker, it has been investigated. It has been reviewed, and it states very clearly in the review that the ASC management had considered the matter thoroughly and had determined that although there was a breach of ASC policy, there was no use of confidential information, that there was no interference with the conduct of the ASC file, and there was no breach of ethical standards. The matter of the breach by the director of enforcement of the ASC's policy has been dealt with internally with the Alberta Securities Commission. No whitewash, no cover-up, but there it is: black and white.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, only this minister would go on the statement.

Why is the minister relying on the statement of the ASC chair in exonerating the director of enforcement when the ASC chair himself is implicated in breaching security regulations, thereby undermining the credibility of his claims?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, you know, to draw the two together is quite ridiculous. Actually, the occasion occurred before he was the chair if you want to split hairs.

However, if you go to the Auditor General's report, Mr. Speaker, he deals quite extensively with the trading activities by employees. He outlines very clearly the events and what happened with that trade, and he did recommend very clearly that there be processes put in place to ensure as much as possible that this could not happen again. The Alberta Securities Commission has agreed with that, has agreed to put those in place, has made some changes to date but has assured the minister and, I'm sure, the Auditor General that further changes will be in place by January 1 of 2006.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the ASC chair provided no documentation or evidence whatsoever to back up his claim that there was no wrongdoing by the director of enforcement in this case, will the minister provide the House with a detailed independent investigation that will show one way or another whether or not these people are telling the truth?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I do not think that the hon. member, if he thought this through, would expect me to table in the House details of trading information. I don't think that he would expect me to do that. That would be certainly breaching my responsibilities respecting the confidentiality of activities. I am convinced, I am satisfied that the proper information has been provided and that the follow-up of the Auditor General on this matter, who does have the responsibility of respecting the confidentiality of the information, will provide to him all of the information that the Auditor General requires to ensure that this matter has been dealt with appropriately.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Clean Energy Incentives

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The warm feeling all Albertans felt yesterday with the Eskimos' victory will not keep us warm all winter long, and the \$400 energy rebate will quickly be spent on winter heating bills. High energy prices are the result of monopolies and a shortage of energy. To the Premier: what is this government doing to increase the supply of clean electricity and truly drive prices down?

Mr. Klein: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that although the hon. member raises concerns about the rising cost of natural gas energy in particular, we're better off in this province than any other jurisdiction perhaps in North America, perhaps even around the world.

Mr. Martin: The universe.

Mr. Klein: Well, maybe the universe. Who knows? In the terrestrial world. I don't know if there's life beyond. Maybe the hon. member does.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the rebate, the \$400 to every man, woman, and child, of course we were in a position and we are in a position in this province to rebate natural gas prices to a maximum of \$8.75 a gigajoule. That extends through last month I believe, October, November, right through to March, and in the case of some industries that consume more of their gas during the summertime, like irrigators and greenhouse operators, the rebate is extended during the summer months instead of the winter months. So it's very generous.

Mr. Hinman: I was worried time was going to run out.

Will this government take the lead to spur on private research and development that will truly benefit the world into coal gasification and CO₂ sequestration through aggressive tax incentives as it has for the development of the Alberta oil sands?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, we aren't using tax incentives right now, but we have established the Alberta ingenuity fund, which is under the Ministry of Innovation and Science. I don't know what that fund stands at right now, but it certainly is in excess of half a billion dollars, and individuals and companies can draw on that fund to initiate and proceed on defined research relative to coal-bed methane, coal gasification, clean-coal technologies, and perhaps there are others.

I'll have the hon. minister complement my question.

The Speaker: He may have an opportunity in the next question forthcoming from the hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: The question wasn't on government grants; it was on tax incentives.

Will this government allow Alberta's energy companies to forge ahead in the research and development for cleaner and environmentally economical energy sources like wind, solar, geothermal, and biomass reactors through aggressive tax incentives?

2:10

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, outside of the oil sands royalty regime we are basically out of that business. Not only have we had pressure to apply tax incentives to research relative to coal and other energy

sources such as wind and solar, but we've had requests from the movie industry and other industries to get back into the tax credit business. As the hon. member well knows, that would violate our laws. That would violate our laws. The Financial Administration Act simply says that we cannot get back into that business. Now, if the hon. member wants to bring forward an amendment to the Financial Administration Act next spring, he's entitled to do so, but he'll have to remember the words that were spoken by so many Albertans during the early '90s: for God's sake, get out of the business of picking winners and losers. If he wants us to get back into that business, then fine.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Aboriginal Issues

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, last weekend Canadian political and aboriginal leaders, including our Premier and the minister of aboriginal affairs, launched a \$5.1 billion strategy to end aboriginal poverty at the first ministers' meeting in Kelowna. This is a very significant agreement, especially for the 94,000 status Indians and 66,000 Métis and Inuit, who make up 6 per cent of our population in Alberta. I understand that this agreement is directed at areas like education and health care to allow aboriginals to live healthier and happier lives. Could the minister of aboriginal affairs identify what decisions were made in the various sectors of housing, education, health, economic opportunities, and relationships and accountability?

The Speaker: Well, if the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development can do that in 45 seconds, go for it.

Ms Calahasen: Well, this is a very important question. First of all, that was a really great meeting. It was a very productive meeting, and our Premier led us very well, and I want to say thank you for his statesmanship. We were able to come out . . . [interjections] Excuse me. You've got to listen to this. This is important to aboriginal people. Pardon me, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, on the educational side there definitely were commitments made on dollars, and I want to identify these dollars because these are very, very important: first of all, on the education side, \$1.8 billion; on housing and infrastructure, \$1.6 billion; on relationships and accountability, \$170 million; on economic opportunities, \$200 million; on health, \$1.3 billion. Of course, that all totals up to \$5.1 billion. I would love to talk about the outcomes, but I'll leave that for the second question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. How will the outcomes of the first ministers' meeting impact aboriginal people in Alberta?

Ms Calahasen: Well, let me get to the point. As the hon. member indicated, much of the funding will be directed through federal government programs for education, health, housing, and of course the other areas. We do look at education from K to 12, Mr. Speaker. That's to increase the number of aboriginal high school students. More funds will be available for innovative education and for off-reserve schools.

On the postsecondary side, Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to pick some areas that we've been working on: increased number of aboriginal postsecondary graduates, more funding for scholarships

and apprenticeships; on the health side new targets to reduce rates of infant mortality, youth suicide, diabetes, and of course violence against women, to double the number of health professionals; on the housing side, of course, to reduce the housing shortages. There is a housing shortage on reserves here in the province of Alberta in the amount of 20,000 homes. So when we look at that, no one can get anything done or deal with the poverty issues if they don't have adequate homes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many people have suggested that the ownership of their own homes would improve the quality of life and reduce poverty for First Nations people, what has this government committed to to improve the quality of life among aboriginal people in Alberta?

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, of course, the housing was a huge issue, as I indicated. There were some 20,000 shortages of homes in the province of Alberta alone. What has happened in that respect is that the federal government is willing to look at options to deal with the shortage and to be able to close the gap. Their approach could result in improving, I would say, market-based approaches to home ownership on First Nations reserves. That's an important part because it'll depend on the First Nations to be able to do that. Funding is also required to ensure that we begin to look at other options to deliver their homes for the First Nations. Therefore, I was very pleased to see that the federal government was willing to look at other options than just the usual, that has been creating some problems on reserves.

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

Enron Activities in Alberta

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Enron has always been a winner with this government. [interjections] In December of 2001 this government – and this is not a laughing matter – found it undesirable and unnecessary to release publicly the details of the cabinet decision to split the Sundance B power purchase arrangement owned by Enron. This sweetheart deal allowed Enron to quickly sell this generation capacity to AltaGas Services Inc. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why did the Progressive Conservative cabinet have the opinion that the publication of the deal be deemed undesirable and unnecessary to the public?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I guess what is known is that the policy that came forward at the time was to split that power purchase arrangement into two and that that would be in the best interests of Albertans so that they'd have a greater opportunity for more companies being involved in our marketplace.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister: why was this deal made with Enron here in Alberta when at the same time in America Enron was under investigation for fraud and electricity price fixing?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, this was not a deal done with Enron and the government.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, it was. They wanted you to do it.

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, it was an arrangement which they requested at that stage, wanting to sell their power purchase arrangement, which companies are allowed to do at any time. This is a marketplace that we've accepted. Those who have bought those arrangements are in the marketplace and allowed to resell them. That could happen any time. At this stage they just asked for the ability to split that power purchase arrangement into two smaller amounts, which we also concurred was a very good policy.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: why did the Progressive Conservative government allow Enron's legal department to dictate the wording of the secret changes to the power purchase arrangements? Call it what you want: an arrangement or a contract. Why did you allow Enron to call the shots?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, there's nothing secret about this at all. As I've just said, any company can submit ideas. The department is always acting independently on behalf of Albertans. The Energy and Utilities Board likewise will act independently on behalf of the benefits of Albertans. We will assess policy as cabinet as we deem in the best interests of Albertans. In this case that was done.

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

Lunchtime Supervision in Schools

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My office is receiving an increasing number of calls from parents who are raising some opposition to the lunchtime supervision fees. To the Minister of Education: why are students or their parents required to pay to eat their own lunches at school?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I would suspect that most students across the province aren't expected to pay a fee. If there are some schools where that type of policy is in place, then that's entirely a decision made by the local school board and by the school in particular. I would further suspect that if they are charging a fee for that lunchtime supervision, they're probably doing it on a straight cost-recovery basis with respect to perhaps labour costs, perhaps cleanup costs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since some parents can't afford to pay what I understand is \$20 per child per month, are there any options for those parents other than paying those fees?

2:20

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are probably some schools, particularly I would think within Edmonton public, whose policies I'm somewhat familiar with, where, in fact, supervision programs are undertaken by volunteers. Some of them are comprised of parents, others of volunteers who just come forward in the system. I think that's probably one option for them to pursue right there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our parents are not only volunteers, but are teachers not involved in supervising our children in schools during lunchtime, which would then alleviate the fees?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I suspect that many teachers

are involved in supervisory-type activities, be it at lunchtime or before school starts or after school, but I also think that there are probably in some cases restrictions within contracts, within negotiated settlements where if teachers are teaching only a specified number of minutes in a given week, then perhaps they're not able to supervise during lunchtime. It will vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction and from school to school. I think the important point is that if any parent feels that they cannot afford fees where, in those few cases, fees are being charged for lunchtime supervision, they can always talk to the principal and have some of those fees waived. That pertains, for example, to people in hardship cases, perhaps, or people with special-needs children or where distance might be a factor and so on.

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

Minable Oil Sands Strategy

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government has sent a clear message to oil sands companies around the world that we are open for business in our boreal forest area under the minable oil sands strategy before we understand the environmental implications. I quote the University of Alberta's tailings research expert, Dr. Segó. No one has come up with a technique to deal with the tailings pond, he said, including the toxic metals naphthalene and bitumen. To the Minister of Environment: how can the minister say that we understand the environmental consequences of tripling oil sands output in the next decade?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, through the chair, first of all I have never said that we understand the consequences of the important point that the hon. member has made. In fact, I think that in the proper context of what was described, we are open for business but not in any way, shape, or form at the compromise of environmental principles in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how can the minister be believed when he says, as he did last week in the House, that the industry has reduced greenhouse gases by 50 per cent when the target of this government is 50 per cent reduction by 2020?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, it's important to recognize this: over the past 25 years technology and renewable energies have played an important role in Alberta, and that's why Alberta, this province, is viewed by, actually, the federal government and other governments as a leader in dealing with the issue of reducing greenhouse gases. Let me say without any fear of contradiction that as we go forward, technology will continue to play a key role, and let me repeat for the members and the hon. member that in the past 25 years relative to the economic output per barrel of oil the actual greenhouse gas emissions per barrel have been reduced by 50 per cent.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Minister of Environment take a stand and slow the development of the oil sands in the interest of people and the environment, particularly the First Nations?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, absolutely yes. We have taken a stand in the past and we will in the future. I want to remind the hon. members that of the six principles of the minable oil sands strategy

number 4 talks about this: "Within the coordinated development zone there will be progressive, timely and seamless reclamation to a self-sustaining boreal forest ecosystem." I think that principle in itself clearly indicates the importance of environmental principles as we go forward. Open for business for development, but at the same time mining will never, ever, ever overshadow the economic but, more importantly, the environmental principles of this government.

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

School Infrastructure Needs in Calgary

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary's population is rapidly increasing on the order of 25,000 new residents every year, and so is residential community expansion, and so is our student population. Our school board is under tremendous pressure to accommodate all of these new needs for building new schools, for expanding existing schools, for modernizing aging schools. My question today is to the Minister of Education. Given such a desperate need for more school facilities, what are you going to do, and how will your plan to consolidate the infrastructure of schools within the Ministry of Education help the school boards?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree: Calgary is one of the high-growth areas. We have started on helping to address some of the infrastructure needs there. In particular, the \$10.9 million that went to the Calgary Catholic board for their new school in Tuscany will help, and so, too, will the \$13 million or so to Calgary public for their new school in Shawnessy-Somerset help a lot.

I have met with the board on a few occasions. I am aware of some of their additional needs over and above that. I think it's important to just note that there are about \$59 million worth of projects already under way involving seven different locations with the Calgary board of education right now, on the infrastructure piece, and there are about four new schools that are being added to the Calgary Catholic system that will be opened shortly, I hope, and they total about \$33 million. The consolidation piece is really a recommendation coming out of the Commission on Learning, where they said: please bring all of the infrastructure piece under the guise of Alberta Education. So that's what we're moving toward doing right now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that we have the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation, what are you going to do to clear up any confusion regarding which ministry is responsible for school construction planning and approval?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that there's minimal if not no confusion whatsoever because I've just finished meeting with all 62 school boards, and we talked specifically about this. In a nutshell, there are three pieces to the infrastructure component. One of them is IMR, or infrastructure maintenance renewal programs, formerly the old BQRP program for building quality restoration, the second one is plant operations and maintenance, and the third one is, of course, school construction projects. So I've cleared that up with them. The piece dealing with plant operations and maintenance has formally been transferred to Education, so we're dealing with that now. In fact, there was an augmentation of about 43 million additional dollars over and above the 300 and some million that's already there. The other two pieces will be flowing our way as soon as we can get there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that construction of a school needs a long lead time in planning, architecture, financing, and so on, when will you provide the school boards with a long-term plan to address ongoing school infrastructure needs?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, that is a very good question, Mr. Speaker, and I think most members here would know that we do provide significant dollars, in the hundreds of millions, to address infrastructure needs in a general sense.

