

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, March 6, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/03/06

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for the bounty of our province, our land, our resources, and our people. We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Hon. members and to our guests here today, would you please join in the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Would you kindly participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly His Excellency Dr. Musaed Al-Haroun, the ambassador of Kuwait to Canada. His Excellency is accompanied by the Kuwaiti ambassador's third secretary, Mr. Al-Kulaib. The ambassador is on his first official visit to Alberta. His Excellency has had a very busy schedule with courtesy calls on the hon. Premier and my cabinet colleagues and the MLA for Calgary-East.

Alberta's exports to Kuwait reached over \$40 million in 2005, consisting mostly of oil and gas machinery and agricultural products. There has been increasing contact between Alberta and Kuwait. This summer Kuwaiti oil companies will meet with their Alberta counterparts at energy conferences in Houston and Calgary. In the meantime, I'd ask our honoured visitors, who are seated in your gallery, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce Shanly Donahue. Shanly and her husband, Jack Donahue, are close friends to Colleen and me and, of course, are close to many members of the government caucus. Shanly is a proud Albertan and active in her community, and I'm honoured to have her join us today. She's seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that the Assembly please join me in giving her the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 26 enthusiastic grade 6 students along with their teachers Ms Nancy Ellestad and assistant Maria Flammia and parent helpers Donna McLean and Colleen Smith. They are from the Archbishop Joseph MacNeil school in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. They're here today to observe and learn with keen interest about our government, although I understood from the question time I had with them earlier day that they've learned about government very thoroughly both from their teachers and through the tour that they had today at the Legislature. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members assembled two residents of Strathcona constituency who are seated in your gallery. They are Frank and Adele Peters, who are the proud parents of page Robyn Peters, who is a student at Ardrossan junior/senior high school. I'd ask Mr. and Mrs. Peters to please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Carter Snethun, who is seven years old and just yesterday received the Great Kids award. Carter is accompanied today by his parents, his grandparents, and his sister. When Carter heard about a family in need, he decided to do something about it. The family was staying in Edmonton to be by their baby, who had just received life-saving open-heart surgery. The family needed \$1,000 to make a trip home for Christmas. Carter sold his and his sister's artwork to raise the funds and in three weeks raised over \$3,500. Carter isn't big in stature, but he's big in the hearts of all Albertans. They are seated today in the members' gallery. I would ask that Carter and his family stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce some incredibly talented and hard-working individuals who are here in recognition of National Social Work Week, from March 5 to 11. It is my distinct pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature social workers from the Ministry of Children's Services. My guests are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, and it's my honour to introduce Brenda Mazurek, Edward Garrick, Denine Kalita, Judy Pearce, Morris Chaban, Fran Champagne, Janice Adamson, Debbie Osbaldeston, Clay Golden, Cathie Aquirre, Dinah Weeks, Rod Adachi, and Guy Quenneville. Also supporting Social Worker Week is Gord Johnston, the CEO for the Edmonton and area child and family services authority. I'll ask my guests to stand and receive the warm welcome.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 26 of the best and brightest grade 6 students in Alberta. They're from Meadowlark elementary school. They are

accompanied by their teacher, Ms Moreau, and two parent helpers, Mrs. Kaliel and Ms Mack. They're here for a week in the School at the Legislature program, which, I must say, is an outstanding program. They're in the public gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm reception of all MLAs.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a friend and assistant, Marj Carroll. Marj is an assistant in the Edmonton-Mill Woods constituency office. I'd like to ask her to stand, and I'd like to ask all members of the Assembly to give her our warm traditional welcome.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a huge group, 70 students from Meyonohk elementary school in my riding accompanied by their teachers Mr. David Fairfield and Mr. Victor Wang and parents Mrs. Chan, Mrs. Hai, and Mr. Chan. This is a Chinese/English bilingual school program established over 20 years ago. They are all sitting in both the public and members' galleries. I want to thank them for coming to the Legislature. I request them to please rise and receive a warm and traditional welcome.

1:40

Now it's my second group introduction. Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise again to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Dr. Aman Khanna, visiting from England, U.K. He is here to check out the Alberta health care system. I want to thank him for coming to the Legislature. He is sitting in the public gallery with my son, Ricky Agnihotri. He has a master's in public health. I request both of them to please rise and receive a warm and traditional welcome.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Sharla Ozeroff, my constituency assistant in St. Albert, who is well known in northern Alberta as one of the best hockey referees we have. Would you please rise? Welcome to the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a young lady who is the newest member of the Official Opposition staff. Her name is Kelly FitzGibbon. She is seated in the public gallery. She is joining us to perform admin support duties. I would ask Kelly to please stand and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to rise and introduce someone who is well known to members of this Assembly, but I want to introduce him today in his capacity

as vice-chair of the board of governors of the University of Alberta and head of their strategic planning. Mr. Brian Heidecker is with us in the members' gallery. I can say to the House that we've relied on Brian to head up a committee for us in terms of the access to the future fund and help us design a report around how we put the regulations in place. He has done strategic planning with the University of Alberta and, generally, has helped to advance education in Alberta. I'd like members to give him a warm welcome.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Health Care Reform

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last 13 years at least 10 different deputy ministers have presided over a health department so dysfunctional that after commissioning over 20 different reports, symposiums, summits, frameworks, plans, and initiatives, they still appear to be stopped at step 1. These reports include in 2006 the health policy framework; in 2005 the health reform implementation; in 2000 We Are Listening, Here's What We've Heard; and on and on and on. My questions are to the Premier. How many tens of millions of dollars has your government spent producing these numerous reports, symposiums, summits, frameworks, plans, and initiatives going all the way back to 1993?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I don't have that information.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: after spending 13 years and millions, probably tens of millions of dollars on these reports and plans and initiatives, why does the most recent one have as action 1, "Put an overall health policy in place"? Surely, after 20 reports there's a health policy for this province.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, much of the health policy has been implemented. Some has yet to be implemented. What we see in the policy is a proposal that is now under public consultation, and we will take the public's feedback into account, as we will the Liberal opposition's feedback and the NDs' feedback and the Alliance's.

I'm glad to see that our proposed reforms have sparked what I think is a needed debate about health care in Canada. I see that the federal Minister of Health was speaking about our proposed reforms on CTV and agrees that this kind of debate is good. I also see that the Montreal Economic Institute has waded into the debate and has said that there is absolutely nothing illegal about opting in and opting out. That remains to be seen. But the federal Liberal candidate for the leadership, Mr. Martin Cauchon, was quoted last week as saying: "The nature of democracy is to allow discussion and debate. To reject the simple idea of exploring alternatives is unhealthy for the future of health care in this country." That comes from a Liberal.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. If open debate is a healthy thing, why did the Premier dismiss our policy last week as "crap"?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I won't use that word again. I apologized. If he is not man enough to accept an apology, then he doesn't deserve to be sitting there.

The Speaker: There is a tradition in the House that once a matter is dealt with, it is dealt with, so it's probably not good language to repeat.

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

Cost of Health Care Reform

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Electricity deregulation, one of the most expensive and unpopular public policies in Alberta's history, was forced through by this government on the misguided claims of lower cost, more choice, and better service. I was at an REA meeting recently where delegates spoke about electricity deregulation costing Alberta a staggering \$15 billion. Now this government is preparing to force through health reforms with the same phony arguments of lower cost, more choice, and better service. It amounts to health care deregulation. My questions are to the Premier. Given that the Premier has already admitted that the proposed health care reforms will cost patients more, how much is he planning to shift onto the backs of individual Albertans?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I haven't made that admission. I've said that we will consult with the public, and if the Liberals or the NDs have a better idea, send them over. I will have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness speak to the proposals in the red book because many of those, as the minister will elaborate, have been carried out already, and they are a key to achieving sustainable health care.

Relative to electricity, Mr. Speaker – it was included in the preamble, so I think I can speak to it – first of all, the retail side of electricity has not been regulated. People have the choice of staying on the regulated rate. As a matter of fact, if the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition listens to the Enmax commercial, the Enmax commercial clearly says: we will offer a rate competitive with or under – I'm paraphrasing now, and I don't know exactly what it says – the government regulated rate. The only thing that has been deregulated is the production of energy.

Dr. Taft: Again to the Premier: given that even basic service from a private clinic in Calgary was going to cost \$300 per month out of pocket per patient, is the Premier happy to support a policy that could easily cost Albertans another car payment a month?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, this is all part of the healthy debate that ought to take place, and certainly inside or outside the Legislature the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has ample opportunity to provide his insights.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that electricity deregulation led to soaring costs, worse service, and dismal choice, why should Albertans have any confidence in this government's health policies, which amount to health care deregulation?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, as I explained before relative to the deregulation of electricity, the only thing that was deregulated was the production of electricity, not the retail of electricity. People can still secure electricity through the regulated rate and can for some time, as I understand it. Indeed, the hon. member should listen to the Enmax ad, but if he hasn't, I'll send it to him.

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

Hospital Capacity

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At 8 a.m. on March 1, 2006, there were 81 people in the Capital region emergency rooms waiting for a bed, but none were available. We've heard from the ER physicians that the situation is in crisis and not just, and I quote, horrible, as is normal, end quote. Currently hospitals are often forced to cancel elective surgeries because there are no beds to put the patients in afterwards. My questions are to the minister of health. Why don't these hospitals have the staff and resources to function properly?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, traditionally this season, the flu season, always sees an extra burden on health care delivery systems. The work that's being done by the Capital health authority and Calgary health authority is very aggressive in trying to find alternative strategies: moving day surgeries to other locations, finding ways to work with the people that are delivering patients by ambulance in this city, working on a different protocol so that we efficiently use staffing, both from the city ambulance delivery as well as providing some other options. It is regrettable when we need extra space for patients, but I can assure this Assembly that everything possible is being done to accommodate those patients.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. Again to the same minister: what concrete steps has this minister taken since December to improve this situation? Flu season happens every year; you should have been expecting it. This has been a day-to-day crisis.

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, I truly believe that Albertans want us to find solutions in a collaborative way. Each health region is working to do just that, not only with partners in other health regions.

If one is going to talk about how we have provided for health care in Alberta, let's look at the success rates in health care. In Canada there's probably no other place that people would be able to get such quick and responsive service. The \$1.4 billion in capital planning that was added this past year for new spaces will help address a lot of the problems. The bed reclamation project and other new projects have been announced.

Mr. Speaker, over and above that, the primary care networks, which are a community-based response facility, in this region have increased. In total now we have 11 primary care networks to help take off some of the pressures of the burden of the people that arrive sick.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. My last question, again to the same minister: will the minister assure Albertans that the new hospitals that are being built or expanded will have the resources to function?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, with the best that we know today, they will have the resources to function. Today we are looking at an expansion of the role of hospitals, looking at the expanded use of community-based facilities for health care. If you look, for example, at some of the facilities we're building – and I'll address one right now, the Calgary Children's hospital, which some have apparently criticized as not being big enough. The expansion of the outpatient there is going to increase the capacity by 60 per cent at that facility. Three other spaces in three other hospitals look after other children's issues.