I will acknowledge two things quickly. One is that the \$207 million of unanticipated surplus monies that went into the system through an announcement I made in September will certainly help address many of those needs, but we do need stable, predictable funding to help deliver on the capital plans as submitted by the school boards, and we're working on that right now as we start preparing our budgets. Whether or not we will get the full amount of money in comparison with the other ministries such as health care and advanced ed and seniors and roads and transportation and so on remains to be seen. Suffice it to say, hon. member, that I do support the need for stable and predictable planning, and we'll do our best to respond as we can.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, the majority of Albertans and Canadians support the Kyoto protocol, while Alberta's greenhouse gas emissions continue to increase dramatically. Alberta's policy purports to decrease emission intensity, but the actual result is an alarming increase to the absolute emissions that actually pass into the air. The Alberta plan is based on math only George Bush can love, and in fact the *Globe and Mail* reports today through the United Nations Secretariat that Canada's emissions across the country have gone up by 24 per cent over 1990 levels. My question is to the Minister of Environment. How can the minister go to Montreal insisting that the Alberta government's plan heads down the same path as the Kyoto protocol when the Alberta plan allows our total greenhouse gas emissions to increase up to 37 per cent higher than 1990 levels?

2:30

Mr. Boutilier: Well, I think the hon. member raises an important point, that being that any province in this country if they were blessed with the resource that we have would be taking the prudent, responsible environmental action that we take. I want to remind the hon. member that the resource that we develop in this province with important environmental principles is shared with people in Quebec and in Ontario and other parts because they drive cars and they want their homes fuelled. I want to remind other parts of the province and the hon. member that the resource we actually develop in this province, which, true, has been expanding, the oil sand development, we're providing to markets. So ultimately the consumption is because of the demand by other Canadians in other provinces. We are delivering on that demand, but we are doing it continually in an environmentally sustainable way.

Mr. Eggen: If we produce it, we should be responsible.

Given that the oil sands exploration is the single most greenhouse gas intensive form of oil extraction in the world, can the minister explain how tripling oil sands production without any real govern-

ment commitment to investing in renewable energy can lead to an absolute reduction in greenhouse gas emissions?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, in our minable oil sands strategy the six principles are talking about the environmental principles of ensuring that any future development, along with past development, is done where reclamation is done properly, where people are consulted with. The Minister of Innovation and Science may want to complement on the example of the EnergyINet, which is making real results in protecting the environment as well.

Mr. Eggen: To the same minister: if the environment minister is serious about reducing greenhouse gas emissions, when will he commit in this House to firm dates and policies on the following: net metering, low-impact renewable energy, real . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, sit down. We'll take one at a time. That's what question period is about.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I have a point of order.

The Speaker: You sure as heck can have one.
The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. On the important point of the impact of what Alberta is doing, I spoke with my federal colleague the other day, the Minister of the Environment from the federal government. In a letter to me he makes reference to the fact of the EnergyINet, the first province in Canada with Climate Change Central, the first province with a law, the first province going out in a consultation to ensure that there is no duplication between provincial jurisdictions and federal jurisdictions in regulating final large emitters.

I believe that at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, because in Fort McMurray, in the oil sands – not only am I Minister of Environment, but my family breathes that air and works that land and drinks that water. I can assure you and the hon. member and all members and all Albertans that we're going to make sure that environmental principles are protected and sustained for future generations because it's my family as well that's involved.

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

Health Care Operating Costs

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again emergency rooms in Alberta are having to divert ambulances because the ERs don't have the beds to put people in. The backlog is created because there is no available space or staff to admit patients to the hospital, and in both Edmonton and Calgary orthopaedic surgeries have been cancelled because the hospitals lack staff and bed space. My questions are all to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How much longer will the minister let this go on? Two weeks? Two months? Indefinitely? How much longer?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, all across Canada the problem of crowding in emergency rooms exists, and in actual fact it's a situation that both the health authorities and the municipalities are addressing. They're looking at ways and means and looking at ways of co-ordinating. One of the reasons why, I believe, over the past several months we've been looking at how we properly co-ordinate a ground ambulance delivery is that it was recognized that it was important for the regional health authority to have a role in that co-ordination with

frequently provided municipal contract or managed services. There are peaks and valleys in various facilities where that occurs. We know it's a problem. We know that frequently there are long waits, but we do our best to prioritize the patients on entry and give those that are most in need of treatment that treatment as required.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: Albertans want to know why surgeries are being cancelled and ERs are diverting patients when the minister has \$1.4 billion to fund bricks and mortar.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, the \$1.4 billion that was assigned from unbudgeted surplus this year for future construction is a good-news story. This year several million, \$146 million, are being spent on projects throughout Alberta to sustain the growth and development of those projects either at the design stage or in renovation. I think that any time you have, for example, a city, like Calgary, growing by about 25,000 people a year, it's very difficult to keep pace with all of the facilities as you would wish.

One of the most important things we did this year was expand our capacity on the wait-list so that people who aren't able to be served in one community can look at the wait-list and see what capacity exists in other regions or with other medical practitioners because we are linked with the College of Physicians and Surgeons to give that acknowledgement on the registry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: when will the minister provide existing hospitals with the operating dollars necessary to provide safe and adequate care for their patients? When?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, in this past budget year the overall macrobudget of Health and Wellness was some 8.3 per cent increase. If you factor in operating expense, each regional authority received different amounts of money depending on the menu of services they provide as well as the province-wide services. To say that they haven't got the right amount of money depends on exactly what concern is being raised. For the most part you could look across Canada and find no better funding for health for people in any part of the community than you can in Alberta.

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

Labour Force Resources

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Everyone knows that Alberta's economy is hot. Such a thriving economy means there aren't enough skilled workers for jobs that are available. No matter where one goes, employers are looking for help. My question to the minister is: what is the government doing to develop Alberta's labour force?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. Our government is developing a long-term labour force strategy to meet Alberta's current and future labour needs. The strategy will focus on a number of areas including informing

people and organizations about Alberta's labour market opportunities and trends, attracting Albertans to the workforce and workers to Alberta, developing and increasing the skills and knowledge of current workers, and of course trying to retain current workers in the Alberta labour force.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the same minister. Given that 32 of 53 occupational groups are reporting an unemployment rate of less than 3 per cent, a definite skill shortage, what is Human Resources and Employment specifically doing to address skill shortages?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, part of our strategy is that Human Resources and Employment and Advanced Education are co-leading the development of a long-term labour supply strategy to ensure that Alberta remains internationally competitive and productive. Human Resources and Employment alone is spending \$288 million this year to help people get the training and information they need so they can keep meaningful employment.

Mr. Goudreau: My last question is also to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. When you say that we need to increase our labour force's productivity, do you mean that workers will need to do more with less?

Mr. Cardinal: No, Mr. Speaker. No. Improving labour productivity means investing in innovation and enhancing employees' training to develop a highly skilled and safe workforce. The future of Alberta's economy depends on the strength of our labour force, and the strength of our labour force depends on the number of workers we have and their skill levels, their health and well-being, and the quality of their workplace.

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

2:40

Policing Services

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The safety of Alberta's communities is being threatened by guns, gangs, and senseless acts of violence. Violence among our youth is especially alarming. Police resources are already stretched too much, and the government is not responding. To the Solicitor General: given the alarming increase in violent crimes with guns, especially among our youth, will the Solicitor General take immediate action now to increase police resources and keep our communities safe?

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a very good question, and yes, we are working as we speak with the chiefs to look at strategies regarding policing, with opportunities in investigating organized crime, opportunities for looking at sharing intelligence information amongst our police agencies in the province. This is extremely important, and it's a very good question because as we move forward, we can't police the same way we were policing 10 years ago or five years ago. Violence in Alberta is important to every Albertan.

In fact, last week we had a number of representatives from all throughout Alberta here in Edmonton with the Minister of Gaming. We met with individuals regarding violence in and around licensed establishments. They're going to be providing us with a number of recommendations in January regarding those issues, but it stems from issues regarding gang activity. It stems from issues regarding the consumption of liquor. So we're going to work with the industry in that area to look at some of those gang violence issues. We have to look at solutions and strategies as we move forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our two major urban police services desperately need more resources on the ground to get guns off the street, will the minister finally increase the funding formula for policing in our cities? Why are we the last in Canada?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned last week to a similar question, we this past year added almost \$30 million of new funding for policing in this province. Nearly 200 additional officers were put onto the street in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue to look at new programs, new strategies. As I mentioned in my last answer, we want to look at new opportunities of how we are investigating crime, violent crime, organized crime, any type of crime in this province, utilizing all of our police services. We have 5,000 officers, but as well the community has to be involved. We need community support. We want the community to be phoning the police and letting us know where the issues are, what the issues are, and how they can help us. So are we going to be looking at additional officers next year? We're preparing our '06-07 budget, and we'll have to wait until the spring to find out.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Given that other jurisdictions in Canada are expanding their resources to deal with gun violence by hiring specialized Crown prosecutors to work directly with police, will the minister commit to similar action for Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do have prosecutors in Alberta who are specialized. In fact, we have prosecutors who work closely with the various police groups that are focused on various areas, including organized crime. I can tell you that we intend to follow what happens in the expanded policing here in Alberta and ensure that additional prosecutor resources are made available as the good work of those expanded police forces are shown in our communities.

head:

Members' Statements

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

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Child Care

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The absence of significant direct public funding for child care centres and licensed day homes combined with part-time kindergarten and the absence of public

funding for pre- and after-school care creates serious distress for working parents, especially women, in Alberta. When we compare Alberta to Quebec, we find far lower average wages for child care workers, less parental leave time, fewer supports for stay-at-home parents, and more expensive child care.

There is a better way, Mr. Speaker. First, Alberta must raise the wages for child care workers by using the new federal money for making direct grants to operating centres. This will bring up standards and bring down parent fees. Currently 86 per cent of Alberta's child care spending goes to parent subsidies rather than operating grants to centres. At the other end of the spectrum, Quebec spends 97 per cent of its child care expenditures on operating grants and achieves more affordability for parents. Further, Alberta's child care investments should be made in the nonprofit sector, a position that the NDP opposition is committed to, the only strong voice in the Assembly on that point.

Alberta must also keep the promise that the province made in the wake of the Learning Commission and implement junior and full-day kindergarten. The early education experiences benefit the children enormously and also strengthen our communities and our economy. Parenting centres and support of the municipal FCSS programs would also improve education outcome for all children but especially low-income and aboriginal children.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Alberta must do more for stay-at-home parents. Despite the rhetoric of parental choice, Alberta has never proposed measures such as fiscal reform, changes to labour legislation, employer requirements, or parental insurance top-ups to support caregivers in the home. Let's use the Quebec child care model as a starting point and make changes to our child care program that will provide real choices for Alberta's parents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Private Braun Scott Woodfield

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in this Year of the Veteran to recognize another Canadian soldier who has paid the ultimate price in the service of our country and in the interests of peace. I speak, of course, of the death of Private Braun Scott Woodfield of G company, second battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment. Private Woodfield lost his life in Afghanistan when his light armoured vehicle rolled over. It was an accident that also injured four of his fellow servicemen.

As has been the case so often, this life was lost far from family and friends and far from his Canadian home of Eastern Passage, Nova Scotia. Private Woodfield was in Afghanistan because he committed himself to the service of his country in war and in peace. It is a commitment that thousands of Canadians have fulfilled in countless fields of conflict over the years. We stand today in honour of that patriotism and duty and in deep sadness that too often those qualities are paid for with the lives of our brave young men and women.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the thoughts of all hon. members are with the Woodfield family and with Private Woodfield's colleagues in arms. We all honour the price that Canadian troops continue to pay in the cause of peace.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Barrier-free Accessibility

Mr. Loughheed: Mr. Speaker, persons with disabilities and seniors with mobility challenges often find stores, offices, and public

buildings to be inaccessible. For someone in a wheelchair or scooter a curb that may only be a few centimetres high becomes an obstacle that cannot be overcome. Just a few days ago a young man who uses a wheelchair told me that he often drives by buildings and then just keeps on going because they appear not to be accessible.

This is the same concern expressed a few years ago by Glen Lavold, an Ardrossan resident, who because of MS realized that soon he would be unable to access many buildings in his scooter or wheelchair. Glen and I talked a few times about doing an access survey and making that information freely available. Because of the effects of MS Glen was unable to continue the project, but community volunteers Bob and Deanna Loewen and Bob Simpson offered to do the work. They spent hundreds of hours canvassing more than a thousand businesses and services in Sherwood Park and the rest of Strathcona county. Parking, curbs, washrooms, doors, and other features that affect accessibility to stores, offices, and public buildings were examined. The results of this barrier-free survey, the first of any major municipality, are now online at www.communityaccessibility.ca. Now anyone living in Strathcona county or visiting Sherwood Park can check the website to determine how accessible buildings are.

Mr. Speaker, the website www.communityaccessibility.ca is hosted by the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities with the support of the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. The Premier's council will be pleased to offer advice to any other volunteers who would like to do a barrier-free survey of their region and provide this valuable service to persons with disabilities.

Thank you.

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

2:50 University of Alberta Augustana Campus

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency is home to the Augustana faculty, University of Alberta. Augustana serves as the rural presence for the University of Alberta and as such is a key component of our government's rural development strategy.