Mr. Speaker, children don't want to be in hospital, and the acuity level for those that will be in hospital will be higher than ever before. We're working very hard to allow children to heal and recuperate in their own homes, where they're likely to heal better in a loving atmosphere.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Health Care Reform Consultation

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, today I sent the Premier a letter calling for real, meaningful, and transparent public hearings on the government's proposal for two-tier, private medicine in Alberta. The government has hurriedly announced that previously closed-door SPC meetings dealing with health care would be opened up in an attempt to show that the government was actually listening. It shows, on the contrary, that the government's public-input process is ad hoc and excludes the public from being heard. My first question is for the Premier. Will the Premier support the NDP opposition's proposal to establish an all-party Legislature committee, which will hold public hearings around the province on the government's proposals, before introducing legislation that will inevitably lead to two-tier, private health care in this province?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, it's an assumption to say that legislation will be introduced that will lead to two-tier health care. I would remind the hon. leader of the third party opposition that the so-called third way is a way to achieve sustainability in health care without resorting to what the hon. member describes as that awful, evil, two-tiered, American-style system or the Canadian way, which is not sustainable. ND Premiers, Liberal Premiers, Conservative Premiers, and the federal minister all agree that health care as we know it today in Canada is not sustainable.

Relative to the consultation process and the way it's being carried out, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

The Speaker: Perhaps the next question.
The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is the Artful Dodger when it comes to answering real questions.

My question to him is: will this government commit to full public hearings around the province with a legislative committee made up of all parties in this House before he introduces two-tier health care?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the hon. leader of the third party is the Artful Dodger when it comes to asking a question because he always ties in what he alludes to as that evil, American-style, two-tiered health care system. We're talking about a third way. That's what the international symposium was all about, to find out what is happening in other countries.

You know, I had a visit today with the ambassador to Canada from Kuwait, one of the richest countries in the world, where they have a parallel system of delivering health care.

Mr. Speaker, relative to the public consultation process, again, I'll have the hon. minister reply.

The Speaker: We may get to it.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier has found a new way to avoid answering questions.

Speaker's Ruling Preambles

The Speaker: Now, just a second, please. I try and administer a basic time factor in here, about 35, 40 seconds. That has now been evaporated. Then I with a great deal of politeness recognized the leader of the third party. The leader of the third party needs to be reminded that he cannot have a preamble. He can't have it both ways.

Proceed.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that most excellent admonishment, Mr. Speaker.

Health Care Reform Consultation (continued)

Mr. Mason: I'm going to ask the minister the question. Will she agree to hold public hearings with an all-party committee around the province so that the people can speak directly to their representatives and they don't have to come up to Edmonton and go to an SPC meeting?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think it's quite evident that they don't have to come up to Edmonton and speak to their minister or their MLA. I'm going this . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This Saturday I'm in St. Paul and in Bonnyville. I'm listening to the groups that are coming there. I have been doing my best to register the groups that want to come forward, individuals as well.

Mr. Speaker, it is worthy of note that although the Alliance Party has asked for an opportunity to provide their comments, I have heard from none of the other opposition parties.

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

2:00 Health Policy Framework

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents want assurance that the government and the Minister of Health and Wellness are considering all new ideas from all sources. Now, we understand that the Liberal opposition has their red book with some ideas for health care reform. Have the minister and her department evaluated those red book ideas?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister has been recognized.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very hard to speak over the noise here, and I don't want to speak over the noise. If that would diminish, I would speak.

The Speaker: That's better.
The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, the ideas contained in the Liberal paper have been reviewed. They were reviewed in 2003 and in 2004. A communication from my predecessor to the hon. Leader of the Opposition took place talking about the Creating a

Healthy Future document. At that time there were 24 health care ideas in the paper. It appears that eliminating premiums has been dropped from this latest version, but we will accept all ideas and evaluate them accordingly. We'll provide response to them, and I will be prepared to table that later today.

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, if there are no new ideas in the Liberal red book and constituents are asking for new ideas, will the Minister of Health and Wellness describe the new ideas in the health policy framework released by the government last week?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, many of the ideas that we have been tabling, both in the document Getting on with Better Health Care last summer, in July, plus the policy handbook, talk about putting patients first and work towards keying in on accessibility and sustainability in a nutshell. There are many ideas in the opposition document that have been provided that have been also works in progress, including the wellness funds that we have given to regional health authorities, the extra work that we have been providing along with dollars for children's mental health services, and the pharmacare program that we have been working on extensively.

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, would the minister explain to members assembled and all Albertans who are watching question period in their living rooms this afternoon where they can get copies of the health care policies and how they can have input in the most effective way?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, they can go to the library, they can get it from their MLA, they can go to www.yourhealth.gov.ab.ca, and they can also call 310-4455. We have produced some 6,000 reports over this weekend, and we are distributing them as rapidly as we possibly can.

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

Health Care Funding

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, no matter how you cut it and leaving aside the fact that eliminating health care premiums is now in our fiscal policy, you can't get away from the fact that the hospital system needs more beds, more doctors, and more nurses. The government has committed to funding the Calgary health region's capital expansion plans through to 2010 so that the region has enough beds eventually, but to actually open those beds to patients will take approximately 25 per cent more operating funds over the next four years. To the minister of health: how much operating funding is the minister prepared to provide to address Calgary's acute need for acute care expansion?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, that is a question of budget. I believe that at the appropriate time the Minister of Finance will table the budget, and we will speak to that accordingly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister explain this government's reluctance to commit to sustainable funding certainty for this or any other organization that relies on it for the money to keep our citizens healthy?

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, when I start thinking about

what's going to be available for my children and my children's children, it keeps me awake at night. Today we are spending almost a billion dollars more every year in health care. We've doubled in the last five years the amount of money we're spending. We have spent a considerable amount of money both on capital and operating, and it's simply not sustainable. Why are we worried about this spending? Well, Water for Life, supports for moms that are single with children and don't have work, all the kinds of things that affect the social determinants of health. If we had the money that we're putting in to treat people, looking after people who are most vulnerable, we would do a lot better. I think that we are doing our very best to spend our resources wisely.

One other item I'll mention: there's no place else in Canada that spends so much money on health care as we do in Alberta.

Mr. Taylor: To the same minister in an effort to bring some focus back to the issue at hand: should the people of Alberta take this government's refusal to commit to sustainable long-term funding as a sign that the government has concluded that it's not going to be the government after the next election?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think there's no real response to that question.

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

Grizzly Bear Management

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development announced the management decision to suspend the grizzly bear hunt while a DNA census of the involved grizzly bear population is completed through the province. Why didn't the minister just name the grizzly bear a threatened species?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. The preservation of the grizzly bear is more than just coming up with a single number, it's more than just an annual hunt decision, and it's more than just looking at any single aspect of grizzly bear management. We're committed to having proactive management of a sustainable grizzly bear population. We do that whether the species is designated as threatened or not. It's important, for sure, that we have good, solid information when we make those kinds of determinations, but we don't need that designation to do the proper management when species are threatened.

More importantly, Mr. Speaker, we should be talking about sustainability, proper management, and monitoring to make sure that the species is sustainable for the future. Even though I did suspend the hunt for a few years, I'm planning on keeping grizzlies on the landscape and definitely on people's minds. We're increasing our education as well as increasing the information that goes to our BearSmart program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. How is it possible to manage a wildlife species if you don't have the complete information about the grizzly bear population?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. In Alberta we manage a wide range of species, and where we don't have estimates, we have very good systems to make sure that we monitor the trends that are on the landscape. How do we manage grizzlies without the numbers? Well, we've already established a recovery team. We've changed our management regime over the years. We use DNA work to make sure that those estimated populations are within range. We dedicate extensive manpower and resources in planning and research for the species. We've put 1.3 million additional dollars into management and into research, and there's more on-the-ground work than there's ever been in grizzly bear management.

What amazes me, Mr. Speaker, is to hear people say that suspending the hunt is the first step in conserving bears. Well, the regulated hunt is only one part – one part – and it's only one of the tools that we've ever used in the extensive management of grizzly bears.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. What is the government doing to address the concerns of ranchers, farmers, and communities about grizzly bear safety?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, this is a very, very important question. I don't underestimate the concerns of the ranchers or the people that live on the eastern slopes when their livestock, which is their livelihood, has been threatened, and I don't underestimate the public safety component of grizzly bear management.

2:10

I'm increasing the public safety efforts through our BearSmart program, as I had mentioned, and that will include an educational component for all of rural Alberta. We will be stepping up our bear aversion programs with farmers and ranchers, who need to know that monitoring of all sightings of grizzly bears is the responsible thing to do in risky situations. At the same time we'll continue with the spring program to fly food sources into the backcountry so that grizzly bears do not come down to eat the livestock that is so important to our farming and ranching community.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ministerial briefing documents from October of 2004 advise the human resources minister that the division 8 declaration for the Horizon project could be seen as, I quote: a misuse of an otherwise legitimate labour code provision in order to avoid unions affiliated with the building trades and that "critics will try to politicize issue during the expected election campaign." My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Why did this government approve a division 8 application for the CNRL Horizon project before the 2004 provincial election and delay the announcement until days after that election was over?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. It gives me an opportunity to clear up the issue. A legal challenge, which will be heard in May, has been filed with the courts, as the member knows. You know, it is related to the major

project status that was granted to CNRL for the Horizon oil sands project.

Mr. Speaker, as you are aware and as the member should know, because the matter is going to be heard in court, it would be inappropriate for me to in fact make a comment on it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order?

Mr. Backs: Yes.

The Speaker: I've recognized you for a question.

Mr. Backs: Point of order on the answer. It wasn't answered because of sub judice. He didn't answer the question.

The Speaker: You've been recognized for the question, sir.

Mr. Backs: The point of order, Mr. Speaker, is . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, please sit down. It is at the conclusion of the Routine that we deal with points of order. I will recognize you at the conclusion of the Routine for the point of order, but right now I've recognized you for your second question.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplementary to the minister of human resources: is the Department of Human Resources and Employment considering at this time any other division 8 applications, and if so, to what sites do they apply?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, I am unaware of any applications.

Mr. Backs: A supplementary to the same minister: why did this government choose to so quickly and quietly approve the division 8 declaration when it clearly favoured the use of the CLAC convenience union and also favours the use of temporary foreign workers in that document?

Mr. Cardinal: Again, Mr. Speaker, the same answer. Because the issue is before the courts already and will be heard in the very near future, I can't make any comments on it.

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

Agricultural Assistance

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Both the federal government and the provincial government have provided short-term relief to the grain and oilseed sectors of the ag industry. I know that it's encouraging news, but I really haven't talked to too many producers who have received many federal cheques recently. But they have indicated that they really would like to see some substantive changes to crop insurance programs. My question is to our Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Would the minister pursue with our new federal ag minister the possibility of developing a farm income insurance program, one that would vastly simplify our current crop insurance program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have already begun working very closely with our new federal minister of agriculture, and I can say that my impression is that he's very committed to working to improve our business risk management programs as a package. We want to make them more bankable. We want to make them more responsive and predictable and simple. Indeed, we also perhaps want to add some regional flexibility into the package overall, and we're talking to him about that.

Really, production insurance has been one of the most stable tools producers have had to use over the last 40 years and has been a program that has stayed with us over those 40 years, where many other programs that we've tried to dabble in have kind of come and gone. What producers do need is stability, and we are committed to working to achieve that stability and improving those programs. Should that mean a change to the crop insurance programs as we know them today, we are open to those discussions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first supplementary to the same minister: is it possible, in your mind, to establish a revised program based on a selected income level by the producer that's still shared in cost by all the present or current participants?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, the CAIS program as we know it now is more or less a margin insurance program. When you couple that with our production insurance, it does allow for that flexibility. Coverage under both programs is related to the productive capabilities of the farming operation. Indeed, CAIS is related to the economic operation of that business.

The real question that I think we need to explore is: can we make these programs better? Can we make them bankable? Can we make them more of a program tool for producers? I think the answer to that questions is yes. In the short term and in the meantime we need to recognize that our producers, especially in the grains and oilseeds sector, are hurting. To that end, today we'll be announcing that we will be reducing the cost of production insurance by some 20 per cent for producers. That is good news to producers in the grains and oilseeds sector. That will be coming out today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Minister. It is good news.

I would ask if any financial lending institutions have indicated to you that they would prefer to have a client who has a relevant income program or return on investment type of income program available as opposed to crop insurance?

Mr. Horner: Well, that's a very good question, Mr. Speaker. To that end, in addition to the grains and oilseeds recovery strategy, which we announced some weeks ago, we're working on, as I mentioned earlier, the bankability of these programs. We will be meeting with financial institutions over the course of the next weeks and months to talk about the changes that we're making to both crop insurance and CAIS, to the ag policy framework discussions that we're having with the federal government and our other colleagues around the country, and we are committed to working as a group to ensure that the financial sector understands our programs and can use them as bankable programs of business risk management for our producers. Whether that means that it would be an investment vehicle or an income vehicle we'll leave to those discussions.

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

Water Quality at Ellerslie Elementary School

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last November the Education minister assured this House that he would investigate the drinking water situation at Ellerslie school in my riding. In fact, he stated that he would investigate the situation and get some action moving. Well, four months have already passed, and students are still relying on a water truck for drinking water, as they have for decades. My questions are for the Minister of Education. Why is the minister continuing to allow some Alberta children to have to wait for water in their schools?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, I did act on that issue. I had my officials contact the school board, and I talked to some of the school board officials myself, and I understood that the situation was being looked at or at least looked after. However, I also understand that in some subsequent follow-up to that intervention that I made, which I think the member for bringing to my attention incidentally, there was an issue to do with something about the boundary, exactly where the school is located. I can't recall offhand, Mr. Speaker, if it was an issue of a municipal boundary or a school boundary or something else, but there was some issue like that that came into play and, unfortunately, prevented the speedy resolution of it. But if it hasn't yet been resolved or looked after, then we can certainly have it revisited, hon. member.

2:20

Mr. Agnihotri: It isn't the boundary.

A question to the Minister of Education: does the minister believe that students should rely on trucked water in what he calls the best school system in the world?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do have the best school system in Canada and one of the best in the world; that's true. However, we have a number of partners who help in the delivery of that, and municipalities are one of them, so we'll have a look at this again, hon. member, just to make sure that it is being tracked and followed. Perhaps within a few days I would hope that we can get an update. But what surprises me is that the hon. member hasn't called the school board directly to find out because that's where I'm going to call, and he'd certainly be welcome to do the same.

Mr. Agnihotri: When will the students at Ellerslie school have reliable hot and cold running tap water like the homes in the new development across the road from that school? Are the property developers in that area a higher priority than our schoolchildren?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, you know, if in fact four months have gone by since this issue was first raised, I'm surprised that the hon. member has waited this long to actually do something about it. It's in his constituency, and he'd be welcome to do something about it. However, given that he's chosen not to do anything about it, then I'll direct my officials to follow it up yet again, and we'll do whatever we can to help ameliorate the situation.

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

Coal-bed Methane Drilling

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, fools rush in, and unfortunately Albertans must learn to duck for cover. In the mad rush to develop the coal-bed methane industry here in this province, the

Alberta government has approved thousands of wells before a proper regulatory framework to safeguard public safety and the environment is in place. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Considering all the trouble that's gone on in these past weeks and months, could the minister please commit now to a moratorium on coal-bed methane drilling until after a proper inventory of groundwater has been completed in the affected areas?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First off, I'd like to mention that there is a tremendous, strong, rigorous regulatory environment in place to ensure that Albertans are protected, that their water is protected. We're continuing to improve upon that platform. In fact, I'd like to have the Minister of Environment supplement some of the work that they do on Water for Life.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, on the important question, the Water for Life strategy is a long-term strategy that talks geologically about mapping, that talks about inventory. It talks about a long-term strategy of getting a baseline of information. To all Albertans: I want to assure them that that is exactly what this government is doing.

Mr. Eggen: To the same minister: would the minister not admit that the bargain basement royalty reductions that he has offered energy companies have in fact contributed to the headlong rush to drill CBM wells without proper consideration for the environment and for the rights of residences?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we have a very good regulatory environment in place. We also have a very good and fair royalty structure in place. It has to balance the risk. It also comes in as part of the royalty. As for fair share, I'd like to compliment the industry on the \$3.4 billion that they've reinvested back into the lands and for the future development of that resource. The coal-bed methane is a huge opportunity for Albertans. Albertans have benefited substantially in the royalties of that. Almost 14 and a half billion dollars of revenue have come to Albertans directly. In addition, we could go into the income tax. But Albertans have benefited tremendously by this resource. It is being done responsibly and safely.

Mr. Eggen: To the same minister, please: to what degree is this so-called urgent need to exploit CBM in fact a direct result of the mismanagement of our conventional natural gas supplies here in Alberta?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, this industry actually is one of the most responsible of any of the industries. They take the environmental issues as well as the landowner issues. Clearly, with the volume of activity there are always some challenges to be met, but they are trying to be proactive, ensuring that they do address everything from the surface issues to the landowners to the environmental to the water to the air quality. Substantive improvements in technology likewise continue to ensure that we have the safe air, the safe water, that those things are protected, that we can also receive the tremendous benefit from those minerals that are there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Access to Education by Nonresident Students

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was amazed to hear that a 17-year-old student who recently moved from Lethbridge to Calgary is being prevented from enrolling in the Calgary public school system because her parents live in Lethbridge. It seems rather strange that at a time when our province is increasing its emphasis on students completing high school, we see examples of the reverse occurring in the system and access, in fact, being denied. My first question to the Minister of Education: does the fact that parents pay property and education taxes in one city preclude their child from enrolling in a school jurisdiction outside their own community?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, obviously high school completion is extremely important, but I don't recall there being anything specifically in the School Act that would prevent or preclude the situation that the hon. member is asking. In fact, I don't think there's anything in the School Act that specifically ties the issue of accessing an education directly to the payment of school or property taxes. Now, that having been said, the simple fact is that the funding doesn't follow the student in the way that the situation might otherwise dictate it should in this particular case.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister is: what options do exist for a student who is caught in exactly this kind of situation?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the options if the child or if the young adult is over 16 but under 18 would be to see if that person can be qualified as an independent student. Automatically when a student turns 18, according to the School Act, they can be deemed to be independent. There could be circumstances that one could construe as options in the 16- and 17-year-old age range, which I believe is what the member said describes the student in question.

Now, the locally elected school board – and in this case I think he's cited the Calgary public board of education – would have some locally developed policies that would further flesh out what constitutes being an independent student at age 16 or 17. It could include factors such as whether the student is married or is cohabiting or is paying rent or has some other means of private dwelling, so it'll depend on the individual circumstances as to what the options might be.

Mr. Magnus: Given that this student has been denied access, Mr. Minister, what exactly are you going to do to get this student back into school?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I did immediately after being called by the press yesterday on this issue was that I directed one of my Education officials to get in touch with the particular school board and try to find out a little bit more about what the circumstances are. Quite frequently when we're dealing with issues like this, there is sometimes sensitive or delicate information. Sometimes there's private information. Sometimes there are other hardships or difficulties that perhaps aren't ever going to be made known publicly, but they might exist. I'm not saying that that's exactly the case here, but each one of these circumstances has to be looked into for its full value.

Secondly, I also indicated, which, as you know, was also indicated in the throne speech, that we were going through the process of organizing a high school completion symposium, and as part of that, Mr. Speaker, we will certainly look at removing any roadblocks that exist that might otherwise prevent a student from completing high school, or we'll fix or clarify any other difficulties that may exist, be they in policy, in law, or in rules.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Consultant Contracts

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General writes, "... contracts are a cost-effective means of delivering services, it is important that contracting policies and practices are appropriate and adhered to." Albertans work hard for their money and expect this government to be accountable and responsible when spending that same hard-earned tax dollar. My accountability and transparency questions are to the Minister of Finance. Would this minister agree that consultants should provide sufficient documentation to justify their consulting expenses?

2:30

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding, certainly of contracts that I'm aware of, that the terms of the contract do outline exactly what you expect for the contract. Each contract is put out singly, generally, and all of the obligations in the contract are expected to be met.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: does this Finance minister pay consultants to provide verbal advice without supporting documentation?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is asking me if I have paid out money to consultants to give me verbal advice without any supporting documentation, if I heard the question right. My answer to that would be: not to my recollection.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the Finance ministry pay consultants to provide verbal advice without supporting documentation?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I will discuss this with my deputy and provide an answer to the hon. member. It is certainly not my knowledge.

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

Electricity Transmission Line

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A strong electrical transmission system interconnected with neighbouring jurisdictions can provide a stable source of electrical energy to all Albertans. I'm concerned that the ever-increasing demand on our system caused by industrial and residential growth will cause some parts of Alberta to experience outages in the coming years. My question is to the Minister of Energy. A new 500 kV line that will service the Calgary area is being planned for, but no construction is happening. What's the delay?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's critical that this line that's just recently been approved by the Energy and Utilities Board – at least, the needs application was approved – go forward as expeditiously as we possibly can. We know of the growth in Alberta, and the demand for electricity is growing. The transmission lines are one of the next key components to make sure that we get into place to ensure the reliability of electricity delivered to our homes. It is paramount that this line go ahead as expeditiously as possible.

That said, also at this stage in the process it's making sure that appropriate consultation with the public has gone forward. Alberta Electric System Operator has done a 10-year analysis of the need for transmission. Some of that, this specific 500 kV line, has been approved by the Energy and Utilities Board for need. Now it's down into the needs of and the issues with landowners.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that part of the answer talked about consultation but that rural MLAs are getting many calls from constituents about the lack of information on how this line will impact their farms and their residences, what are this minister and his staff doing to inform these folks in rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know of the need for the transmission line though it's a very difficult issue to know where to locate those transmission lines. No one really wants to have them on their property, but it's very important that they go somewhere, so right now there is extensive consultation going forward.

The transmission facility operator in this case is AltaLink. They have begun consultations with the United Power Transmission Area Group. That's a group representing landowners along the Genesee to Langdon corridor. They've also had a number of consultations – November through December was their first stage open house – talking to landowners. Over 500 landowners attended AltaLink's open house information sessions that have been held throughout 2005. They continue to be working through them in the first half of this year and want to ensure that those landowners that are particularly affected have been listened to and that their issues have been addressed appropriately.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. I understand that southern municipal leaders are calling for buried lines on this project. These lines will just drive up the cost for all Albertans. What's your response to this?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, in some ways it would be wonderful if all of our transmission lines could be put underground. We'd certainly get rid of the sightline issues and the disturbance on the surface, yet that would likely add 15 times the amount of cost to bury those lines. When you put in a 500 kV line, it's not just a matter of burying it, but that wire also has to have special materials to be encased. Then, if there were a power outage or something, you've got to dig those lines up. If there is a disturbance or a problem with those lines, it is a tremendously more expensive option. Though it might appear attractive just to get rid of the sight, it is really a cost and servicing issue that is the problem.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, very shortly I'll call upon the first of six but first of all our historical vignette. Let me quote.