When Augustana University College and the University of Alberta came together in 2004, creating the Augustana faculty of the University of Alberta, all parties including Augustana, the U of A, and the government of Alberta promised there would be a number of benefits for Augustana students and for the Camrose region. Two important steps in the growth and development of Augustana were undertaken on November 9.

The first was the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the East Central health region and the University of Alberta. This MOU creates a new partnership to provide rural Albertans with increased opportunities to pursue professional health education and careers. Residents in rural communities will benefit from an increased number of health professionals and from an increased focus on the well-being of rural Albertans. The Minister of Health and Wellness and the Minister of Advanced Education were both in attendance for the signing.

Following the MOU signing was the groundbreaking ceremony for the Camrose regional sport development centre, a partnership between the city and county of Camrose, the University of Alberta, and the government of Alberta. The centre will include a large arena with seating for approximately 3,000 people, a second ice surface, a fitness centre and running track, sport training labs, and classroom facilities. This facility will meet the recreation needs of the people of Camrose area and the needs of the University of Alberta, Camrose campus athletics program. The sport development centre is a major

step forward in the Augustana Viking Cup, which is now celebrating its 25th anniversary. The centre will be completed in time for the 2007 Viking Cup.

Taken together, the MOU signing and the groundbreaking ceremony underline the importance of the University of Alberta, Augustana faculty, to my constituency and rural Alberta. Thank you.

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

A Centennial Summary

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

In just under fifty legislative days,
We acknowledged our first hundred years,
Fought for smoke free work places
And against the “Third Way’s” two tiers.

We mourned the tragic loss,
Of our great hugger, Lois Hole.
We congratulated Normie Kwong,
As he assumed his new role.

We paid heartfelt homage
To the Mayerthorpe “Four”
Who passed prematurely
Through Heaven’s open door.

We honored our veterans,
Sixty years after their fight,
Having sacrificed for the peace,
We claim as our birthright.

At Wabamun Lake an oil train
Derailed from the track.
While in northern Alberta,
Our Boreal forests are under attack.

Our gracious Queen survived our rain
As well as . . . an errant umbrella,
Thrust in her direction
By government’s number one fellah.

He disappeared, went AWOL,
During this fall’s short sitting,
Avoiding the questions,
That we thought befitting.

His Conservative cousins cringed,
Wishing his tongue was less sharper,
Especially when protruding at
Their Federal father, Stephen Harper.

For while bestowing his blessing,
The predictions he plucked
Caused Peter McKay to call for
Red Green’s tape à la duct.

Edmonton’s green and gold beat
Montréal’s rouge, blanc et bleu.
Tomorrow, the Eskimos’ Grey Cup
Will be paraded for you.

Our centennial year’s ending,
As Christmas fast approaches.
Let us celebrate together
Without regrets or reproaches.

From under the cupola
Of this Legislature’s dome,
We wish Albertans the season’s best
In this great province we call home.

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

Domestic Violence Handbook

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On September 28, 2003, in Red Deer Josif Fekete shot and killed his estranged wife, Blagica, and their three-year-old son, Alex, before turning the gun on himself. The Fekete family had a history of involvement with the Red Deer RCMP, and a fatality inquiry cited a number of factors that may have played a role in their deaths. The judge’s recommendations identified several areas for improvement including the need for police training to understand the dynamics of family violence, the need for a clear protocol for dealing with issues of domestic abuse, and the need for a collaborative and co-ordinated approach to family violence.

On Friday the Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security released the Domestic Violence Handbook for Police and Crown Prosecutors. The handbook provides information on investigative procedures, prosecutions, victims and abusers, risk factors, and safety planning. Guidelines for developing a domestic violence protocol for police services in Alberta have also been distributed for use with this handbook. It encourages a co-operative and consistent approach for handling domestic violence cases throughout the criminal justice system. This training tool will go a long way toward preventing future tragedies.

I want to congratulate those involved for getting everyone on the same page when it comes to family violence. Seeing that Alberta has one of the highest rates of domestic violence in Canada, I will look forward to seeing the impact that this training and the new protocol will have on reducing the rate of family violence in Alberta.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like table a petition today which has 400 signatures on it. The signatures were collected by Lynda and Ron Jonson of Seniors I Care. The petition calls for either the reinstatement of the 25 continuing care beds “that Hinton had before the Good Samaritans Society and the Aspen Health Region changed it to a Designated Assisted Living Facility” or, failing that, commit to build a “new 25 bed Continuing Care Facility in Hinton.”

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I’m submitting a petition signed by concerned parents from various communities including Taber, Magrath, Fresh Start West in Edmonton, Barnwell, Coaldale, Lethbridge, and Fort McLeod. It reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to take measures that will require school boards and schools to eliminate all fees for instructional supplies and materials and general school services, including textbooks, musical instruments, physical education programs, locker rentals, lunch hour supervision, as was mentioned today,

and required field trips, and to ensure that schools are not deprived of the resources necessary to offer these programs and services without additional charges to parents or guardians.
Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

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

Bill 52
Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2)

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce for first reading Bill 52, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2005 (No. 2).

[Motion carried; Bill 52 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Bill 58
Alberta Centennial Medal Amendment Act, 2005

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce a bill being the Alberta Centennial Medal Amendment Act, 2005, and ask that this bill be read and received a first time.

[Motion carried; Bill 58 read a first time]

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

Bill 213
Standing Committee on
Continuing Care Standards Act

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce private member's Bill 213.

The purpose of that bill is to establish an all-party standing committee that would review and monitor the legislated standards for continuing care facilities, the compliance of those standards, and in return would report to the Assembly on a yearly basis.

[Motion carried; Bill 213 read a first time]

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

3:00 **Bill 214**
Water Protection and Conservation
Statutes Amendment Act, 2005

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce private member's Bill 214, Water Protection and Conservation Statutes Amendment Act, 2005.

This bill is designed to enhance the protection, conservation, and long-term management of our water resources in Alberta.

[Motion carried; Bill 214 read a first time]

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

Bill 218
Land Agents Licensing (Licence Requirement)
Amendment Act, 2005

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 218, the Land Agents Licensing (Licence Requirement) Amendment Act, 2005.

The bill removes the restrictions on who can negotiate on the landowner's behalf for the acquisition of surface interests.

[Motion carried; Bill 218 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and table responses to Written Question 35, which pertains to costs regarding Alberta's incredible SuperNet project, and also to Motion for a Return 17, which pertains to an hon. member's request for information regarding certain ministry-related expenses.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sir, I wish to table for the House five copies of a letter from Reverend Lynn Maki, who is the executive secretary of the Alberta and Northwest Conference of the United Church of Canada. The letter passes on the United Church's congratulatory wishes on the occasion of Alberta's centennial.

Also, Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of the House I would like to table five copies of my responses to questions raised during Community Development's appearance before the Committee of Supply on the 11th of May 2005.

Thank you, sir.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first I wish to table on behalf of the Official Opposition leader is a letter sent to him on November 7, 2005, from Bradley Nemetz of the Bennett Jones law firm telling him to curtail his comments in regard to the ASC or face possible legal sanction. In light of the RCMP probe now under way into the ASC, the opposition leader wants this letter to be part of the public record.

Secondly, I'm tabling with the permission of the recipient a letter from Alan Currie, investigative counsel for the ASC, to a Zi Corporation investor in response to the investor's request for the ASC to look into Zi Corporation's disclosure violation.

The appropriate number of copies of correspondence directed to me, Mr. Speaker, expressing the person's extreme disappointment about the irresponsibility of the Alberta government with the recent announcement of the \$400 payment. They believe that with proper economic policy it could have been put to much better use and end up benefiting Albertans.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of John Flipsen, a constituent: he asks why he was required to get repeated tests when they knew that an operation would be coming in the future. He also attached information on RespErate, which is a new blood pressure device to assist people with high blood pressure.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise with two sets of tablings. The first is the correspondence from Calgary-Varsity constituent Dr. Ramesh Joshi to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation concerning the extension to the Confederation Park Senior Citizens Centre. Dr. Joshi calls into question the manner in which the contract was awarded and is concerned about the lack of transparency, accountability, and the use of taxpayers' money.

My second tabling comes to me in my role as Infrastructure and Transportation critic from Diane Newman of Edmonton. While Diane is aware of the excitement and economic benefits of the West Edmonton Mall Grand Prix racing event, she would like to see greater education and emphasis placed on the differences between professional track racing and the dangers associated with street racing.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter from the Alberta and Northwest Conference of the United Church of Canada addressed to the people of the province of Alberta, celebrating with us the centennial but also reminding us of the challenges to Alberta concerning homelessness, poverty, threats to public health care, assault on the environment, and the need to respect all persons regardless of age, colour, sex, language, sexual orientation, or ethnicity.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to officially table one T-shirt from the Edmonton Eskimos and two thunder sticks provided through the Edmonton Eskimos. I thank the Clerk and the pages for distributing them before this House was at work so it didn't disrupt the business of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling from my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Adamson. They have a concern about the cost of Alberta health care premiums. They are urging the government to eliminate "this archaic and punitive levy."

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter I received last Thursday from the Minister of Finance. It was provided to me in reply to an earlier oral question involving the settlement between the ATB and West Edmonton Mall. The minister asserts that the government is not soft on corporate crime.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to table a number of letters from Albertans regarding the unfunded teachers' liability, and I'll just list a couple of examples. Warren Marcotte says that "to saddle future taxpayers with many billions in debt is beyond [his] comprehension." Phil Mark, a teacher, says, "Could you please have our provincial government deal with this matter with expedient and proper manner?" Doug Johnson says, "It is my belief that teachers in this province would be willing to make this a strike issue in the near future if this issue remains unaddressed." Deen Khan says, "I do think that in this time of plenty . . . the government of this province stand up and face its responsibility towards its teachers."

I'm in receipt of 100 further letters that have been written by teachers from all across the province asking the government to address this very serious issue of the unfunded teachers' liability.

I'm not going to take the time to read them all into the record, but it could be noted . . .

The Speaker: Well, I would hope, hon. member, that you wouldn't – please sit down – because all 83 of us in this Assembly are getting the same ones. If we get 40,000 teachers times 83, we're looking at roughly 3,200,000 tablings. If we start now, next April 14 we'll still be here tabling them. So let's assume that we've got them tabled now. Okay?

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. Hancock, Minister of Advanced Education, public postsecondary institutions' audited financial statements, public colleges and technical institutes, for the year ended June 30, 2004, and universities and Banff Centre for Continuing Education for the year ended March 31, 2005; pursuant to the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board 2004-2005 annual report.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Melchin, Minister of Energy, responses to questions raised on April 20, 2005, Department of Energy 2005-06 Committee of Supply debate, and return to order of the Assembly MR 26, asked for by Mr. MacDonald on April 25, 2005.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Coutts, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, returns to orders of the Assembly MR 11, MR 12, and MR 13, asked for by Mr. Bonko on April 11, 2005.

On behalf of Mr. Liepert, chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund, pursuant to Standing Order 52 the 2004 report of the Select Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund and the 2005 report of the Select Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund.

3:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I'm just assuming that the hon. member is rising asking for a response to 13(2) of the Standing Orders?

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Mason: Yes, Mr. Speaker, indeed I am rising on that. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder was involved in asking questions to the Minister of Environment, and in one of his supplemental questions he provided what I would call a bit of a laundry list of things that he'd like the minister to respond to. The chair ruled that out of order. The question I have for the chair is that when the hon. Member for Red Deer-North provided a similar laundry list of questions within a supplemental question to the minister of aboriginal affairs, she was not ruled out of order. I'd like to know why.

The Speaker: Hon. member, there's an assumption there that isn't true. The chair did not rule out the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder on a point of order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder was speaking. He was proceeding with a question, and he said to the same minister: "If the Environment minister is serious about reducing greenhouse gas emissions, when will he commit in this House to firm dates and policies on the following . . ." At that point in time the chair rose, stood up. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder continued to speak. The chair said, "Hon. member." The hon. member caught the chair's eye. I saw him catch my eye. The hon. member continued to speak and did not sit down. The chair was standing. At that point in time the chair said, "Sit down" because the first two interventions and interjections did not count.

For the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to

suggest that the chair was going to rule the member out of order on his question is totally erroneous. The chair raised his voice because the hon. member did not sit down when the chair rose. That's the explanation.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, November 24, it is my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, November 24, it is my pleasure to move that motions for returns 49 and 50 be dealt with today. I would just note that since there are no additional motions for returns, there are none to stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

Diploma Examinations

M49. Mr. Flaherty moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all reports, studies, papers, presentations, memos, correspondence, or other ministry documents pertaining to the plan to phase in a method for equating diploma examinations as referenced on page 28 of the Ministry of Learning's 2003-04 annual report.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have reviewed Motion for a Return 49, submitted by the hon. member, and I would like to indicate that I'm prepared to accept Motion for a Return 49, albeit with some amendments. I'll speak to that in just a second, but I would like to indicate firstly that I did share this amendment with the hon. colleague opposite prior to 11 a.m. today as per our procedures.

Now, specific to the amended motion. If I could be allowed to continue briefly, I would just like to explain, Mr. Speaker, that the original motion as presented by the Member for St. Albert requested a copy of all reports and studies and papers and presentations and memos and correspondence or other ministry documents with respect to the planning and phasing in of our method for equating diploma examinations. I just find that that's just so broad, so generic that it isn't focused enough to allow me to respond because I simply can't guarantee that I would be able to provide all, each and every stitch of paper. Sometimes human error may occur.

What I'm simply suggesting in the friendly amendment, hon. member, is to focus the question in a way that would allow me to accept it. I'm hoping that the hon. member opposite would appreciate and understand that and will also appreciate the fact that I am willing to provide the information as outlined in this friendly amendment, as I call it.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, the only thing here is that I will undertake to provide everything that I can under the motion as

amended, and I would ask for his and other members' support of that amendment.

The Speaker: Has the amendment been circulated? [interjections] Well, a number of members tell me they haven't seen the amendment.

Are there any comments on the amendment?

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert to conclude the debate.

Mr. Flaherty: So moved, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 49 as amended carried]

Postsecondary Degree Program Approvals

M50. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Mr. Taylor that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing all documents prepared or received by the Ministry of Advanced Education, formerly Learning, between January 1, 2002, and February 28, 2005, pertaining to the accreditation of postsecondary institutions granting baccalaureate degrees, the approval process for institutions seeking to grant baccalaureate degrees, and the establishment of the Campus Alberta Quality Council, including but not limited to correspondence between the ministry and the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada on this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Minister of Advanced Education I would have to request that the House reject this motion. I would be prepared to provide comment now if that's the appropriate time.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Hancock: I certainly appreciate the interest being expressed by the hon. member in putting the question forward with respect to the designation of postsecondary institutions to offer baccalaureate degrees and the approval process for such degrees. Under Bill 43 now, the Post-secondary Learning Act, that's clearly the way forward that's been set out, and the Campus Alberta Quality Council's role in approving programs is essential not only to approving our programs but to setting standards of accreditation. In fact, as I've said in this House on many occasions, Alberta is leading the process across Canada to ensure that there are appropriate accreditation standards, and the Campus Alberta Quality Council is leading the way in this regard. So it's a very important question.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the question is so broadly worded that the natural result of that question would be to bring over the filing cabinets with all the information that Alberta quality council has dealt with. What it asks: the accreditation of postsecondary institutions granting baccalaureate degrees, the approval process for institutions seeking to grant baccalaureate degrees, the establishment of the council, and correspondence. So that's every piece of paper that's there. Surely that's not what the hon. member wants, but I cannot discern from the question what the appropriate information to deliver would be. In fact, if we approved this motion for a return, we would have to provide for the files of the Legislature all of the files of the Campus Alberta Quality Council.

3:20

We've had several other motions this session, particularly MR 40, which have required this sort of broad, sweeping type of information, and the Legislature has been good enough to recognize that that's not an appropriate way of framing questions. It's simply too broad, requests a vast array of material, much of which is already part of the public record. The motion doesn't specify public or private degree-granting institutions, so it's thousands of pages, and many, actually several branches, not just Campus Alberta Quality Council secretariat but public institutions, the former PCAB secretariat, et cetera.

Much of the information may well be subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, so it would have to be reviewed first because it involves information with respect to private institutions, et cetera. In order to release that information, a privacy review would have to be conducted on all the information available.

I want to make it perfectly clear that I'm not averse to providing information to the hon. member about the quality council, about the process, about what it does. In fact, we'd be happy to arrange whatever meetings that might be necessary to make sure that whatever information he's looking for is made available. But to answer this question, as broadly as it's posed, would not be a good use of time or resources and would not necessarily give him the information he wants because he would have to then sort through thousands and thousands of documents to achieve it.

The motion for a return specifically asked for correspondence between the department and the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada concerning the establishment of the Campus Alberta Quality Council. There is, I can say, Mr. Speaker, no such official correspondence of which I'm aware. With respect to the establishment of the Campus Alberta Quality Council, this information is a matter of public record. The act establishing the council and list of members are available on the council's website. As you and other members will know, I tabled the council's first annual report last week. It's also available on the website, and we'll be providing all members with a copy of that shortly.

The hon. member is inquiring about the process for institutions seeking to offer baccalaureate degrees. This process is clearly laid out on the Campus Alberta Quality Council's website, which members can access at www.caqc.gov.ab.ca. Click on Application Process on the main page and then on Approval Process for New Degree Proposals. So that information is available.

The Campus Alberta Quality Council was specifically established to review proposals from postsecondary institutions that wish to offer new degree programs. Its members are "objective, forward-thinking individuals who are highly respected by the post-secondary system and have demonstrated an understanding and support for lifelong learning," to quote from my predecessor who established the council.

In short, I'm pleased to see the interest that's been taken in the process. I'm happy to work with the hon. member to find out what particular type of information he's seeking or what understanding about the Campus Alberta Quality Council he's seeking to find. Obviously, one of our key goals in our ministry is "to provide increased access to quality advanced education opportunities." We do it "through policy, programming, and funding support to post-secondary institutions and working with industry to facilitate the development of training and certification standards." Obviously, Campus Alberta Quality Council is key to that.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very interested in people taking an interest in the role, function, and work of the Campus Alberta Quality Council, very interested in ensuring that there's a clear understanding by the hon. member and all members of the House with respect to the role

and function of the quality council. There's a good, clear starting place by going to their website and getting the information that's published there, looking at the annual report, and getting the information that's published there. No public purpose would be served by bringing over the filing cabinets and having all of the documents in them numbered as documents for the benefit of the legislative records, but I can assure the hon. member that I'd be happy to work with him on any specific questions that he has that I've not been able to answer here.

I'd ask the House to reject MR 50.

The Speaker: If I recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, that concludes the debate.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just for clarification, is the minister suggesting that the accreditation for Alberta's postsecondary institutions in itself is thousands of documents, or does that narrow the scope of what's being requested? I believe that it is the intent of this motion not to carry over entire file cabinet cases but simply the postsecondary institution information within this province.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 50 lost]

The Speaker: Before the Clerk calls the next order of business, I'd just like to let all hon. members know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder and I have had an exchange of information. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder failed to see me rise, and I failed to see the hon. member sit, so all is fine in paradise again.

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

**Bill 204
Pharmacy and Drug (Methamphetamine Limiting)
Amendment Act, 2005**

[Debated adjourned May 9: Mr. Cao speaking]

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

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Bill 204 is a very important bill, and it has far-reaching effects. That being said, after consultation with stakeholders and further research we have come to the conclusion that a necessary amendment needs to be made to strengthen this piece of legislation. I'd like to table the appropriate amendment to Bill 204, the Pharmacy and Drug (Methamphetamine Limiting) Amendment Act, 2005. Would the chair like me to continue or wait until the items have been circulated?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I believe the amendments have not been circulated as yet, so we should give the members an opportunity to receive the amendments.

Mr. Strang: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The pages have the amendments, and I believe they will be circulating momentarily. Hon. members, when we deal with this amendment, we shall deal with it as amendment A1.

Hon. Member for West Yellowhead, you may proceed.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Bill 204 as it currently sits does not exactly accomplish what I hoped it would. My intention for this bill is to eliminate the cause of the problem some of our communities are having with drug abuse. So often we as a society try our very best to handle the effect of poor decisions made by people in our communities.

3:30

This is the same with crystal meth. Most of what we are doing as government to deal with the crystal meth problem is to try and solve the effect of the drug. From increasing penalties to increasing funding for recovering addicts, we do our best to deal with the effect of this naughty drug. What I am trying to do with Bill 204 is address the cause of a lot of those problems that are seen in our communities as a direct result of drug use. I think that if we can get to and try to eliminate the cause, we will be better off. The problem is crystal meth, and if we can get something to eliminate that, we will be better off.

This is where my amendment comes, Mr. Chairman. As the bill is currently written, ephedrine and pseudoephedrine products will be removed to schedule 2 drugs. This means that the product containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine will be put behind the counter in pharmacies, and a person would only be able to obtain said products after discussing it with a pharmacist. As we've heard through the debate in second reading, in order to make crystal meth, the makers must have access to ephedra, ephedrine, and pseudoephedrine. These entities and only these entities are required for meth to have its desired effect on the users.

We did research into this drug and its effects. We thought it would be a good idea if we would limit access to all these products that had those entities prevalent in them, which is what this bill does without the amendment tabled. The problem with this bill right now is that by the way it's worded, we would be putting a lot of products behind the pharmacy counter. As I met with the College of Pharmacists and other stakeholders, I learned that if the bill passed, there would be pharmacies that would undergo serious renovations to ensure that all products affected by this bill would be able to be stored behind the counter. Pharmacists have told me that this was too much for them, especially for rural drugstores that do not have the greatest amount of space to work with.

Therefore, something had to change, and the amendment does that by putting single-entity pseudoephedrine products behind the counter. What we think needs to be clarified is the difference between single-entity and multi-entity products as this has caused a bit of confusion while I was going through the process.

First of all, Mr. Chairman, it has been a bit complicated, but I'll try to explain this as best I can. When you have a product that has pseudoephedrine in it as a single entity, this means that this entity is the only active ingredient in the product. Conversely, when you have a product that has multi-entity ingredients, this means that all of those ingredients are active in the product. There is a difference between the two.

So now we have to look at the amendment that I have proposed this afternoon. The research that was done while we prepared this bill seemed to show that the makers of crystal meth were not purchasing multi-entity pseudoephedrine products because it was far too difficult to chemically synthesize the product to get the pseudoephedrine out and separate for the purpose of making meth.

Meth makers are far more likely to find the single-entity pseudoephedrine products to make their drug as it is much easier. Therefore, we should amend what we have before us to reflect this. The amendment, therefore, before the House also removes ephedrine products from the bill.

Now, ephedrine is one of those ingredients that is necessary for the production of meth. However, ephedrine is already a schedule 1 drug when there are over 8 mg doses in the product and can only be accessed by prescription. As well, there are very few, if any, single-entity ephedrine products on the market that have so little ephedrine that they are unclassified. Therefore, there is no real need for us to try and move those products to schedule 2 because that would be counterproductive. That is why the amendment removes amphetamine from the bill.

There is also another reason for this amendment that I would like to touch upon in the remaining time. In June the western ministers of health, justice, and public security met to discuss, among other things, meth use, a strategy to combat it. At the meeting they agreed to come up with a common strategy that all western jurisdictions could follow. The jurisdictions involved are Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Alberta, British Columbia, Northwest Territories, the Yukon, and Nunavut. All of the ministers went back to their respective provinces or territories, and each one decided that the best approach would be to limit all single-entity amphetamine products.

I think it's fair to say that at this meeting it was considered that all products with pseudoephedrine be behind the counters. The western ministers also agreed that if one province does something by itself, it does not really eliminate the cause of the problem because drug makers could easily hop a province's or a territory's border to pick up the ingredients needed to make meth. It was decided that if all provinces take a common approach, they may have more success in combating the problem each jurisdiction is facing.

Mr. Chairman, this is not just an Alberta problem, nor is it strictly a rural or urban problem. This is turning into a nation-wide issue, and I think it's encouraging that at least the western jurisdictions are working together to try to find a solution to this problem.

Because of all these issues it was important and necessary that we amend this piece of legislation before us. I think this is a good strategy, and I think it will see some more good results by implementing this law.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to the rest of the speakers on both sides of the House on this issue.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I have a very long list of people who wish to speak. Just to remind hon. members, currently we're dealing with the amendment that's before us, so there will be opportunity for people to speak to the bill itself once we have voted on the amendment.

On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. The amendment to Bill 204 is definitely more specific and pragmatic in supporting the intent of the original bill to ensure that meth makers will have a more difficult time purchasing the main ingredients for the manufactured crystal meth. I believe this amendment is a wise step and will serve the purpose better.

Much of the concern about crystal meth and other drugs comes down to simple supply and demand. If we pass this amendment and make it harder for the producers, some might quit making it, and the lack of supply generally drives prices up, which we could hope might be a deterrent for purchase. The reason why crystal meth's use is so widespread in Alberta is that it is so inexpensive to buy and is so readily available. If it were more expensive and harder to find,

perhaps we could stop some of our children from experimenting and inevitably becoming addicted.

Many of us know that break-in and theft charges are on the rise in our communities. If we can reduce the number of people who are addicted to crystal meth, logically we may reduce the associated crime costs. There is a great concern in our province about the devastation caused in our communities and among our youth because of crystal meth addiction. This amendment is still not a panacea. It does not get to the root of the problem, but it is a step to help us in a tremendous challenge.

What's being proposed with the bill is that making drugs that are the active ingredients used in the manufacture of crystal meth more difficult to get will diminish the amount that is being produced. However, as long as the demand is there for that cheap high, there will be people who will be happy to continue to make it in whatever form and with whatever chemicals they may need in order to sell it to people and make money. So until we address the demand for this drug, we're going to continue to have problems with it.

3:40

This amended bill is addressing a small part of the problem, but it's not addressing why we have such a demand for this drug or other drugs, especially by teenagers. It does nothing to address that demand. It does nothing to address creating and providing activities for youth to get involved with. Youth who are not engaged in positive activities get bored, and this can result in connecting with other peers who are feeling the same way. Then that group, or gang if you like, gets into activities that may not be helpful, and they do not have moral leadership or guidance although this new group may actually become a family of sorts. Most people would rather be engaged in something and do something, but if we don't allow them positive opportunities, their boredom and apathy may lead to poor choices, including trying drugs. We need to look at existing opportunities and why many choose not to get involved. What are the barriers that prevent involvement, and what do we need to change?

Another thing that's not addressed in this amendment is any kind of treatment, and that's the second way to reduce demand. Somebody addicted to crystal meth is driven to the exclusion of all other factors, including sleep and food, to get the drug, to get another high. So by reducing their addiction or eliminating their addiction with treatment, we would reduce the demand. I think that addressing the demand and treatment is more effective than trying to address a small part of the supply side of this issue.

This government has a problem with addictions, whether it's alcohol addictions, drug addictions, or gambling addictions. I would prefer to see an approach that has a complete management plan to it. Determining what needs to be in place in our society to prevent drug use and abuse overall is much more complex, and it requires a collaborative approach. AADAC and many other agencies can make a difference in communities across the province with their knowledge and expertise and the best practices to prevent and treat addictions as well as the range of services that they can provide. The problems related to drug and alcohol use are wide ranging in scope, complex in nature, and costly in personal and economic terms to Albertans. We can succeed with the involvement of partners in the community, including individuals, municipal leaders, government and nongovernment agencies, law enforcement, educational and health professionals, and others.

Momentum is obviously growing in this province as people work together to tackle these problems and other drug issues in an effort to build safer communities where we can raise healthier children. We need to extend the reach of the existing services we offer and

provide and invest where the likelihood of success is greater. Hopefully, this amendment will help reduce access. We can increase hope by increasing the number of facilities we use for drug treatment and rehab and also counselling. Let's fund the DARE program so that every child in this province before they enter junior high knows full well the consequences of this addictive drug. There are other programs that the police officers offer that are also not reactive but educational and of great value, and they deserve support.