The greatness of Canada will not depend upon the number of her people, upon the quality of No. 1 Hard Wheat, or the fine Shorthorn cattle she raises – her greatness in the future will consist in the character of her people

This quotation was found in the *Edmonton Journal*, March 5 edition of 1918, and these words were given by James Robert Lowery, who was born in Campbellford, Ontario, in 1884. He studied at Queen's University and at the University of Alberta, and he was among the first to have received a bachelor of arts degree from this new university in the province of Alberta. He was elected to this Assembly in 1913 in the Alexandra constituency as a Conservative and served until 1921. Notably, as a sitting member serving in the armed forces, in the 1917 Alberta general election he was among 12 others who were automatically returned by acclamation. Mr. Lowery also served overseas in the First World War as a major of the 1st Canadian Mounted regiment. He was wounded at Vimy Ridge on April 9, 1917. Mr. Lowery died December 12, 1956.

In 30 seconds I'll call upon, first of all, the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Health Care Reform

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week certain hon. members on my left made alarmist allegations that the government's health care initiative is going to reduce the number of doctors caring for Albertans. These nervous Nellies seem to assume that the number of doctors working in our health system is static and that it never changes. Nothing could be less accurate. Doctors and nurses enter and leave our health care system all the time. During the decade of the '90s 1,000 doctors a year left Canada. The challenge to Alberta is to design a health care system with incentives that will keep and attract our health care workers.

Mr. Speaker, the good news is that the government of Alberta is meeting this challenge. [interjection] The opportunities created by our health care reforms will attract more doctors into our health care system. The balance between the parallel public and private systems is not a zero-sum game. It is not a question of dividing a fixed-size pie between the public and the private sector. [interjection] It is a question of growing the pie so that there are more doctors, more nurses, and more technicians.

The government's third way reforms will grow Alberta's health care sector. Allowing doctors to work in both the public and the private health care systems will give doctors more opportunities and greater flexibility to structure their practices. This option will help to retain the doctors already in Alberta and attract new doctors to our great province. These reforms will mean more health care to more Albertans more quickly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is not good to have interjections when hon. members have Members' Statements. This is a very unique thing that we did in this Assembly, and one of the key discussions among all members was that members when giving a member's statement could discuss any particular kind of item they

wanted to discuss. There would be no points of order, no points of privilege considered by the chair, and there should be no interjections. None.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

2:40

National Social Work Week

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today and recognize that March 5 to 11 is National Social Work Week. National Social Work Week celebrates this proud and dedicated profession and its long history of commitment to improving the well-being of people in society. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to advise Albertans that I am a social worker and proud of the profession.

Throughout their long history social workers have made a difference in the lives of others. We should all be very proud of them and the work they do. Across Alberta social workers provide a variety of services. They work in hospitals, mental health clinics, public and not-for-profit agencies, and in private human service agencies. As independent practitioners they counsel families, work as researchers, educators, and as policy consultants.

Social workers are skilled and ethical practitioners who give help to society's most vulnerable members. They work for positive outcomes for individuals, families, and groups within each community. Ministries within the Alberta government are lucky to have these dedicated professionals deliver social programs to Alberta's children, youth, families, seniors, and people with disabilities, among others. With integrity, dedication, and commitment to helping society's most vulnerable, they provide services as diverse as the many people they serve.

I commend the women and men who take on this rewarding and challenging line of work. I hope that this week we all take time to celebrate the contribution social workers make to the lives of Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Liberal Opposition Vision for Health Care

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberal opposition health plan, *Creating a Healthy Future*, addresses the present concerns the Conservative government is attempting to tackle through two-tiered private health care. The solutions our public health care system needs are in this plan. The problem is this government's inability to take off the privatization blinders and focus on improving our public system. Just as they did with electrical deregulation, they're trying to convince Albertans that privatizing health care will be in their best interests, but I can assure you that it will not.

Today during a technical briefing the Alberta Liberals outlined a number of concrete solutions to create a high-quality, affordable, and sustainable health care system. The government has thrown the challenge at us to prove our system will effectively reduce waiting times and keep health spending affordable, and today we responded. Our plan will work to meet the government's goals and will uphold the principles of the Canada Health Act.

Kevin Taft, the leader of the official Liberal . . . [interjections] The Leader of the Official Opposition and myself as health critic outlined six major initiatives contained in *Creating a Healthy Future* which would improve the public system by increasing access and affordability and ensure that all Albertans receive the same quality of care: one, the integration of specialized surgical centres into the public system to reduce wait times, reduce costs, and improve quality; two, the expansion of community health centres to improve

access to primary care; three, the introduction of a pharmacare program to reduce costs and ensure equal access to prescription drugs; four, the creation of comprehensive continuing-care legislation, including minimum hours of patient care and staffing ratios; five, the re-examination of the roles of medical professionals and the systems of payment to allow a more collaborative approach to delivering health care; and, six, the use of health impact statements and assessments and a wellness fund to focus on prevention.

A good health care system has a cohesive approach based on the principles of affordability, accessibility, equity, and quality. When you take these elements apart, the system is left in chaos. I fear the government's current plans will do just that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: There was no interjection from the chair during that participation by the hon. member, but the hon. member knows . . .

Ms Blakeman: Yes. I'm sorry.

The Speaker: But then the chair did not intervene either when the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness did it today. Let's all try to remember.

Should I give you the reason again why we don't use names? [interjections]

I'll come back to that a little later. Right now we're going to deal with the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Great Kids Awards

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise today and recognize Alberta's great kids. Yesterday the hon. Premier and the Minister of Children's Services presented awards to 16 outstanding Alberta children and youth for making a difference in their homes, schools, and communities. I had the honour of attending the seventh annual Great Kids award ceremony to recognize one of my constituents, Great Kid Browne Courtorielle from Cold Lake.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity acknowledge all the other Alberta 2006 Great Kids. They are Colton Meronyk from St. Albert, Carter Snethun from Spruce Grove, Dennis Brown from Calgary, Chance Szott from Daysland, Britny Martens from Alix, Colin David Price from Sangudo, Savannah Symmonds from Medicine Hat, Taralyn Chapman from Edmonton, Stephanie Armstrong from Calgary, Beau Brietzke from Airdrie, Danielle Hilsabeck from Lacombe, Tanessa Lynn Andres from Bassano, Karleen Beaverbones from Rocky Mountain House, Clayton Muff from Blairmore, and April Roan from Wetaskiwin.

Mr. Speaker, these Great Kids were selected from among 236 province-wide nominations, and yesterday I saw first-hand what an amazing bunch of children and youth we have in Alberta. As the Premier said, we are very fortunate to have a generation of young Albertans moving towards adulthood who are in a position to take this province to even greater heights.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Brokeback Mountain Oscars

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate nearly 600 Albertans. They are the cast and crew behind the *Brokeback Mountain* movie, which last night was awarded three Oscars at the Academy awards. The Blackfoot hotel in Calgary was home last night to a local Oscar ceremony hosted by IATSE, the union representing the crew. Complete with red carpet and a big-screen TV showing the ceremony, hundreds of people gathered to celebrate the highlights of the entertainment industry this past year. The

celebrants included the set builders, costumers, wranglers, and makeup artists: the people behind the camera. When Ang Lee, the director of *Brokeback Mountain*, was named the winner of the best director award, I bet the crowd's cheers were heard all the way to California. When he went on stage, standing behind him in spirit was a crowd of happy and proud Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the real winners were Albertans. The movie highlights the beautiful countryside of Alberta and, I am proud to say, the Highwood constituency, home of the best western backdrops that nature has to offer. The movie shows everyone what we offer tourists: big skies, beautiful landscapes, horse trails, ranch experiences, and more.

Congratulations to all the hard-working Albertans in the film sector who made these Oscars possible.

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

Education Achievement Testing

Mr. Chase: Early in June this government forces grade 3, grade 6, grade 9, and grade 12 students to participate in a questionable exercise called standardized testing. Not satisfied with the unnecessary stress it has caused students, their parents, and teachers in June, the Alberta government cranks up the level of abuse in March. It shares the results with its ideological partner in crime, the Fraser Institute, which broadcasts the results across the province in local papers. By so doing, it rubs salt into the open wounds of disadvantaged schoolchildren, whom this government pushes further down rather than providing the means to pull them up. Is it any wonder that Alberta has the highest high school dropout rate of almost a third, including a 75 per cent dropout rate for English as a Second Language students in Canada?

This government in its false show of veneer accountability spends three times as much on creating, administering, and marking these tests as it does on developing the curriculum that these tests supposedly measure. What these tests accurately and predictably reflect is the socioeconomic level of the student writing the test. With very few exceptions private schools, subsidized to the tune of 60 per cent of public per-pupil grants, with restrictive, selective enrolment policies, not to mention high tuition fees, are compared to their underfunded public counterparts, which, not only as a result of their mandate but out of a genuine desire to improve the human condition, accept all children regardless of their socioeconomic or learning luggage.

If this provincial government truly wanted to improve its educational outcomes, it would increase its curriculum support for the schools at the lower end of the achievement results. There is no educational purpose served by publishing the results of these highly questionable tests.

head:

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts I hereby submit five copies of the report of the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts dated March 1, 2006, which outlines the committee's recommendation for changes to the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I also submit five copies of the report of the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts covering the committee's activities for the First Session of the 26th Legislature.

Thank you.

head: 2:50

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of over 4,500 residents of Grande Prairie I would like to present the following petition to the Legislature: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation to build a skywalk across the Highway 43 bypass in Grande Prairie."

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of a petition that's signed by 185 constituents of mine in Whitecourt-St. Anne. They are petitioning the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the government to do what is necessary to complete the plans to widen highway 32 in my constituency as soon as possible.

Thank you.

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling an e-mail from Elaine Hyshka, a constituent of mine. She is deeply concerned about our Premier's latest attempt to privatize health care. She disagrees with queue-jumping and forecasts great detriment if doctors are allowed to practise in both the public and private settings. She urges me as her MLA to oppose two-tiered health care and reaffirms her belief in the five guiding principles of the Canada Health Act.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table two of the many letters that I've been receiving about the government's plans to privatize the health care system. One is from David Finch, and he warns about the return to the days when people's lives were often in danger because they didn't have the money to buy health care.

The second one is from Reny Miklos from Edmonton, and he's concerned about the changes to violate the Canada Health Act and to create a two-tier system.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today. The first is on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. I believe that a constituent of his, Craig Colvin, writes expressing his outrage at the government's proposed third way, great concern and objection to having doctors working in both systems, and a question about how private insurance companies will not allow us to get the most bang out of our health care dollar when most of the money goes to paying the shareholders.