In principle I'm supportive of what's being recommended and being proposed in this amended bill, but this is not looking at an overall plan of management to attack this addiction. It doesn't include any kind of treatment. It doesn't deal with the demand side of things. It doesn't do anything to address activities for youth or to expand educational programs that can make a difference. We need to do better.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, did you want to speak on the amendment or wait until the bill?

Mr. Martin: Yeah, on the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: On the amendment. Okay.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Chair, just very briefly. I understand the reason that we've limited this, and I'm sure that pharmacists won't be too happy about that. But I guess the bottom line to me is that we want something that's going to be effective. I'm sure the member wants that. I guess that if this is what's possible at this time, then we'll certainly support it. The questions I have, though, are flowing from the member's statements. I have a couple questions that I think deal with the amendment, Mr. Chair.

You mentioned – and I remember reading about it – that the western health ministers and premiers were getting together because this is a very serious problem not only here but, of course, in the United States, everywhere. Am I led to believe that the reason that we're limiting pseudoephedrine is that that's what all four have agreed and that's what's possible at this particular time? That's the one question.

The second question I would have, Mr. Chair, is that there are some examples I believe in the States, who are formally ahead. I think this might be worth checking out because I don't see this yet as a government bill. I expect that the hope is that it eventually will be a government bill rather than a private member's bill.

It's my understanding that Oklahoma became the first U.S. state to classify such common cold remedies as Sudafed and Claritin as schedule 5 narcotics, forbidding sales in stores other than pharmacies, ordering the pills placed behind counters, limiting the amount sold per customer, and requiring purchasers to show a photo ID inside to register. It seems to me that they're going much further. I'm wondering if the member – in terms of research maybe he doesn't have it, but if we deal with this bill down the way – can give us an update of how that's working because surely their pharmacists must have been a little exercised, I would say. It would be extra work for them there. I'm wondering how that has worked out and if it has worked out. Perhaps there could be some suggestions about how we might deal with this in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Danyluk: I'm going to speak on the bill, not on the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Okay.

Does anybody else wish to speak on the amendment? The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to speak to the amendments to Bill 204, the Pharmacy and Drug (Methamphetamine Limiting) Amendment Act, 2005. This is an important piece of legislation, and these amendments will ensure that the intent of the bill is preserved while the interests of Albertans are maintained.

I believe Bill 204 is complementary to Bill 202, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, that was passed in the spring session. I would like to commend the Member for West Yellowhead for his persistence and dedication in working with various groups to ensure that the bill will produce the intended effects without the unintended consequences. This is always a difficult task when creating legislation.

Mr. Chairman, the fight against crystal meth is difficult since the drug is readily available because of the ingredients used to produce it. It is very cheap to make and, unlike other drugs, can be made anywhere. This is why the drug has spread so rapidly and why it has created such havoc in Alberta as well as most of Canada and the United States. To combat this trend, jurisdictions have created various pieces of legislation. The biggest challenge to our government has been to balance the interests of Albertans with the need to take action against this deadly drug.

With the amendment to Bill 204 these interests will be balanced quite reasonably. The amendments deal with which products should be behind the counters and which should not. The original purpose of the bill was not to put every product that contains ephedrine, ephedra, or pseudoephedrine behind the counter. Rather the purpose was to put those medications which contain substantial amounts of these ingredients in the control of the pharmacists. This is why the bill is being amended to focus on products where pseudoephedrine is the only ingredient. These are the products that are being used by the drug producers, not the products where pseudoephedrine is one ingredient amongst many.

The amendment will mean that approximately 21 products will be behind the counters as opposed to 200 originally thought to be included and that sick Albertans will have access to the medication they need to feel better without being inconvenienced too much. The amendment creates a real win-win situation.

3:50

Mr. Chairman, the problem I had with this bill when it was introduced several months ago was that I thought it would work better as federal legislation. My issue was that if someone could not get these ingredients in Alberta, they would simply drive to Saskatchewan or B.C. However, the other western provinces have been working to create similar legislation to avoid this problem. I'm very happy to hear that the provinces have all stepped up in the absence of federal leadership on this issue.

I want to thank the federal government, however, for taking some action on crystal meth by increasing sentences for the trafficking and possession of this terrible drug. This was a very important move as dealers were simply not deterred by the law. More leadership from the feds would go a long way, like tripling the sentence for a dealer who is selling to a minor, but I think Albertans and Canadians will take what they can get.

The lack of federal leadership on this and many other fronts forces provinces to work closely together to do what is right for Canadians. This lack of leadership is why in recent years provincial premiers have united and have held several summits and meetings to fight tough issues that the federal government does not act on.

On June 10 there was a meeting of western ministers of health, justice, and public safety, which was called Building Partnerships to Address Addictions, Responding to Crystal Meth. During that conference the western leaders decided that each jurisdiction should adopt legislation to restrict the sale of products containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine. The idea was to follow Alberta's lead and create legislation that is similar to Bill 204. This is the reason for this amendment. Bill 204 was the sample piece of legislation for the western leaders, but it needed to be amended slightly to ensure that it created an appropriate response to the problem without creating unintended consequences.

Mr. Chairman, what I found comforting about this conference was the level of co-operation and participation that was achieved. Aboriginal communities are among the victims of the meth problem, and for this reason the provincial leaders invited Chief Bird of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations to express the important perspectives of the First Nations peoples. As we all know, Alberta's aboriginal communities often live in isolated areas. They do not enjoy the same access to pharmacies and medications as the people who live in Edmonton, Calgary, or any other larger communities. Many rural Albertans must also travel to access pharmacies and medications. The amendment we are discussing addresses the concerns of these groups by ensuring that most cold products are available in convenience and grocery stores.

Mr. Chairman, this was the intended purpose of Bill 204. This amendment will ensure that the bill will have maximum effect in reducing the production of crystal meth and will not cause undue hardship on Albertans who are in need of cold medications.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to acknowledge the Member for West Yellowhead for introducing this bill and for working with several stakeholders to ensure that the bill will produce the desired results. I would also like to express my thanks to the ministers and leaders from the western provinces, aboriginal communities, and the federal government for taking action on crystal meth. Working together is the only way we will be able to overcome this devastating problem in our society.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 204 is not meant to be a panacea, a cure-all, for crystal meth addiction. However, it is an important step in the war on this drug. It is my duty to support this amendment, this bill, and any reasonable measure that will help us win the fight against crystal meth. I strongly urge all members to also support this amendment and the legislation.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, did you want to speak on the amendment?

Ms Blakeman: To the bill, please.

The Deputy Chair: To the bill itself. Okay.

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

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to speak on the amendment as it pertains to Bill 204, the Pharmacy and Drug (Methamphetamine Limiting) Amendment Act, 2005, which I believe is very important. I'm glad to have this opportunity to rise and speak to it. I would also like to thank the hon. Member for West Yellowhead for bringing it forward so that we can discuss it here today.

[Mr. Prins in the chair]

It would mean that cold, cough, and allergy medicines that are multi-entity pseudoephedrine products rather than single-entity

would be accessible to the general public. This would be a wise decision, Mr. Chairman, since multimedicines containing pseudoephedrine are subject to a complicated procedure in order to be used in the manufacturing of methamphetamine and should, therefore, still be easily available to citizens who require them.

I believe, Mr. Chairman, that anything the government can do to prevent individuals from manufacturing crystal meth is a noble goal. Bill 204 will no doubt help to reduce the number of meth labs within the province of Alberta. I don't believe that Bill 204 and our other current laws aimed at reducing the production and sale of methamphetamines will completely halt the production and sale of this highly addictive drug.

Mr. Chairman, I think we need to be aware that there are still methods by which methamphetamine producers are going to be able to obtain the pseudoephedrine products that are required in order to get the ephedrine they need for the production of this illegal drug. Not only will meth producers be able to simply drive to the United States, pick up these drugs, and return to Alberta for manufacturing, but they will also be able to use the Internet in order to obtain them. There are a large number of online pharmacies out there, both Canadian-run and internationally-run, and not much, if anything, can be done in order to regulate the companies and, in some cases, the individuals running these sites and delivering these pharmaceuticals. In other words, there is not much that can be done to prevent a methamphetamine manufacturer from simply ordering a large quantity of pseudoephedrine off the Internet and having it shipped to an Alberta address.

In order to see how simple it would be, Mr. Chairman, to obtain a large quantity of pseudoephedrine, I simply researched the Internet and found that a number of these online pharmacies will sell large amounts of drugs to anyone with a credit card and, in some cases, even a personal cheque. One such example was on the site *drugstore.com* where for a mere \$178.30 I would have been able to order 500 pseudoephedrine capsules. Another site, *canadadrugs.com*, which is based in Winnipeg, would allow me to purchase four boxes, or 96 doses, of Tantaferd, tab 60 milligrams, which is a single-ingredient pseudoephedrine product, for a mere \$36.87 including shipping. There are countless online pharmacies, and no doubt it is nearly or equally as easy to obtain these products from them.

Unfortunately, whereas placing these products behind the counters in pharmacies to be monitored by pharmacists according to Bill 204 is a realistic option to curb the production of meth, there is no such procedure available for the sale of a single-entity pseudoephedrine product online. If we are able to place these drugs in schedule 2, there is no way to be sure that those interested in making the drug wouldn't simply order the necessary nonprescription drugs from other provinces, the States, or from other international companies.

Even if it were to be decided that the single-entity pseudoephedrine products would be placed as schedule 1 drugs, which are prescription-only drugs, there are still ways that individuals would be able to obtain the needed drugs for the creation of crystal meth. Although many online pharmacies require a copy of the person's prescription to be faxed to the company, these types of documents can be forged easily enough by determined individuals. As well, Mr. Chairman, there would no doubt continue to be methods of obtaining the drugs whether or not a prescription were required from different Internet groups, just as they are now.

Also, although volume control may be possible by pharmacists in actual pharmacies with physical locations, limiting quantities of the drug does not seem to be something that can be or is enforced by online pharmacies. Again, Mr. Chairman, in looking at these Internet pharmacies online, I found that most sites do not limit the

amount of single-entity pseudoephedrine products that a consumer is able to buy.

Mr. Chairman, the limitations that I have mentioned are not to discourage or to in any way denounce Bill 204. I mentioned the availability of the drugs that are the precursor to methamphetamine over the Internet before. I believe that it is a matter of which we must all be aware. The bill will unfortunately be unable to stop the production of methamphetamine, Mr. Chairman.

4:00

That being said, I must reiterate that I do still support this bill. I believe that Bill 204 will be able to help decrease the number of small-scale, or mom-and-pop, meth labs within the province. Whereas the big-scale methamphetamine producers have access to large quantities of ephedrine, Bill 204 will help to reduce the number of small operations by curbing their access to large quantities of over-the-counter single-entity pseudoephedrine products needed for the creation of crystal meth.

Mr. Chairman, again I would like to take this opportunity to thank the presenter of Bill 204 and to thank the hon. Member for West Yellowhead for bringing this issue forward for discussion. Methamphetamine is very dangerous as an illegal substance and one that I know we would like to get rid of from this province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Acting Chair: Well, thank you to the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul. You did very well with all those pronunciations.

Now, anyone else on the amendment? I believe the Member for Edmonton-McClung maybe was standing up first.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Very briefly – and I've expressed my support in the initial phases of debate – on this amendment A1 to Bill 204, the Pharmacy and Drug (Methamphetamine Limiting) Amendment Act, 2005, one thought came to mind when I listened to the presenter of the bill, with whom I agree on most of what he said. When he mentioned, you know, the rationale for limiting it to single-entity cough, cold, and flu remedies and not extending it to multiple-ingredient products, I immediately remembered the discussion that we had in this House last week when we were debating the merits of extending presumptive coverage for cardiovascular events to other emergency response personnel in addition to firefighters. The hon. sponsor of that bill stood up, and he said that he disagreed with me and my caucus colleagues because, in his words, there was "no science" backing up our statements. So my question to the hon. sponsor is: what is the science on which you based your thinking?

We may be limiting single-entity products initially, but then those criminals, those crooks who cook up crystal meth in their homes or in their basements, will probably find some other household detergent or some other product that is readily available to extract ephedrine or pseudoephedrine from those multiple-ingredient products. So what we're doing is just delaying it a bit. They're very resourceful, they're very creative, and they would probably find a way around it.

Second would be the thought I had when the discussion centred around how cumbersome it is and how costly for pharmacies and pharmacists to redesign their dispensaries and to bring in more shelves or spend more money on restocking those multiple-ingredient products in their dispensaries. I find this argument not very strong because, for example, the hon. Member for Red Deer-North mentioned that there are 200-plus products that include ephedrine or pseudoephedrine or some derivative thereof, and I would argue that most of these are interchangeable. By that I mean that you don't

have to stock them all to have all the different various combinations of ingredients.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

From my own experience as a practising community pharmacist you can actually have only about 30 or so of those products without risking not having all the different combinations available. You don't have to stock every single brand name and every single make and strength and bar code to have general coverage of all the different afflictions. You can have one for just a runny nose or one for a runny nose and sneezing or for a runny nose, sneezing, and red eyes or runny nose, sneezing, red eyes, and cough or any different permutation of those. So you don't have to stock all 200 products.

Also, my colleagues in the Official Opposition and myself particularly, because of people's knowledge of my prior life, we have not received a lot of communication from concerned pharmacists or pharmacy operators who said that this was going to be very cumbersome. As a matter of fact, the college itself supported this, and they said: yes, that's a good idea. So it's not an argument that I'm willing to accept.

Also, I wanted to mention that if we're really concerned about those drug stores, maybe we should look at a mechanism where they are empowered and compensated to undertake such an initiative. One example comes to mind with the electronic health record. For example, when the Ministry of Health and Wellness was promoting the EHR and trying to have it widespread and have it across the province, they offered an upgrading allowance to all the different participating drugstores, an upgrading allowance that included upgrades to your software to be able to link to the EHR and also to your hardware to be able to secure the information and access the information on a timely basis. So it has been done before. Why not extend it to this scenario as well?

Finally, I think that the concern that was quoted from the chain drugstores or the grocery distributors was overemphasized. These people, yes, have a reason to be concerned because they risk losing some of their sales, but honestly I think these products should belong in a pharmacy to start with. They don't belong in a gas station. They don't belong in a corner grocery store. They belong in pharmacies only, and maybe that's a good decision to have them behind the counter so a pharmacist has to intervene and has to offer professional advice before they're accessed.

Further, the argument that patients in rural Alberta may not have access to a drugstore and that they would have to go to a local grocery store or a gas station to buy their cough, cold, or flu remedy really intrigues me. We should then be thinking about the reasons why most rural communities do not have a medical clinic or why they do not have a local pharmacy or drugstore within them. We're not graduating enough health professionals in this province, and we're not encouraging the ones who do graduate to practise or to set up shop in rural communities. We're not enticing them with any incentives whatsoever, and the bigger centres are more attractive, of course – Edmonton, Calgary, and Red Deer – and then the smaller communities are suffering. So maybe this is a discussion for another day where we should look at what we can do to attract and retain health professionals, top-notch practitioners, in rural Alberta, be it physicians and/or pharmacists.

Although I don't disagree with the amendment – I understand where they're coming from – I think it's just a statement that they didn't want to displease the grocery association, and I think that in doing so, they have sidetracked from the initial intent, which was basically to protect the public and to limit access to a precursor that is easily available and easily used to make crystal meth in people's

homes or kitchens or basements. I think that we would have been better served if we had kept the initial bill in its original format, which also included the multiple-ingredient preparations.

With that I would invite further debate and thank you for this opportunity.

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

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is with great pleasure that I rise to join the debate surrounding Bill 204 as it moves through Committee of the Whole. There is no doubt that the problem faced by Albertans and Canadians on the whole with respect to crystal meth is a large one. The highly addictive properties of the drug, coupled with the relative ease with which it is made and the low cost to purchase it, make this drug one of the most dangerous narcotics in circulation. It's certainly a problem in Drayton Valley, and I know that it's a problem in the hon. Member for West Yellowhead's riding as well, so I thank him for bringing this important bill forward.

Mr. Chairman, the effects of crystal meth are horrendous, rotting both the mind and the body. Any addiction has a negative effect on that person and on their family, but with this drug the effects seem to be magnified.

The proposed amendment to Bill 204 is one which makes a lot of sense. The changes which are proposed in the amendment to section 2 of the bill ensure that the Pharmacy and Drug (Methamphetamine Limiting) Amendment Act, 2005, will achieve the goal which it is intended for; that is, limiting access to ingredients used in the manufacture of crystal meth. As representatives of Albertans we have a responsibility and an obligation to address issues which have an effect on our province. This piece of legislation gives us another avenue to pursue the reduction of drug use in Alberta.

4:10

Also, the measures outlined in the amendments to Bill 204 will be an excellent fit with other programs which are in place to combat this awful drug. Mr. Chairman, at present there are programs in place which pursue other methods of addressing the problem of drug abuse in Alberta. These include addressing issues of education as well as treatment of those addicted to drugs. The government of Alberta, through AADAC, has long been involved in a variety of education programs informing Albertans of the dangers of drug use. I would argue that the function of these programs is very similar to what is being addressed by the amendments to Bill 204, and that is prevention.

Some of these programs specially target young Albertans. Recently AADAC has run a successful ad campaign featuring two different advertisements which highlight the consequences of using crystal meth. Having seen these ads, I can say that they address the issue in a straightforward and frank manner. It is acknowledged that the drug can bring positive feelings, which come with the high, but it then goes on to illustrate the side effects, and there are many and they are extremely negative. Educational tools such as these have a strong effect because they show Albertans what the true consequences of using crystal meth can be. By reducing access to the key ingredient of crystal meth, we can hopefully limit the amount of this drug being manufactured and thereby prevent more Albertans from becoming addicted to it.

On the other end of the spectrum from prevention is treatment, treatment of those who have become addicted to crystal meth and other drugs. This issue is also being addressed by the government through the auspices of AADAC. Earlier this month AADAC announced the opening of 24 new addiction treatment beds in the

province specifically targeted at youths. This expanded space will allow for treatment of higher numbers of youths in the province who have fallen prey to a drug addiction. While these beds are not specific to any one drug, increasing the province's capacity to deal with addiction will certainly help alleviate the impact that crystal meth has on our society.

Mr. Chairman, while the prevalence of this drug has not yet reached levels witnessed by some of the U.S. states, I believe that this means we have an opportunity to act and ensure that Alberta never sees those levels of use. The proposed amendments to Bill 204 take a proactive approach to addressing a part of the crystal meth issue. Any obstacle which can be thrown in front of those looking to produce methamphetamine provides us the opportunity to reduce the chances that another Albertan will become addicted to this drug.

A possible outcome of the increased barrier to the manufacture of crystal meth is a potential rise in the price of the drug. Now, this could happen through two ways, Mr. Chairman. First, in absolute terms the amendments to Bill 204 are designed to make the production of meth more difficult. This means that producers will need to charge more for their product, reducing one of the – and I use this word very loosely – attractive points of meth, which is of course the low cost.

Secondly, by reducing the amount of crystal meth being made, this will cause the price of the available drug to rise because there will be less of it. It's a simple case of supply and demand. Again, the higher price reduces the attractiveness of this drug and will hopefully act as a deterrent to those who are interested in obtaining this drug. By reducing access to the necessary ingredients used in making crystal meth, we can positively affect the amount of this drug in our society.

Mr. Chairman, I fully support the proposed amendments to Bill 204. They provide a common-sense approach to addressing the issue of crystal meth use and production in Alberta. Additionally, I support an amended Bill 204. This piece of legislation as amended will provide another deterrent to drug use in Alberta and is a good fit with current policies and programs addressing drug use in our province.

I would like to congratulate the Member for West Yellowhead on bringing forward this piece of legislation. Mr. Chairman, in closing I would invite all members on both sides of the Chamber to stand and support Bill 204, the Pharmacy and Drug (Methamphetamine Limiting) Amendment Act, 2005.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Please, if I could be reminded, are we speaking on the amendment or the bill?

The Deputy Chair: On the amendment.

Mr. Eggen: On the amendment still?

The Deputy Chair: Yes.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. I was wanting to speak on the bill actually.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Great.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's with pleasure that I rise today to continue debate on the amendment proposed to Bill

204, which ensures that it's more difficult to access an important precursor to methamphetamine. To set the record straight right from the start, I'd like to point out that while people commonly refer to crystal meth and methamphetamine synonymously, crystal meth is only one form of the drug. It's the smokable form.

Mr. Chairman, while individuals and society are quickly learning that meth is indeed extremely dangerous, public awareness surrounding it does continue to grow every day. And those are good things. We see it on television. News, specials, movies of the week: they highlight the devastating effect that substance abuse in general has on communities and families. As chair of AADAC I hear first-hand accounts all too regularly of how meth use has become a very serious problem for all kinds of Alberta communities: rural and urban, rich and poor.

I believe that there are two reasons for the rapid rise in meth use and production in Canada and the United States. The first is due to the actual nature of the drug: very highly addictive. The second is the relative ease with which this drug can be produced. It's this aspect of the drug that both the amendment and the bill itself seek to address. Anyone who has access to the Internet and possesses basic chemistry skills can make meth just about anywhere with supplies that are readily available at hardware and grocery stores. Mr. Chairman, the ease with which meth is produced is the reason why it is so important that this amendment proceed.

This amendment would elevate single-entity pseudoephedrine products to schedule 2 from their current unrestricted status. The elevation of pseudoephedrine to schedule 2 would mean that single-entity pseudoephedrine could only be sold by pharmacists and that those products would have to be kept out of public access areas in the pharmacy. In other words, products like Sudafed extra strength decongestant tablets would only be available behind the pharmacist's counter because it is a single-entity pseudoephedrine product. Bill 204 would then have the potential to limit public access to precursors used in the production of meth.

Although federal actions and regulations are making it more difficult to get large quantities of ephedrine, producers may turn to single-entity products like those with pseudoephedrine to make meth. The amendment would allow the Alberta government to act in a pre-emptive fashion and help prevent the production of meth by restricting access to one of its precursors. While the use of cold medication in the production of meth is currently limited, the potential exists for it to be expanded. So for obvious reasons it's extremely important that we not allow methamphetamine production to expand.

Mr. Chairman, the amendments proposed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead strike an important balance between protecting Albertans from the negative impacts of meth use and allowing them access to the medications that they need. However, they limit the availability of only single-entity products. The distinction between multi-entity and single-entity is very important.

The purpose of this bill is not to limit the legitimate use of cold medications. Bill 204 as originally proposed would have moved all products containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine behind the pharmacist's counter. At first glance this would not seem to be that great of a restriction. For example, any legitimate user of Sudafed or a similar product would likely not have a problem asking the pharmacist for such a product, while an illegitimate user would be less likely to ask for the product from a pharmacist since any request for a significant quantity of the product would likely draw suspicion. There's no significant difficulty for the legitimate user of cold and allergy medication.

However, this law would have prevented all multi-entity products containing pseudoephedrine from being sold in grocery or conve-

nience stores without pharmacies. While this may not seem like a major issue for the people of Calgary or Edmonton where 24-hour pharmacies are common, I can assure you that it would be a major issue for rural Albertans. I hear about it quite regularly. In rural Alberta during evenings and on weekends there's less access to pharmacy products. Grocery and convenience stores provide a vital link in helping rural Albertans to get relief until they're able to get proper medical attention.

4:20

Under the amendment proposed this afternoon, the medications that would still be available in convenience stores are multi-entity pseudoephedrine products. Mr. Chairman, as I alluded to earlier, the easiest and most common way of making meth, at least at the current time, involves using ephedrine. The second easiest way to produce this drug is through the use of single-entity products. The use of multi-entity products to produce methamphetamine is actually rare and represents the most difficult method of extracting the necessary precursors. These products do however provide Albertans with necessary relief from legitimate medical symptoms and, therefore, should continue to be available at all retailers.

In short, I believe that it would be unreasonable to restrict access to needed medications when that restriction would not likely result in the reduction of methamphetamine production. Albertans should have reasonable access to multi-entity pseudoephedrine products so that if they don't feel well in the evening, they can purchase medications to relieve their symptoms until they have a chance to go to the doctor. From a rural perspective this amendment makes complete sense. It seeks to ensure that Albertans can access medication while limiting the ability of those who seek pseudoephedrine for illicit purposes to gain access to large quantities of this product.

Mr. Chairman, this amendment reflects a commitment that I've seen recently in this House towards ensuring that Albertans and their children are protected from drug abuse, including the use of methamphetamine. If successful, this bill will join with the initiatives proposed in Bill 202 and pave the way for Alberta to be a leader in protecting children from substance abuse.

At a recent ministerial meeting I attended in Regina in June, ministers from western Canada agreed to work together on the meth issue in an attempt to stop the abuse of this drug. The amendment to Bill 204 supports that objective and all of the others that were laid out in the ministerial communiqués produced at that meeting.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 204 as amended will take a significant step forward in limiting the production and use of methamphetamine. By taking a comprehensive approach to this emerging issue, I believe we're making significant progress towards AADAC's goal of an Alberta free from the harmful effects of substance abuse.

I urge all members to support this amendment from the hon. Member for West Yellowhead and to support Bill 204. I believe we owe it to the future generations of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, did you want to speak on the amendment?

Mr. Chase: Yes. Hopefully, it's to the amendment. I would like to ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed how many staffed AADAC beds we have in total throughout the province now that the 24 additional beds have been added.

The Deputy Chair: I believe you are wanting to kind of rise like we do under Standing Order 29(2)(a). That doesn't apply, but the hon.

member may be able to participate later on because at committee there's no limit on the number of times you can stand.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The chair will recognize the hon. member, if he so chooses.

At this time the chair recognizes the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Lougheed: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to join this debate on the amendment to Bill 204 that's currently before us. The Member for West Yellowhead has sponsored a valid amendment to the original bill that was put forward. As amended, this bill would make it more difficult to obtain single-entity pseudoephedrine products by reclassifying these drugs as schedule 2 drugs under the Pharmacy and Drug Act. As I am sure we have heard, but it's certainly worth repeating, schedule 2 drugs are sold behind the counter in a licensed pharmacy or an institution's pharmacy.

Now, when this legislation came forward, it afforded me the opportunity to question pharmacists and other professionals and discuss their view of the problem. That discussion has also given me insight into what I perceive is their view of this proposed amendment. After all, it's the pharmacists who work on the front lines and would be most affected by this legislation. The amendment is putting single-entity pseudoephedrine products behind their counter and in their control. They would be responsible for releasing them at their discretion to the general public.

Pharmacists have been asked what they thought about the proposed amendment to put single-entity pseudoephedrine products behind the counter, and these pharmacists, most concerned about Albertans and their ability to keep Albertans safe and informed about their health and their medication, have discussed it with me at some length. One of the first points the pharmacists all made was that they have already voluntarily moved single-entity pseudoephedrine products behind the counter. The reason they gave for this is that the Alberta College of Pharmacists, the body to which all Alberta pharmacists both belong and answer to, requested exactly that. I understand also that in June of 2004 pharmacies voluntarily relocated single-entity pseudoephedrine products to behind the counter at the request of the Alberta College of Pharmacists.

One of the pharmacists referred to other jurisdictions as another reason to voluntarily move their products, stating that recently both Manitoba and Saskatchewan have announced legislation requiring pharmacies to relocate single-entity pseudoephedrine products to behind the counter. The pharmacists thought it appropriate that even if there was not similar legislation in Alberta, the practice should be recommended so as to prevent someone, say, from the Saskatchewan side of Lloydminster visiting the Alberta side and buying the products off the shelf here in Alberta. That was an example given as quite possible.