The second tabling that I have today is from one of my constituents, again very opposed to the health care. She's a health care professional herself, opposed to what the government is proposing, is particularly concerned about the shortage of health care professionals, and believes that the third way would create a situation very similar to the American system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of tablings. First of all, I'd like to table a copy of a letter sent by the leader of the NDP to the Premier. The letter calls for thorough and sincere public consultation on health care reforms, including transparent, all-party public hearings. He notes that the current consultation period "is a sham."

I would also like to table two documents from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. Their news releases are dated February 19 and March 4 of this year. The first raises concerns about the so-called third way in health care. The second also calls for proper public consultation on health care.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to table the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail from a constituent, Frank Jenkins, who copied me his responses to the government's website asking for consultation on the third-way changes. The comment he particularly wanted me to highlight is where he says:

Please spend our money and your time on getting more doctors and nurses into the health care system. Stealing doctors from the public sector for the private sector . . . does not change access (the number of doctors is the same).

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise to provide the proper five copies of documents of advice to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment on the Horizon oil sands project and their use of temporary foreign workers and the Christian Labour Association union.

Mr. Tougas: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of the Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Dialogue document, the Your City, Your Voice report, which was released today at Edmonton city hall.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Cardinal, Minister of Human Resources and Employment, pursuant to the Architects Act the Alberta Association of Architects 2005 annual report. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Zwozdesky, Minister of Education, return to order of the Assembly MR 27, asked for by Mr. Flaherty on May 2, 2005.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning on a point of order.

Point of Order Sub Judice Rule

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on this point of order to speak on the question of sub judice regarding the question that was brought by me during question period. I'll cite 509 in *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*.

The Special Committee on the Rights and Immunities of Members recommended that the responsibility of the Speaker during the question period should be minimal as regards the *sub judice* convention, and that the responsibility should principally rest upon

the Member who asks the question and Minister to whom it is addressed. However, the Speaker should remain the final arbiter in the matter but should exercise discretion only in exceptional cases. In doubtful cases the Speaker should rule in favour of debate and against the convention.

Also, in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, edition 2000, on page 428 in the second paragraph it says:

The Committee clarified further that while all Members share in the responsibility of exercising this restraint, the Speaker is the final arbiter in determining whether a subject matter raised during the consideration of oral questions is sub judice.

In reality, I was not ruled out of order by the Speaker under our rules of order, the Standing Orders of our Legislative Assembly, under 23(g), “where there is [any] probability of prejudice” to any individual because of speaking to a court case, because I did not speak to a court case. I spoke to a decision which was essentially a political decision as to the timing of a declaration of an announcement.

Basically, in arguing that the question cannot be answered because it is before the courts – the question should be that it is before the courts. This question is not, in fact, as I argued, before the courts. The question before the courts is whether this declaration after the fact prejudiced the interests of tradesmen in this province. My question did not cite the criminal case in any way. The question did not in any way prejudice the rights or interests of the individuals and organizations involved in that civil case, and in no way does the question affect the interests of the government in this case. What this question speaks to is the clearly political decision of the government to delay the announcement till after the election, and this decision was made before the election. The case before the courts is not a criminal case. Again, it does not speak to the timing of the announcement.

I ask that the Speaker rule that this question be answered. Indeed, if we are to limit questions under division 8 in this manner, any question regarding this huge project, important to our Alberta economy, could be avoided by saying that the division 8 application is before the courts and may be for some time with appeals. I ask that the Speaker exercise his discretion and that this question be answered.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m not sure quite how to approach this. First of all, I’ll say thank you for attempting to clarify where you’re coming from, hon. member, on this. Issues pertaining to what a Speaker’s role is or should be or whatever are enunciated, too, in the various documents, which the hon. member obviously indicated.

I think that the current Speaker and previous Speakers, who have had the privilege of sitting in that chair, have made it abundantly clear to all members what their role is as Speaker and what the rules of question period are. The rules of question period simply are for private members to hold the government accountable for its policies, its actions, its directions, and that sort of thing. While there is, I guess, an incumbency upon ministers to provide answers, it is totally up to the ministers or the Premier to provide whatever answer they feel is fit in the appropriate part of the response. But I have yet to hear a Speaker that would compel a minister to provide some type of an answer such as the hon. member opposite is looking for. I’d like to see that one somewhere if it exists. I don’t think it does.

3:00

Now, it’s true that sometimes, Mr. Speaker, members may not like the answer they get, or they may feel that the answer isn’t as pointed

to the question. That happens in all parliaments where we have this particular system. But whether something is before the courts or not is another matter, and I think the minister was attempting to answer that particular part of the question if that’s in fact what was said.

I’ll just end by saying, Mr. Speaker, that frequently there are causes for misinterpretation or misunderstandings when it comes to the ebb and flow, the to and fro of question period. That may or may not be the case here. We’ll await your ruling in that respect. But we don’t have the Blues or the ability, unfortunately, on this side of the House to have looked up exactly what the exchange was and whether or not there is any validity to the point being raised. Nonetheless, we’ll leave it up to the Speaker to make some insights into this and see if, in fact, there is some resolution to this curious matter.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in terms of the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, first of all, while it is useful and it is convenient to reference sub judice in *Beauchesne*, all hon. members must note that this Assembly in the past has gone beyond the conventions that were used in *Beauchesne* in dealing with sub judice and views sub judice and the whole question of sub judice to be of extreme importance. That’s why we are one of the few Assemblies found anywhere that follows this model of government to actually have a sub judice section in our Standing Orders. That goes way beyond anything that can be found in terms of these other documents that we would use from time to time. Under Standing Order 23(g) this Assembly debated the whole question of sub judice and dealt with it, and it’s dealt with in a pretty dramatic way.

Secondly, it must be very, very clear: the chair certainly did not hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning saying that the chair ruled the question out of order because that certainly was not the case whatsoever. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning was raising a question to the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment, and the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment basically came back and said: look; this matter is before the courts, and as a result of that I am prohibited from dealing with the question. I believe he even gave a date; he said in May.

But all of that is totally moot because there are some good paragraphs to read in *Beauchesne*. The chair would refer hon. members to *Beauchesne* 416, which has the subtitle Replies to Oral Questions. This is what it is:

416. (1) A Minister may decline to answer a question without stating the reason for refusing, and insistence on an answer is out of order, with no debate being allowed. A refusal to answer cannot be raised as a question of privilege, nor is it regular to comment upon such a refusal. A Member may put a question but has no right to insist upon an answer.

(2) An answer to a question cannot be insisted upon if the answer be refused by the Minister on the ground of the public interest; nor can the question be replaced on the Notice Paper. The refusal of a Minister to answer on this ground cannot be raised as a matter of privilege.

This goes back, actually, in the Canadian House of Commons as far as 1942, and there’s another citation dealing with it again in 1974. So the whole question of sub judice basically, as I repeat, is quite moot.

The fact of the matter is that this is called question period, and hon. members have the right to ask questions, and the chair will recognize some person of the government to respond to it. The government can choose on its own merit as to who should be the answerer to the question, and then it becomes totally subjective and subject to interpretation what the answer may or may not be.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, March 2, I would like to now 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, March 2, I would now move that motions for returns that appear on today's Order Paper also stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

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

**Bill 202
Environmental Protection and Enhancement
(Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and move second reading of Bill 202, Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006.

As most members are probably aware, I have been looking for ways to stop the damage that this horrible drug, crystal methamphetamine, has brought to our province. While some members choose to address the problems produced by the effect of the drug, avenues which I wholeheartedly support, I feel that it is better for me to go after the cause of this drug problem. I want to take down the manufacturers and distributors because if we eliminate this aspect, we will eliminate some of the problems that we are seeing in our province. If we can get rid of the people who make or distribute the drug, we are a lot better off.

Methamphetamine is a challenge within my constituency. Many of the communities around West Yellowhead are battling the effects of this drug. This drug has the power to overtake communities and lead them to disaster. My constituents call me on this to do something about it.

In the past within this House we have discussed how addictive this drug is. We have discussed how devastating this drug can be. The province must and is taking action against this devastating drug. But one of the things that I've noticed in my research on this topic and in speaking to my constituents is that there is a part of Alberta that is being hurt by the drug, and it's been overlooked, not necessarily on purpose, because I don't believe it has been considered when we are dealing with the adverse nature of this drug. That part is our environment.

Now, many of you may not understand why I've linked meth with environment, so to grasp this, you will have to look at how this drug is made. A quick search on the Internet gives you a litany of ingredients, none of which are safe, which are put into making the

drug. Here is a short list of some of the chemicals used to make crystal meth: hydrochloric acid, sulphuric acid, starting fluid, and Freon. They are four of the chemicals that are going into making this drug. This is what goes into your body if you take this drug. Now, this is bad. But after you make the drug, there is waste generated which is extremely dangerous.

The waste produced from manufacturing crystal meth is very toxic. First, there is a toxic sludge that is produced. This sludge is a thick, black, tarry mess, that should be classified as hazardous. In fact, there are many toxic warning labels that can be attached to this filth.

Secondly, outside of this sludge there is a lot of ether that is left behind. Ether is normally used in the producing process of crystal meth, but there is always a lot of substance left behind after the initial process is completed. Not too long ago there was a meth lab bust in Edmonton, west side, and so much ether was discovered that had it been ignited, it would have levelled six city blocks. Now, some may shrug their shoulders and say: well, how easy is it to light? How easy? Considering that the making of crystal meth requires the use of open flame, you can rest assured that the chances of ether exploding are very real. So not only is it toxic; it is explosive.

3:10

Leftover toxic chemicals can get absorbed into the walls and furniture and cause immense damage to the place that houses this operation. The outcome is devastating, and you have to realize that this damage is only from the absorption of the chemical, not from the chemical being spilled or dumped. Now, think of the damage that is caused when this toxic, hazardous sludge is dumped in a field or down a toilet or down a storm sewer. The damage to the environment is immense. It is beyond compare the damage that has been done through the irresponsibility of crystal meth producers.

Some detractors may say: how do I know this toxic waste is being dumped into our environment? Well, you need to think about this with some common sense. When crystal meth is made, there is about six times the amount of toxic waste produced as a by-product. To put this in perspective, if a producer makes a pound of meth, they will produce six pounds of toxic waste. But these manufacturers do not make one pound of meth; they make five, 10, 15 pounds of meth at a time, from which at least 30 pounds of sludge is produced. Do you really think meth producers keep this sludge in their labs? Of course not. They get rid of it, and I can assure you that they do not move it down by travelling up to the Swan Hills facility. They take this mess and dump it. They dump it in waste ditches, in farmers' fields, or down household and storm sewers.

With all this in mind I have produced Bill 202 in hopes that it will allow officials to charge individuals who operate a meth lab with crimes against the environment. This is not hinged on a conviction. My hope is that when officials arrive on the scene of a busted lab, they can charge those responsible with not only the federal narcotic crime but also provincial environment crime. By having another charge brought under EPA, we can cut off the drugs at the source, and we just may be able to scare the makers to disband the making of this drug. It's my hope.

Now, I know that there will be those out there that say that EPA has many different areas that can already be used against polluters, and while I realize that this is the case, I don't think there's a section specific enough to go after what we need. There's no specific meth production section within the act, and without that I feel that we are not going to be able to be successfully charging and convicting operators of environmental crimes. To be brutally honest, I have no knowledge of the EPA ever being used against meth producers.