Though I understand that Bill 204 is necessary, I was extremely pleased to hear that pharmacies across the province and the Alberta College of Pharmacists are already taking action. In fact, Mr. Chairman, one of the pharmacists mentioned earlier that the national chain that he works for has made the decision to voluntarily move all single-entity pseudoephedrine products behind the counter in all of their pharmacies across all of Canada. This is good news, of course, and I'd hope that all members would support this legislation if for the sole reason to ensure that Alberta regulations fall in line with what happens in other parts of this country. They have already done this voluntarily in large measure.

Mr. Chairman, when an Albertan walks into a pharmacy, they need to feel that they are being provided with accurate and safe

information. I've been reminded by the pharmacists that their first and primary concern is the well-being of their patients, and they agree that if they were to allow the sale of single-entity pseudoephedrine products to customers without ensuring that the customer was informed and the use was safe, then they would not be doing their job. As a matter of fact, one pharmacist stated her concern as follows, and I quote: does the proliferation of crystal meth go against the well-being of my patients? Yes. End of quote. It is apparent that pharmacists are doing what they can to ensure that single-entity pseudoephedrine products stay out of the hands of those interested in abusing them for the purpose of making crystal meth.

Pharmacists did raise some concerns, however. I think their concerns are valid, and they need to be discussed to ensure that we as a Legislature are doing all that we can to stop the proliferation of crystal meth. They felt that although increasing the restriction on single-entity pseudoephedrine products will help to reduce the crystal meth problem, it's a long way from making it go away. They referred to this legislation as a single step in what would be a very long trip. I share that opinion as well. Crystal meth is a monster hazard. It's consuming the lives of our youth, and it's growing worse. We can't solve this issue overnight, but we have to ensure that as members of this Legislature of this great province we do everything we can in our power to limit the access to the chemicals needed to produce crystal meth. As long as we view this amendment as part of a larger solution, then we are headed in the right direction, but we still have quite a long way to go.

4:30

Another concern pharmacists have shared is the fact that the majority of crystal meth is not being made with off-the-shelf pseudoephedrine; rather, it is coming from chemical wholesalers via the Internet and even mail distribution. In fact, the pharmacists I talked to made the observation that since they voluntarily pulled all single-entity pseudoephedrine products off the shelf and put them behind the counter, they have not noticed any increase or any additional inquiries for its sale.

We can't look at this proposed amendment as a solution, and certainly we can't sweep the whole problem under the rug. We as representatives and legislators must find alternative and innovative solutions to win the battle against drugs like crystal meth. The pharmacists I talked to concerning the proposed amendment were guardedly optimistic. They liked that this legislation would bring a standard that's in conjunction with the volunteer efforts currently taking place, and we would in reality be raising the bar to where the Alberta College of Pharmacists have already placed it. However, they were concerned that MLAs would step back, thinking that all that can be done has been done. Mr. Chairman, I assured anyone I talked to that we would not take that approach.

Mr. Chairman, we need to assure Alberta's youth and their parents that we are doing everything we can to protect them from crystal meth and, for that matter, other illicit drugs. So I encourage all members to support this proposed amendment and continue to support the battle against crystal meth.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Blakeman: On the amendment?

The Deputy Chair: On the amendment.

Mr. Johnson: On the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure of mine to rise today and contribute to the discussion on

the amendment for Bill 204, Pharmacy and Drug (Methamphetamine Limiting) Amendment Act. First, if I could, I wish to thank the hon. Member for West Yellowhead for his leadership in introducing this most important bill. The issue of methamphetamine abuse is a real concern, and this bill is a part of a series of measures targeting that abuse.

Crystal methamphetamine, also known as jib, crank, meth, crystal, ice, or speed, is a synthetically produced drug that directly alters the hormonal regulations of the central nervous system. What is most disturbing regarding crystal methamphetamine is the simplicity of how it is composed. Should you or I, Mr. Chairman, pay a visit to a local drug store, we could easily obtain the most critical ingredients to produce crystal meth. It is this very fact that Bill 204 combats.

Bill 204, coupled with the amendment that I rise to speak to today, is a first attainable step in limiting the availability of pseudoephedrine containing medicinal drugs and its salts by reclassifying the drugs as schedule 2 drugs under the Pharmacy and Drug Act. What this reclassification does is remove these medications from public access, where there is minute purchasing tracking, and places them behind the counter, where the purchase of pseudoephedrine medicines may be observed and regulated by pharmacists.

To understand how important this measure is, Mr. Chairman, we must understand the severity of crystal meth abuse itself. In all frankness, the realities surrounding this specific drug are startling, and its effects on society and individuals are quite simply frightening. Production labs for crystal meth synthesis are so makeshift and simplistic in nature that they have been found in homes, apartments, hotels, vehicles, and warehouses.

Further, the production of crystal methamphetamine is a highly toxic process. Chemicals used in its production are corrosive, explosive, flammable, toxic, and can cause major environmental harm in addition to posing serious health and public safety concerns. In fact, Mr. Chairman, for every one pound of methamphetamine produced, an average of five or six pounds of toxic chemical waste is produced. As startling as this might be, one has yet to even scratch the surface of the horrors that crystal meth evokes.

Posing another great risk to individuals is the ambiguity revolving around the toxicity of the drug. No matter how seasoned a user, it is difficult, in fact impossible, to know the exact strength of the drug or what dangerous chemicals it is being cut with even when buying from a familiar supplier. The resulting effects after one consumes crystal meth are limitless. Even in small amounts one may feel increased wakefulness, increased heart rate and respiration, decreased appetite, excessive talking, and increased body temperature. Users may also experience tremors, mental confusion, hyperthermia, convulsions, insomnia, irritability, aggression, and chest pain, also hypertension, and cardiovascular collapse. The list continues, Mr. Chairman.

Users rapidly develop a strong pattern of psychological dependence in which the next use is typically larger than the last. Psychological effects include memory loss, hallucinations, paranoia, mood disturbance, repetitive behaviours, and formication. Overdosing can cause delusions, seizures, stroke, heart failure, coma, and even death.

Police in rural cities, towns, and villages primarily in the northern area of the province, including right here in Edmonton, have identified the use and manufacturing of methamphetamine as a growing and immediate problem. The abuse of crystal methamphetamine is indiscriminate to the provincial boundary. As a response to this, western ministers responsible for health, justice, and public safety met in Regina on June 10 of this year to discuss a western interprovincial and interterritorial approach. The result of that meeting is the amendment that we are discussing today.

My support for this amendment is in effect two-tiered. The first tier of my support stems from what this move will accomplish in the fight against crystal methamphetamine. This amendment removes pseudoephedrine from the public store shelf and places them behind the counter under the control and supervision of pharmacists. Not only will this move act as a significant deterrent to one wishing to use pseudoephedrine for illegal purposes, but it will also equip drugstore personnel with the ability to more closely monitor the purchasing patterns of patrons. Red flags, Mr. Chairman, will be able to be determined more easily and reported to the proper authorities.

The second tier of my support is based on the effectiveness that this amendment will create. The interprovincial and interterritorial approach represents a powerful tool in reducing the prevalence of crystal meth in our province and is the first real, tangible mechanism that we have had to do so.

Mr. Chairman, perhaps what is most solidifying for me in my support of this amendment is to hear the personal stories of people whose lives have been torn apart by crystal meth abuse. In a documentary originally aired on March 23, 2005, on *The Fifth Estate*, viewers were introduced to a young girl who at the age of 13 became addicted to crystal meth. This young girl, now 16, who is just beginning to free herself from her addiction, described one night in which she overdosed on meth. She said: "I ended up outside in the rain. I had frostbitten feet. I was talking to people I thought were there, but they actually weren't there." Another young individual in this documentary had been addicted to crystal meth for five years. He said: "The dark side is when it takes control of you. You don't choose when you do it. It chooses you and pretty much isolates you. I have so much potential, but I'm slowly drifting further and further away from it."

4:40

Mr. Chairman, as a province and we as its leaders must do everything we can to ensure that this isolation and loss of potential as described is kept at bay. It is in this light that I support this amendment as an important tool in the fight against the resurgence of crystal meth. I not only ask my colleagues, but I also urge them for their support of this amendment. We must seize this opportunity to deliver a solid blow to this stunningly disturbing addiction.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. In considering what is proposed in this amendment that has been brought forward by the same member who proposed the bill, what I keep seeing is that the government and this government member keep making choices that are easy but not right. They're ineffective choices. We know that the problem here is not one of supply; it's one of demand. This bill does nothing to deal with what drives that demand. Nothing.

On the other end of it, what are we dealing with here? What's everybody complaining about? What are the effects that people have been now talking about for an hour and a half? They're talking about a need for treatment, and what the effect of this bill is on somebody. There's nothing in this bill that addresses treatment at all.

Let's face it. To actually be able to cook a good batch of meth, you need boxes and boxes and boxes and boxes of this, so changing this to an over-the-counter deal is not going to substantially alter what's going on here. You know, you are not getting people going in and purchasing 30 boxes of Sudafed or NyQuil or something with

this active drug in it in order to cook meth. They might be going to several different pharmacies in an urban area and getting six boxes at each, but frankly, we've got to give the pharmacists a bit of credit here. They know what's going on in their stores. They're already watching. Most of them are already running voluntary programs.

The Pharmacists Association I think has a voluntary code that they're already working with that lays out that they need to be watching for this kind of thing and being involved in public education strategies. So they can already see when you've got a customer coming in and purchasing a number of units of boxes of pills for this and are likely, probably, already communicating with their local police detachment about that if they see it happening.

You know, once again I watch this government see a problem develop. Do they actually take steps that are going to address the problem or make a significant dent in it? No. What I see them doing – and yet again this is a perfect example – is pass off the responsibility to somebody else. Who's responsible for this? It's the pharmacists. The pharmacists are going to be the ones on whose backs this whole scheme rides.

Whether it's just the active ingredients here or whether they're composite drugs that are available, which the amendment is dealing with, that we won't deal with the multi-ingredient products and we will only put pure products behind really doesn't significantly matter because the government, this private member that is a member on the government side have not dealt with anything that is going to reduce the demand for this. Certainly, I've heard it repeated on this side with opposition members saying: "What are you doing? What strategies, what initiatives are out there to reduce the demand?" Without reducing that demand, this is a nod; this is a tip of the hat. This will not be effective in reducing the crystal meth problem that we have.

You know, I look across Canada and say: "Okay. What is everybody else doing here?" Well, we've got Alberta considering it. Manitoba and Saskatchewan have already limited the access and made it a schedule 2 or essentially made it that you have to purchase it over the counter. Therefore, you have to talk to the pharmacist, which frankly is a good thing because when the pharmacist gets involved, there's an opportunity for additional counselling and for the pharmacist to get a better idea of who they're dealing with and to be more alert for problems.

Again, we've got to give the pharmacists as a profession some credit here about being able to do their job. When I look at the crystal meth strategy in B.C., for example, it's working in partnership with the federal government, the College of Pharmacists, and the Pharmacy Association to control access. They're looking for bulk sales. They're looking for theft of cold medications. If there's a pattern, then they're following up on it.

The strategic plan for crystal meth and other amphetamines in Saskatchewan, 2004, is around a comprehensive alcohol and drug strategy developed by Saskatchewan Health. I mean, we've got absolute piecemeal happening, and this amendment is a perfect example of that: let's just throw one or two things at it; let's make it somebody else's problem and hope this all works. Well, it's not going to. The Ontario Pharmacists' Association has launched an awareness campaign at teaching pharmacists and the public about the threat of the drug, and it's meant to alert pharmacy staff to unusual purchases. Now, that's the kind of thing, you know, I'm talking about. They're already doing that in a lot of places. They're catching onto it in other places.

But whether what's being proposed by this member is really going to be effective in what we're trying to do, I have to say no. Am I going to vote against this bill? Probably not because it's harmless in itself, I suppose, except that once again it puts the onus on a group

of people that didn't ask for this. This will have a cost for pharmacists. Will it drive them out of business? No, not likely. But it will be a cost for them. Once again the government, who's responsible for this issue and for developing a strategy and some concrete actions to deal with it, off-loads onto another group of people, who not only have to integrate it and produce something, but they've got the additional cost of building new shelves behind their counters on which to stock this product, maybe additional staff because they're now going to have to deal with everybody that comes forward looking for this.

My colleague rightly talked about rural health strategies and people's access in rural areas to these perfectly legal products. Will this stop someone who is really determined to get hold of it? No, it won't because, as I said, they'll shop around. They'll get three boxes from here and four boxes from there and six boxes from there, and they'll just keep going. Now, harder to do in the rural areas because, as my colleague from Edmonton-McClung pointed out, they're likely having to go and get cold remedies from the local gas station or from the grocery store because they don't have access to pharmacies in every small town anymore.

I'm just really disappointed at how ineffective this strategy is. I know that there have been a lot of government members get up and speak at length to it today, but really if that same political will had been put into a strategy to actually deal with decreasing the demand of it by looking at some activities for people to get involved with so that they aren't looking to drugs as an amusement, as a way to break the monotony of their life and of their existence, that would have been far more productive. Once again, the government member that's proposing this bill is doing the easy thing, not the right thing, and frankly it's ineffective.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to speak to the amendment proposed by the Member for West Yellowhead. I think this amendment is reasonable, and I hope that each member present here today understands the reason for it.

As we've all heard, crystal meth is horrible. It is one of the most brutal drugs that have beset our communities. I know that there are plenty of drugs that we must all be aware of, drugs that are harmful to our children, and I think crystal meth is the most harmful of them all. I believe this is because it is not a drug that is imported from the fields of Colombia or cooked by experts in intricate labs. Rather, this drug can be made and is made by the most innocuous group. It doesn't take much to cook up crystal meth in one's basement, barn, or living room, and it is in these places where the drug is being made. I think that is a point that needs to be hammered home here today. This stuff is easily made, and we as legislators need to do our best to change that. This is where the amendment introduced today comes in.