How can we strike fear in these people if we do not even use the tools that are available? How can we show that we are serious about these repercussions if we don't have the specifics available?

Bill 202 specifically states: "A person who releases substances into the environment in the course of producing methamphetamine is deemed to cause or to have caused a significant adverse effect." By having it specifically say what I just read, we have in my opinion opened the door to getting these manufacturers without having to worry about whether the current rules could really apply. I believe that Bill 202 gives our officials an easier avenue to get these manufacturers, put them behind bars, charge them for the cleanup, ensure that they will never be able to hurt our province again.

Mr. Speaker, methamphetamine is a problem in my constituency, as it is around the province, and my constituents have asked me to do something about it. I realize that this government has done a lot to combat this problem by adding more money for treatment centres, supporting AADAC, and creating a task force to investigate this problem. However, I feel that we are dealing with the effect of this problem and not specifically dealing with the cause. With all due respect, my constituents cannot choke off the supply with treatment centres or through task force committees. My constituents are demanding action from me. My constituents need to see proper tools in place. They need to see officials use tools to ensure that their communities, their children, their livelihoods are protected.

I realize that this is a tough battle for all of us here in the Legislature. Drugs are systematically destroying our future in many cases. We need to come up with a new and out-of-box way to meet this challenge. I think Bill 202 is a start in that direction.

I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate on this bill, and I hope that all will be convinced to support Bill 202. Thank you.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise and speak in favour of Bill 202, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006. This bill amends the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act to add meth specifically to the section on a prohibited release where no approval or regulation is given. The amendment makes the production of meth prohibited under this act and makes a person deemed responsible for such a release into the environment liable for penalties that include a \$100,000 fine and imprisonment for a term of not more than two years.

This bill is another tool that can be used in the fight against crystal meth. Specifically, this amendment addresses the production of meth by making it illegal to produce meth by any method or process. A person who is found to have released substances into the environment in the course of producing meth is deemed to have caused a significant adverse effect and thus is liable for penalties.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is important in the fight against crystal meth. From an environmental standpoint it addresses the adverse environmental effects caused by producing meth in clandestine labs, or, as we call them, clan labs. It makes it illegal to use any method or process of altering a chemical or physical properties of a substance to produce meth. It allows for additional charges to be brought to bear on those deemed responsible for producing meth as well as causing the release into the environment of any materials that cause an adverse effect.

The spread of crystal meth use in Alberta and across the country has become almost an epidemic. It is a highly addictive and potentially lethal drug that can be bought for a very cheap price. Due to this and the devastating impact on those who use it, their families, and society as a whole, it is very necessary for governments

to move quickly with legislation that makes it more difficult to access the ingredients for the production of crystal meth as well as enact any law that gives enforcement officers more tools to lay charges for the production or possession of ingredients that are used to produce crystal meth. Amending the EPEA to provide another mechanism to lay charges relating to the production of crystal meth as well as making it a crime to release those substances into the environment is a necessary step to deter the production of crystal meth in labs.

3:20

Clandestine labs, or what we call clan labs, can cause serious harm to the environment. Illegal operations are extremely dangerous. Whether they are large or small operations, these clan labs can cause significant damage to the environment. For every kilogram of meth produced, there are five to seven kilograms of waste. This discarded waste that is produced is toxic and can remain viable and present in the environment for years. Due to the massive environmental risk inherent in the production of meth, producers must be held accountable, and there must be a mechanism to lay charges against those deemed responsible for a discharge into the environment. This bill allows for such charges to be laid.

Mr. Speaker, meth production is extremely dangerous. The chemicals used to cook the meth are very hazardous. Solvents and fumes from meth labs are flammable and explosive, and gases formed in the meth manufacturing process can cause very serious health problems or death from inhalation. Meth operations also produce highly toxic wastes, which can pollute dwellings, water supplies, and soil. The wastes include liquids, acid vapours, heavy metals, solvents, and other harmful materials.

Mr. Speaker, the operators of these labs almost always illegally dump the waste in ways that severely damage the environment. The federal government has already moved to list meth in schedule 1 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, which provides the maximum penalty for production and distribution of meth. The move increases the maximum penalty from 10 years to life in prison. There is a growing trend across Canada and also in the United States to take legislative steps to combat crystal meth production. The move to include production of meth under the EPEA is another tool to use in the fight against crystal meth.

This is a drug that is destroying families, that is destroying the lives of Alberta youths and Alberta families. We need to use every tool we have to fight this scourge, from harsher penalties to protecting our children from established drug houses. This bill provides another tool in this fight and allows for additional charges under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. It is necessary to use every means we have to punish those who produce meth and pollute our environment with toxic by-products. This bill is a good move and a good tool to fight crystal meth.

I personally support this bill and urge all members to support this bill. Thank you.

The Speaker: I would advise all members of the House that this so far is the order which members have indicated, if they need to take a telephone call or something else: the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, then the hon. Member for Highwood, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview or Edmonton-Calder, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. members for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, Lac La Biche-St. Paul, Calgary-Fort, Drayton Valley-Calmar, Calgary-Hays, the Minister of Environment, Calgary-North Hill, and Calgary-Lougheed. So that gives you an indication.

Now we'll go to the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to make this quick. I'm happy for the opportunity to join in the debate on Bill 202, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006. I would like to commend the hon. Member for West Yellowhead for his sustained effort in the fight against crystal meth, which is plaguing our society.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

In a few short years crystal meth has done a lot of damage in our province, our country, and much of our continent. This drug has the most devastating effect on the users but may hurt all of us in ways that we are not even aware of.

Mr. Speaker, every single Albertan has a stake in the fight against crystal meth because its production is so incredibly dangerous. This drug is so dangerous because of the chemicals used to make it and the fact that the people who make it have little or no experience with these chemicals.

An article in *Newsweek*, which was published in August, tells a story about a crystal meth producer. This story is becoming far too common. I would like to quote a few sections of that article because it highlights the need to get tough on this drug. The article reads:

As the concoction simmered, Houchens, [the cook] . . . noticed it was getting too hot. When he picked up the pitcher, the bottom gave way and the combustible mixture splashed onto a burner. The resulting blast engulfed Houchens in a ball of fire. "I felt my face just melting," he recalls. "The skin was running down my arm . . . like lard."

Mr. Speaker, chemicals that can produce such damage are extremely dangerous and are almost always regulated by the highest environmental standards. However, most of the chemicals that are used in the production of crystal meth can be found under the kitchen sink. These chemicals are dangerous on their own but extremely deadly when mixed together.

According to authorities in the United States meth labs have been discovered in houses, apartments, motel rooms, sheds, and even vehicles. As the meth problem grows and agencies seek to restrict the products needed to make methamphetamine, the methods and the locations of the production are changing. This adds to the difficulty health and environmental agencies face in assessing meth-related health risks.

Mr. Speaker, meth is produced using a variety of methods, and the pollutants that are produced as a result also vary, but there are some common chemicals that have been found in meth labs across North America.

In Alberta the police say that crystal meth producers are polluting groundwater with toxic by-products. According to a report that was released by the Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta, toxic chemicals used in cooking the drug are often dumped with no regard to their negative impact on the environment.

I am disturbed by the fact that each pound of meth produced leaves behind five or six pounds of toxic chemicals, which are usually poured down plumbing pipes, storm drains, or directly into the ground. The chlorinated solvents and other toxic by-products used to make meth create long-term hazards because they can persist in soil and groundwater for years, and the cleanup costs related to meth labs are very high because the solvent-contaminated soil usually has to be burned away, which can be a difficult process. According to statistics the average cleanup cost is about \$5,000, but it can cost up to about \$150,000.

But the cost of meth to society is much higher than the cost of cleaning up the environment. Car accidents, explosions and fires that are triggered by the manufacture of meth, increased criminal activity including domestic violence, emergency room and other medical costs, the spread of infectious diseases, and of course the addiction problems: all are very concerning. This is why we need to ensure that those people who are caught manufacturing meth are punished to the highest extent possible.

Mr. Speaker, although I support what this bill attempts to do, I don't know if it takes the best approach. This bill, as well as every other private member's bill that has been debated in this House about meth, is the result of frustration by private members, who are continually hearing meth-related stories. Much of what this bill tries to do can be accomplished by strengthening our government's regulations. This would give the government the advantage of flexibility since regulations can be changed easily in comparison to legislation. I think flexibility is very important in the fight against meth because, like I said earlier, meth producers are doing all they can to stay one step ahead of law enforcement, and we must be able to adapt quickly.

Although I said that private members are frustrated by the meth problem, I must backtrack and applaud this government for responding quickly and aggressively to it. The government's new Crystal Meth Task Force is a welcome announcement. Also, the democratic first that occurred in this Assembly last year to ensure that Bill 202, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, was passed is another example of how government members, ministers, and opposition members came together to fight against this and all drugs.

The larger problem in this fight has been the past federal governments' weak laws. Punishing criminals is the responsibility of the federal government, and the laws are, quite frankly, a joke. People who make meth are simply not afraid of or deterred by the law. In their minds punishment from getting caught is well worth the risk. They know that they will serve their short time in jail, and they will be out making meth again within a couple of years.

3:30

Earlier the Member for West Yellowhead mentioned some toxic chemicals that are used to make meth. Mr. Speaker, those chemicals are poison. Poisoning somebody intentionally is called murder or attempted murder. This is the approach the federal government should take towards meth makers and meth dealers especially because these meth makers and dealers target our children and try to get them addicted as young as possible. If federal laws were stronger, we would likely not be facing the problems we have with meth today. Luckily, now that the federal government is being run by a responsible party, we should see some of our laws strengthened.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion I would like to reiterate just how harmful meth production is to the environment and how costly it is to our society. I'd like to let the Member for West Yellowhead know that I support what he is attempting to do with this bill. I support this idea, and I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate on this issue.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to support the Member for West Yellowhead in his attempt to limit the effects of crystal meth, and I do appreciate his explanation as it related to putting this legislation under the environmental protection act. My colleague the Environment critic from Calgary-Mountain View would like to be participating in this debate, but he has a

meeting at this time with the Environment minister with regard to coal-bed methane and the water pollution. He's hoping that he'll be able to join in support of this member's statements a little later.

I would like to think that the arms of this bill would also be applied to marijuana grow ops. Although it's not the same type of chemicals involved in the grow op, nevertheless there's danger to the environment. There is danger through the mould, through the miswiring and stealing of power. There is the possibility of similar damage occurring in the neighbourhood as is the case with the crystal meth. I would also like to see the teeth that are being proposed in this legislation being applied to such things as abandoned well sites, former refineries such as what the people in Turner Valley are experiencing, and creosote locations as is the case with what the city of Calgary is dealing with. Our environment is being challenged in a wide variety of ways.

Crystal meth is a very serious addictive drug, and I am pleased that the member is addressing not only the effects of the drug itself but the manufacturing of the drug and the lingering damage to not only people directly but the environment itself. I support whatever measures this government can take to clean up our environment and ensure its safety and sustainability in the future.