4:50

As has been mentioned time and time again, the amendment puts single-entity pseudoephedrine products behind the counter in pharmacies across Alberta. This, Mr. Chairman, is important. The reason that we have crystal meth being cooked in basements, barns, and living rooms is because the ingredients are extremely easy to find. We have heard during debate how easy it is to find the recipes to make crystal meth by simply doing a search on the World Wide Web.

What I think has been overlooked a little bit is that not only are the instructions readily available online, but so are the ingredients.

Some may ask: what are the ingredients to make crystal meth? Well, after a quick search on the Internet, it is found that there are only three main ingredients that are needed to make this horrible drug: pseudoephedrine, iodine crystal, and red phosphorus. Now, red phosphorus is a very easily attainable substance because it is found in all strike pads on matchbooks. In my opinion, there is no possible way that we can limit this. It would be much too difficult to outlaw matchbooks without appearing ridiculously heavy-handed, so that part will remain easily obtainable.

Iodine, another ingredient, is watched and regulated by the federal government, and if large quantities are attempted to be bought, it is usually flagged. Iodine crystals can also be found in bottles of iodine tincture, which many farmers use for horses with problems with their hooves. It is easy enough to buy, and our farmers use it quite often, so regulating that more than it already is may also be too difficult to do.

However, the third and most important part of meth-making is the pseudoephedrine, which is found in many cold medications and is currently unregulated. This is the ingredient which is the most important to meth. This is the part of the meth equation that must be regulated more strictly because without this ingredient it is nearly impossible to make crystal meth.

Mr. Chairman, that is what this amendment is trying to accomplish today. The amendment before the Committee of the Whole ensures that all of those single-entity pseudoephedrine products will be put in an area where only those who need it will be able to access it. We are taking this drug and putting at least some restrictions on it.

Pseudoephedrine is only part of the crystal meth formula that is essential. By passing this amendment today, I think that we will be able to limit the access to this key ingredient. I think that it is important to recognize that this law is probably not going to rid our province of crystal meth. However, what it may do is ensure that the labs that are found in the basements, barns, and living rooms are few and far between. That is what we must focus on.

As I outlined some of the key ingredients of meth earlier in my remarks, I hope that members noticed that they weren't highly expensive products. In fact, I've been told that you can make this drug for very little money. This is why it is so attractive, as many different groups of people are able to make and access this drug.

Mr. Chairman, we must hope that this bill will cause some change within our communities. It is my hope that this step we are taking today will make access to crystal meth much more difficult. The more difficult it is to make, the more expensive I think it will become. The more expensive it becomes, the less it will be used. If we can lessen the use, we should be able to combat addictions a little easier. I believe this amendment is going to go a long way in accomplishing what we wish. I think today we will take a step forward in the fight against crystal meth. I urge all hon. members to vote in favour of the amendment here today.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is a great pleasure to join the debate on Bill 204, the Pharmacy and Drug (Methamphetamine Limiting) Amendment Act, 2005, sponsored by the Member for West Yellowhead. As amended, Bill 204 would move single-entity pseudoephedrine products behind the pharmacy counter. This amendment and this legislation are long overdue.

The Alberta College of Pharmacists, businesses and pharmacists themselves, have been voluntarily moving single-entity pseudoephedrine products behind the counters. We've heard

examples of this happening in Alberta, but it is also happening in other jurisdictions across North America.

For example, in April of this year the Target chain of stores in the United States announced that they would move all product containing pseudoephedrine behind the pharmacy counter. Additionally, the chain of stores also stated that in stores where there is no pharmacy, products containing pseudoephedrine would not be sold. Although some government jurisdictions had previously enacted legislation concerning the access to pseudoephedrine products, Target referred to itself as the first national retailer to voluntarily decide to place pseudoephedrine-based cough, cold, and allergy products behind the pharmacy counter. Target also stated that consumers who purchase products containing pseudoephedrine would continue to be limited to two packages per transaction or to more stringent restrictions as required by the local law.

In the United States the practice of moving pseudoephedrine products behind the counter began in April 2004. The approximately \$2 billion over-the-counter cold, allergy, and sinus tablet category got a wake-up call when Oklahoma ordered that items containing the ingredient pseudoephedrine be removed from shelves and placed behind the pharmacy counters. Since then, several municipalities and states have passed or are considering legislation regarding the sale of pseudoephedrine products.

In fact, Mr. Chairman, at the same time that Target was announcing its new policy towards pseudoephedrine products, there were a number of other large consumer chain stores doing the same. In the span of one week Longs Drugs, Albertsons, and Wal-Mart each announced plans to move pseudoephedrine products behind the counter. In addition, Safeway has a policy limiting the sale of cold medications containing pseudoephedrine to three packets at a time. In that week alone 1,330 Target stores, 472 Longs Drugs stores, 2,000 Albertsons stores, and 4,000 Wal-Mart stores moved to limit access to pseudoephedrine products.

The trend followed into August, when Walgreens announced it would move all products containing pseudoephedrine, including liquids and gels, behind the pharmacy counter. Prior to that, for more than three years Walgreens had voluntarily placed limits exceeding those imposed by most of the state laws on the purchase of pseudoephedrine and other over-the-counter medication. Mr. Chairman, this was a substantial move as the Walgreens company in the United States is the largest drugstore chain, with fiscal 2004 sales of \$37.5 billion. The company operated 4,859 stores in 45 states and Puerto Rico. When the largest drugstore chain in the United States jumps on board, it is time for the rest of the continent to jump on board as well.

These are examples, and it's quite an accomplishment and proof positive that by accepting the proposed amendment and passing this legislation, we are doing the right thing.

Colorado's attorney general John Suthers commented on the voluntary actions. I would like to share those comments with the House today. He stated:

The scourge of methamphetamine labs in Colorado has reached dangerous levels. In many cases, the labs pose a danger not only to users but also to innocent children and neighbors. I am pleased that Target and Albertsons have volunteered to put certain medicines used to manufacture meth behind the counter in an effort to discourage their purchase by illicit manufacturers.

He continued by mentioning that

state officials in Oklahoma credit a state law, which moved certain non-prescription drugs containing pseudoephedrine behind the counter, with an eighty per cent decrease in meth lab seizures. In light of this evidence, I encourage other retailers in Colorado to consider following the lead of Target and Albertsons.

That was a quote from the Attorney General. An 80 per cent

decrease, Mr. Chairman – 80 per cent – is a substantial step in the right direction. We may see the same type of result here, or we may not, but it is worth a try.

5:00

To ensure that the quoted statistic of 80 per cent was accurate, I found an ABC news report which discussed the history of this policy in the U.S.A. I would like to share that as well. The report stated that Oregon and Oklahoma have been among the most aggressive states in fighting meth production in smaller labs. In Oregon the law enforcement official asked the advice of meth dealers, users, and smurfers about what would work to slow down the production of meth. For clarification, Mr. Chairman, smurfers are the people who go from one store to another buying Sudafed or other pseudoephedrine-based products for cooks. The answer provided to the question is as follows: making pseudoephedrine hard to get would cripple small-time operators. As a result, in 2001 state legislation was drafted that would do just that, but the bill was quashed due in large part to extensive lobbying by the pharmaceutical industry.

Then in 2003 an Oklahoma police officer was shot and killed by a meth addict during a routine traffic stop, and that was impetus for an Oklahoma law passed in 2004 restricting the sale of products containing pseudoephedrine. Those medicines are now sold from behind the pharmacy counter, and people have to show ID to the pharmacist, who also keeps a monthly record of individual purchases.

According to Oklahoma's drug task force, that move has been a major victory on the war on meth. Local law enforcement saw results immediately, including an immediate 50 per cent reduction in meth labs. According to Oklahoma's drug task force, since the law was passed, there has been an 80 per cent to 90 per cent reduction in meth lab seizures plus the state has seen fewer meth-related cases being handled by child welfare and other social service programs.

Mr. Chairman, Oregon and more than 30 other states have adopted laws restricting the sale of pseudoephedrine, but the law enforcement officials readily admit that shutting down domestic labs has not kept anyone from getting meth. What they found is that the demand is being met by trafficking from other states or Mexico, but they still call the restriction successful to the welfare of the state. What they don't have are the deathtrap labs, destruction of property, and danger to children at risk.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the voluntary and legislative examples I have provided show that this kind of legislation works. It is not a complete solution, but it is a long step in the right direction. I urge all members to support the proposed amendment and support the amended version of Bill 204.

I would like to call the question, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Any other speakers on the amendment?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: On the bill itself, the hon. Member for West-Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. At this time I'd like to sort of answer a couple of questions from the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, the Member for Edmonton-McClung, and the Member for Edmonton-Centre. Pseudoephedrine is the main ingredient. I've talked to a detective with the Edmonton Police Service, and I've talked with the head of the RCMP, and they're

telling me that if we get this precursor handled by the pharmacists, we'll be moving a long step forward because 95 per cent of all crystal meth labs are made by the ma-and-pa scenario. Only 5 per cent is made by the huge organized crime.

Then I guess the other thing is that I've talked with the pharmacists and explained this to them. They understand that it's going to take some time to move this. A majority of them are willing. I've also talked with retail Alberta, retail British Columbia, retail Canada. They're a little concerned, if we move it to a schedule 2, for the simple reason that it'll take it out of some of the smaller retailers.

Let me just explain this one thing. A friend of mine is a pharmacist, and he was in Edson one day at a local store, not a drugstore, and while he was in the store, he watched a young man walk in, grab a handful of pseudoephedrine cold medicine, buy them all from a clerk, and then walk out. The pharmacist went up to the clerk and said: "Why did you sell all those? You know what he's going to use that for." She said: "Well, what do I do? I can't stop him from buying this product that the store sells." She was correct. She has no right not to sell these products to whoever wishes to buy them, even though it was clear to my pharmacist friend that the product was most likely going to be used for crystal meth.

With this bill amended, I hope we'll be able to move on, and we'll never have to have this clerk sort of second-guess. We'll secure the products where our pharmacists can keep tabs on who's buying them. The pharmacists want – and they've stated it through the Health Professions Act – to be involved more with the aspects of helping the total health scenario work with the health programs that we're doing. So here's a chance. I'm sure that they'll be working with all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I've spent most of my teaching career working with junior high students, who are the most vulnerable to drug addictions through peer pressure, through the desire to experiment, the desire to set themselves apart or in many cases just be a member of the group. I've also worked locally in my constituency with police and social workers with a particular young offender who was expelled from two of the schools in my constituency and for a number of months afterwards had an online drug availability, complete with pictures, of the types of drugs that you could get if you simply contacted him. So I'm extremely concerned about limiting access to any of the products that would contribute to the creation of crystal meth. This is part of the solution.

My question that I had hoped to address earlier possibly – I don't see the Member for Calgary-Lougheed. I'm trying to get a sense as to how things are improving. I know that we've recently added 24 more AADAC beds, which have been split between Edmonton and Calgary. If anyone can provide me with the answer as to how many beds – oh, I see the Member for Calgary-Lougheed returning. I would like to have a sense as to how many AADAC beds there are in total that can be used to treat currently addicted crystal meth users. Can any member provide me with an answer to this? Has there been any noticeable decline in the number of drug-related apprehensions since the five-day detox meth act was passed or since the commercials have been broadcast? I know it's very early on in the process, but I'd like to get sort of almost an interim report card suggesting: are we making progress? I would hope very much that we are. This is a terrible drug, and various other members have explained how it has affected their constituents.

What I'm basically looking for is: is this watered-down, five-day

detox from the initial Bill 202 having, from the intended 90-day institutionalization, the desired anti drug addiction effect? Limiting the product is a good first step, but treating those who are already under its influence has to be part of the entire program.

If anyone can provide me with those answers or details, I'd very much appreciate it. Thank you.

5:10

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to join in the debate on Bill 204 as amended. Although I understand that Bill 204 is necessary, I was extremely pleased to hear from the Member for Strathcona that pharmacists have taken action.

You know, colleagues, crystal meth is a deadly drug. It's consuming the lives of youth all across this country. We can't solve this issue overnight, but we have to ensure that we as legislators do everything in our power to limit access to the chemicals needed to produce crystal meth. As long as we view this bill as part of a larger solution, then we're headed in the right direction, but we have a long way to go.

The fact that the majority of crystal meth is not being made with off-the-shelf pseudoephedrine but, rather, that it's coming from the chemical wholesalers via Internet or mail distribution is another concern which was raised by previous speakers. Again, Mr. Chairman, crystal meth or any other drug will always find a way to terrorize our youth. If it's not crystal meth, it'll be something else, something newer and something more serious. We cannot look at the proposed bill as a solution. We cannot sweep this problem under the rug. We as leaders must find alternative, innovative solutions to win the battle against drugs like crystal meth.

I remember a time when marijuana was the most serious thing out there. Boy, what I'd give to have marijuana as our greatest disadvantage to today's youth. Now we're hearing that the feds want to legalize it. I find it rather disturbing that as we sit here and discuss how we're going to prevent the children of Alberta from falling victim to crystal meth, the federal government is making a move to legalize drugs.

An Hon. Member: We don't have a federal government any more.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, I understand that we don't have a federal government right now, but we will have again.

Mr. Chairman, until we can remind Alberta's youth that they do not need artificial substances to enjoy a state of abstracted musing or daydreaming, we need to ensure that we're doing everything we can to protect them from crystal meth or any other serious illicit drugs.

I encourage all my colleagues and members of this Assembly to support Bill 204. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, it's 5:14. I could recognize you, but I'd have to interrupt at the same time.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2), which provides for the Committee of the Whole to rise and report no later than 5:15 p.m. on Monday afternoons, I must now put the following question: shall progress on the bill be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 204.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration Bill 204. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 204.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

By way of information, hon. members, the federal vote was 171 to 133, and the federal government has fallen.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On that historic notation of yours, I would move that we now call it 5:30, repair to our televisions and see what's going on in Ottawa, and reconvene here at 8 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:17 p.m.]