Therefore, I very much support the Member for West Yellowhead's attempt to listen to his constituents and carry out their desires. Well done, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and join the debate surrounding Bill 202, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006. This bill brings to the fore an aspect of the situation which – I'll be honest – had never really crossed my mind before. The scourge of drugs and various societies' efforts to stop them are well known. The focus of the debate centres on the damaging effects of drugs on those who are addicted. These effects are ones which we are all too familiar with. However, because this is such an important issue, other related factors can be overlooked, and this is what I feel has happened in this situation.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard on the news, from our constituents, from experts, from our colleagues in this Chamber about crystal meth. There is no doubt that this drug is one of the most dangerous substances that a person can encounter. It is relatively new in Alberta, and this awareness adds to the havoc it can wreak. As far as being a recipe for disaster, it doesn't really get much worse than meth. It is relatively easily produced using substances which can be found in almost any small town. The drug is highly, highly addictive, it is cheap to purchase, and the damage it does to addicts' bodies is incredible. From rotting teeth to damaging the nervous system, crystal meth attacks the mind and the body of those who use it.

As if this wasn't bad enough, the residue from cooking meth is even worse than the drug. With ingredients including sulphuric acid, naphtha, benzene, and chloroform it is no surprise that the wastes from meth production are harmful. Also, given the fact that producing crystal meth is not exactly a legitimate business, those responsible are not very responsible about the disposing of their waste. The toxic residue from meth labs ends up in storm drains, dugouts, sewers, and ditches. The environmental damage which these types of substances can cause is immense.

Mr. Speaker, I have been farming all my life. One of the most important lessons that can be taught in farming families is that we have a responsibility to work with the land, not just take from it. As farming has changed over the years, we have seen a rise in the

number of chemicals which are used in the industry. As we have learned more about how these chemicals affect our environmental attitudes, regulations surrounding the use and disposal of chemicals in farming communities have changed. There now exist regulations and standards of practice which dictate how chemicals involved with herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers are used. Time and research have proven that the incorrect use of these substances can have wide and far-reaching effects on our environment. As agriculture producers have learned more, they have become more and more careful with these substances as they have a genuine concern for the land and understand that proper management will ensure that this land will be healthy and fertile for our children and our grandchildren to farm.

I would hazard to say that individuals who are producing crystal meth are not quite as concerned with the health of the environment as am I. Mr. Speaker, from 2002 there were 30 incidents with respect to the production of meth. This means that police have found the evidence of production, equipment being in place for production, or the dumping of lab waste. In the most recent year, 2005, two labs and one dump site were found. One of the labs was quite large, and police discovered 21 kilograms of meth in it. This lab was capable of producing an additional 165 kilograms of the drug.

While the number of busts are low, police services believe that the meth is being produced in larger amounts in our province. Part of the reason for the low number of labs being discovered is due to just how portable they are and the relatively short amount of time it takes to produce the drugs. In other jurisdictions labs have been discovered in automobiles, apartments, abandoned warehouses, and even in sheds in the woods. The production of meth does not require large amounts of electricity or water, such as a hydroponic grow operation for marijuana, so it is easier to hide these operations.

Another indication that large quantities of meth are being manufactured is the street-level activity with respect to the drug. Police organizations are reporting that the methamphetamine on the streets is being sold at lower prices yet is of greater purity and of higher quality. Mr. Speaker, the laws of supply and demand are as applicable to this illicit substance as they are to the legitimate businesses. If you are getting a better quality product at a lower price, there probably is some competition for the business.

Finally, evidence provided by undercover officers in other jurisdictions tells a tale of meth being produced in Alberta and being shipped to other provinces. This indicates that the scale of methamphetamine production in Alberta is most likely higher than the number of labs and dump sites which are discovered by the police.

There is no doubt that meth production is a growing issue in our province, and this means that more and more toxic chemicals are ending up in our environment. The measures proposed in Bill 202 would give officials a specific charge to lay against those who are operating meth labs. Having a specific charge would eliminate the ambiguity of whether or not an individual can be charged with an environmental offence. Also, putting a specific reference to drug labs in our legislation would raise awareness of this topic for peace officers and prosecutors.

3:40

This province has long been committed to good environmental stewardship. Our current hon. Premier, while serving as minister of the environment, oversaw the development of the Alberta Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, acknowledged as one of the most progressive environmental laws in Canada. In his Speech from the Throne the hon. Lieutenant Governor outlined the government's priorities for the coming months, and those contained

advances in both water and land management. The provincial Water for Life strategy is a comprehensive plan designed to ensure that Alberta's water resources are well kept for future generations. The groundwater inventory plan for the new future will give the province more information which can be used to make the best decisions possible with respect to Alberta's water. The land-use framework being developed by the province will institute a single process for making decisions on how Alberta lands are utilized. The importance of all of the facets of land use were taken into consideration in developing this mechanism.

Instituting measures against crystal meth labs in the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act fits well with other environmental measures that the government is currently undertaking. The proposal contained in Bill 202 is forward thinking and, as I said at the beginning of my remarks, draws attention to an aspect of the drug trade which is often overlooked. In one way it is saddening to have this realization thrust upon us. Not only are individuals and families falling victim to this horrible drug; so, too, is our environment.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Member for West Yellowhead for introducing the bill to the House. I have enjoyed the debate surrounding the bill thus far, and I am looking forward to hearing what others among my colleagues have to say about it.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you as well for the introduction of this bill, hon. Member for West Yellowhead. Certainly, we have been hearing a tremendous amount of information from all quarters, including this Legislature and around North America, with the emerging problem of methamphetamine and its use and now the problem of the toxic leftovers from drug labs around our province.

The main problem, as I see it, with methamphetamine is that it's very simple to make, and people can have clandestine drug labs in almost any sort of situation. They've been found in apartments, inside of the trunks of cars, in campers, in hotels, out in the back of a field. It doesn't take a tremendous knowledge of chemistry to put these things together, but it does take, I suppose, a lack of care and attention to one's own health and the health of others to consider selling such a noxious substance but also a lack of care and attention to the people in the surrounding area where a methamphetamine lab might be and the larger environment where the chemicals are disposed of.

So I can say with some certainty that the NDP caucus is in support of this bill with some reservation, I suppose, because the first thing that came to my mind, Mr. Speaker, when I was reading about this is: why are we, in fact, just mentioning the drug methamphetamine specifically when we're dealing with toxic substances in the environment and the drug culture that does exist, unfortunately, in our province? There are many other chemical problems that we have in this province besides this one specific one. Indeed, there are many other drug problems that we have in our province besides this one specific one. So, you know, my first impression and something that I would like to continue to bring up as we speak on Bill 202 is: why are we not including other illegal drug operations and perhaps other illegal chemical industrial sites in this legislation?

You know, we do have, unfortunately, a situation where if people can hide toxic substances that they might be using in different clandestine processes or even industrial processes and somehow circumvent the proper disposal of those chemicals, then there are people that will take advantage of that. So I would like to perhaps

see something taking in a wider range of illicit activities here specific to the disposal of drugs.

Unfortunately, I think that methamphetamine is a problem that is emergent and something that we need to deal with in a more pressing way, but certainly there are lots of other criminal activities going on around illicit narcotics labs. My question might be: why are we being so specific to crystal meth? You know, I can think of quite a number of other possible chemical sort of processes that we might be able to include in this same thing. I know that grow operations don't have the same toxicity with marijuana as crystal meth does, but certainly it leaves similar environmental damage and problems with people with a lack of attention to the real estate in the area that they are building these illicit labs in. So that's one of my concerns in regard to this bill.

The second one. This is a funny situation, perhaps, to be in, but one of the things that I was finding myself being increasingly concerned about is building new laws or increasing very specific bills and stacking them one on top of the other instead of dealing with larger issues in a wider sort of way. You know, when we keep making small laws very specific to one specific thing, I'm wondering if we perhaps aren't sort of building a body of law that is great to deal with the small problems as they come up but are not dealing with the larger laws and initiatives that we could generate here in the Legislature that could deal with whole wider issues.

Of course, every time we talk about illegal drug activity, I hasten to bring up the importance of dealing with the root causes of these activities. A lot of it's to do with a lack of education and vision or perceived opportunity for young people, from lack of attention to the social service needs of young people at a very young age where they are through, certainly, some choices of their own but not entirely a fault of their own, led through poverty and through broken homes to a life of using such terrible substances such as crystal meth. I always like to just remind ourselves and the persons in this Legislature and the province of Alberta about the importance of dealing with these drug issues in a wider context. So I do feel obliged to mention that as well.

Another issue, of course, is the question of enforcement. You know, it's becoming increasingly clear that the responsibilities that are put upon our law enforcement officers have grown geometrically over the last 20 or 30 years in regard to the types of responsibilities that we expect them to undertake. Considering that plus the vast, fast growth of our province's population would lead me to believe that none of these small bills or laws are particularly effective if we don't have the enforcement capacity to carry them out. So without, say, Bill 202 being in concert with a real increase in our law enforcement capability in this province, specific to community policing and being able to have the eyes and the ears of law enforcement on a very neighbourhood sort of level, then I question the value of a bill that becomes law that otherwise is not particularly enforceable. That is an issue that I do want to bring forward in regard to Bill 202 as well.

3:50

Also, as I said before, the whole issue of the disposal of toxic substances is a huge concern as Alberta becomes more industrialized and, you know, particularly as the manufacture of methamphetamine involves such noxious substances as toluene and phosphorus, ephedrine, methanol, alcohol, sodium hydroxide, paint thinners, ammonia. But each of these individual substances also exists individually, and people are using them in processes either industrially or around their home. So my concern – and I think it's a very serious concern borne out by the increase in the overall level of toxicity in our environment – is that we must be sure to capture these

substances in a more systematic way before they build up in our environment and create a carcinogenic atmosphere that we all have to live in.

It's becoming evident that the cumulative effects of various toxins that individually, perhaps, do not cause ill health to us but cumulatively build up over time and deposit themselves in our fatty tissues, in our livers, and in other tissues in our body, in fact create a toxic point where we are more susceptible to cancer and other debilitating illnesses. You know, as we push headlong into the industrial process, the industrialization of our fair province, I think we must be very much more conscious of that. So if we could use Bill 202, perhaps, as a harbinger of further attention to this pressing and growing need in our province and industrial society in general in North America, then I think that I would support it more wholeheartedly, but certainly this is an interesting step in the right direction.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join in on the debate on this bill. The aim of this bill is to protect our environment and the health of Albertans by punishing those who recklessly disregard existing laws and add dangerous pollutants or toxins to our ecosystem through the production of meth. Moreover, the bill will hold accountable those who harm the environment through crystal meth production by making them and not the taxpayers of Alberta responsible for the often staggering costs of cleaning up a meth lab. Specifically, this will be done by amending section 9 of the current Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act so that meth producers may be convicted under provincial law for the degradation of the environment without the charge hinging on the conviction of the federal Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

We're all familiar, Mr. Speaker, with the devastating impacts of crystal meth on the bodies of those who use it. This drug causes insomnia, heart palpitations, hypertension, irritability, paranoia, and strokes, just to name a few. Furthermore, we have all seen the devastating impact that crystal meth has on our communities and particularly on our youth. Throughout Whitecourt-Ste. Anne methamphetamine has been used directly, and it's been associated with levels of violence and crime that threaten the very fabric of our communities as well as an increased incidence of HIV, AIDS, hepatitis, and other communicable diseases.

Mr. Speaker, this issue really hits home to me. As you know, the sponsor of this bill has been having a very difficult time trying to get a rein on meth problems that have arisen in his area. My constituency neighbours West Yellowhead, and I've noticed that meth is beginning to become more and more prevalent throughout my area as well. I've noticed that the meth use has been harming the youth of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. It's a problem that's throughout our schools, and we can see it on our streets. This is why I think we need to ensure that the government begins to take some steps to go after the people responsible for making this horrible drug.

There are too many instances where drug dealers and drug makers are getting off seemingly with a slap on the wrist, and I think the law needs to be tougher. The government has taken action, but I think that more definitely needs to be done. I like the idea that the hon. Member for West Yellowhead is proposing in amending the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act so that our law officials can throw the book at perpetrators.

The environmental impacts of crystal meth production often lurk beneath the surface and are often overlooked but are equally as devastating as the social and psychological costs. Production of crystal meth produces many dangerous toxins, including hydrochloric

acid, iodine, benzene, ether, and chloroform, to name a few. The production process typically produces the chemicals in very large amounts. A recent lab bust in Edmonton yielded 12 pounds of crystal meth and 72 pounds of toxic waste. Meth producers often dispose of these toxins by dumping them down the sink or the toilet or into drainage ditches and canals, causing tremendous environmental damage and compromising the long-term health of Albertans. Being a rural constituency, the members can appreciate how much room there is for waste to be disposed of in a large constituency with such a great MLA as Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, and we need to guard against it.

Exposure to the by-products of meth production has been linked to health complications such as kidney disease, lung disease, and brain damage, just to name a few. What's more, the production of meth is inherently dangerous because many of the chemicals used are highly explosive and flammable. A large meth lab can produce enough explosive material to level many city blocks in some Calgary areas. Indeed, there are countless cases where meth labs have exploded, causing severe injury and fatalities.

An American study reports that explosions and releases of toxic chemicals that are related to meth production are far more likely to cause personal injuries than other explosions and releases of toxic materials that are not related to meth production. Additionally, those most likely to be injured were police officers and innocent bystanders. Mr. Speaker, we as legislators have the duty to do all we can to stop these incidents from occurring.

Why all this concerns me is because I fear a lot of the environmental waste that is produced will affect my constituency and those in rural Alberta. It's a growing problem, and none of us are immune from it. Other jurisdictions have realized that harming the environment through the production of crystal meth is extremely harmful.

In 1999 a West Virginia man was successfully prosecuted on environmental charges relating to the production of crystal meth. The court imposed a sentence of 12 years and seven months in jail. Here in Alberta we need to empower our law enforcement and judicial systems to take similar action to protect the environment and the welfare of the citizens of this province.

Alberta has been an innovator in finding solutions to the problems posed by meth production and distribution before. A recent regulation change by the minister of health has made the main ingredient used in the production of crystal meth much more difficult to access, Mr. Speaker. Furthermore, Alberta and other provinces have taken on a new and comprehensive interprovincial approach in dealing with the problems posed by crystal meth use. It's time we applied the same innovative approach to protecting our environment from the destruction caused by the production of meth.

Bill 202 fits well into a comprehensive approach to eliminating meth use because it recognizes that meth production is dangerous on numerous levels. Under the amendments proposed by Bill 202, law enforcement would have the tools to prosecute those who produce meth on a number of different fronts. Bill 202 proposes that a specific section be added to the act to give law enforcement officials a tool to target meth lab operators for crimes against the environment. You see, I would like to make punishment for meth lab operators more severe, but that is federal jurisdiction, so we have to go about it differently. Protecting the environment is a provincial jurisdiction, so it's good to start here, Mr. Speaker.

The future of all Albertans is linked to our environment: the air that we breathe, the quality of the water that we drink, the purity of our land, which will sustain us for many generations to come. We simply cannot allow producers of meth to jeopardize our future through the dangerous and illegal release of pollutants into the environment.

I urge this Assembly to pass Bill 202 and send a message to all Albertans that we are serious about protecting our future. We must also send a message to the operators of these meth labs that their actions will be taken seriously and that they will be punished for the full extent of their crimes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:00

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make a few quick comments, I guess. First of all, I'm always concerned as we pass more and more legislation that sometimes it's too limiting and not covering all of the bases, and when it comes to the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, it just seems to me that when we start making lists, we start excluding a lot of things. To want to put crystal meth and the chemicals being used in it on there I think is a commendable thing. We want to limit them. On the other hand, I just find that as we make a list, we're leaving things off.

I just wonder if under the Environmental Protection Enhancement Amendment Act it shouldn't be any substances that are deemed harmful to the environment. To be much more open and not have a specific list – you know, what's going to come up next year? What are they going to be making and manufacturing? If we have substances that are on a list that are moved and found harmful to the environment, we should be able to act on them. It seems that we're always trying to solve it one problem at a time rather than with a comprehensive act that just says things that we've deemed environmentally dangerous, that we should be able to go after all environmental hazards and not just the ones on a specific list. I would hope that we'll go forward and be able to make, I guess, less amendments and less bills and to get wordings that are more inclusive and cover all the problems with the environment.

I definitely must say that we do want to remove and have a way of getting after these crystal meth labs, and I approve it on that side of it. Thank you.

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

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and join the debate on Bill 202. I am very concerned about the rising use of crystal meth amongst the youth in our society. This drug is one of the biggest challenges facing our society today.

Methamphetamine use is becoming more prevalent in all areas of the province, both urban and rural. Crystal meth has affected both rich and poor. This drug knows no boundaries and is spreading rapidly throughout our province. Part of the reason for the rapid spread of this deadly drug is the fact that it is so addictive that many people are hooked after first-time use. Another reason for the rapid spread of meth is the ease with which it can be produced. Anyone with access to a pharmacy, a hardware store, and the Internet is able to get all the necessary ingredients and materials required to make crystal meth. Practically any space could be converted into a chemical laboratory with the potential to addict and ruin the lives of hundreds of Albertans.

I would like to commend the hon. Member for West Yellowhead for all of the hard work that he has done in attempting to prevent the rapid spread of this drug. Through the efforts of this courageous member many of the necessary precursors to crystal methamphetamine have been moved behind the pharmacists' counters, restricting their availability. Bill 202 is a fitting next step for the hon. member's crusade against methamphetamine use.

The police, in conjunction with the government of Alberta, have worked hard to shut off the tap that has been allowing crystal meth to flow through our province. We have been taking a very proactive approach to trying to remove the drug from our streets. The government and this Assembly have also taken important steps to repair the damage that has been done to Albertans by crystal meth. Thanks to special co-operation between all parties last spring, we were able to pass legislation that would ensure that parents have the ability to get their children into treatment programs.

Mr. Speaker, the important work that is left to be done focuses on cleaning up the mess that meth has created. When police successfully shut down a crystal meth lab, the potential damage to the community has not completely been eliminated. As with any chemical reaction the production of crystal meth also results in the production of several by-products. The by-products of crystal meth production include many noxious, toxic, potentially explosive, and deadly gases and chemicals. Potentially, phosphine gas, hydriodic acid, hydrogen chloride gas, and phosphoric acid are amongst the by-products that are produced in the production of crystal meth. I do not think that I have to elaborate on the potential dangers associated with each of these chemicals. Each chemical has the potential to be quite lethal and needs to be disposed of in the proper fashion.

Mr. Speaker, as a province we have the ability to properly process and dispose of these hazardous chemicals. However, I doubt that the people who are trying to make money by destroying the lives of children are as concerned about the environment as normal Albertans are. Albertans would never tolerate a legitimate chemical waste dump in a residential neighbourhood. It is imperative that we take steps to ensure that meth producers are not able to further ruin our communities. The people we are trying to deal with are less than honourable and, therefore, deserve special treatment.

Alberta's environmental protection laws currently operate under the philosophy that the polluter must pay. Those responsible for making the mess are held responsible for cleaning up the mess. This is the way it should be. If you decide to destroy the lives of young children, risk the well-being of a community, and cause immeasurable harm to our pristine environment, then you deserve to pay. Bill 202 proposes that we do just that. By amending section 109 of the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act so that meth labs are specifically referenced, a provincial charge can be laid without the need for a conviction under federal law.

Mr. Speaker, you might be asking yourself: why do we need this special provision as I have already indicated that Alberta's laws are already based on the polluter-pays system? While this is true, Alberta's legislation and subsequent regulations were not designed to deal with specific situations created by meth labs. Under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act a regulation exists which deals with the storing and disposing of toxic waste. This regulation has rarely been used to go after the operators of meth labs as the regulation has been designed to deal with waste stemming from legal activity, not illegal activity.

The major problem that we run into when applying current environmental protection laws to meth labs is that often the operator of the lab does not own the property. Current legislation allows an environmental protection order to be issued if a meth lab has caused damage to the environment. If the criminal who was running the operation is in jail, the EPO is served to the owner of the property, who may or may not have any knowledge of the meth lab. The main problem with the current situation is that the rules appear to allow the responsible party to avoid having to pay for the damage that is being done.

I believe that the changes are needed so that the blame can be properly attached to the guilty party. Our current laws and regula-

tions have been set up to stop large industrial polluters from cutting corners in order to improve the bottom at the expense of the environment. The laws and regulations have been not been designed to deal with an operation whose entire foundation is illegal. The approach that has been taken in Bill 202 is to simply ensure that the current approach to environmental protection prevails. I feel that it is important to give the lawmakers every available tool in attempting to eliminate both the supply and the effects of crystal meth.

4:10

I have outlined why rules like the ones proposed in Bill 202 are absolutely necessary. I am supportive of the idea and in the absence of an alternative method to advance the goals proposed in Bill 202, I am inclined to support it.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity.

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

Mr. Cao: Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise this afternoon to join the debate. There have been a lot of good points raised, and I hope that my comments will add some thoughts to the proceedings this afternoon.

Methamphetamine is a very serious problem in our cities and towns, Mr. Speaker. In a very short time it has risen from the most obscure to one of the most dangerous, notorious drugs in our communities. We are fighting a bit of a war on crystal meth in this province, and there have been many different ways that we have gone after this drug. From the work done by the Solicitor General and the health ministers to the work done by the private members, this is an issue that we must all co-operate on.

Mr. Speaker, what I find interesting about Bill 202 is the method it uses to go after those that make crystal meth. Most of the provinces and the U.S. states that have been dealing with this kind of drug use increased drug penalties or try to limit ingredients people can purchase. During the debate on the Member for West Yellowhead's bill in the last session, Bill 204, we heard about many different ways the U.S. states are limiting the purchase and tracking the sales of the drug pseudoephedrine. Pseudoephedrine is found in many common cold medications, and Oklahoma state decided to track sales of this drug by using a registry style of system. This system seems to work, and the state reported that instances of meth labs seemingly dropped as the rate and control of this ingredient tightened.

This is a step that this province took in December, 2005, and I commend the Member for West Yellowhead on this initiative. After our hon. Member for West Yellowhead brought forward his bill to limit the sales of cold medications containing pseudoephedrine, the Minister of Health and Wellness changed the regulations and put those medications behind the counter, limiting their sale. However, there are not many jurisdictions, to the best of my knowledge, that have tackled the issue of the environmental damage that is done while making this drug. This is truly an innovative and creative way of tackling a problem that has begun to grow since its inception in our society.

The government is also very committed to addressing this problem, as was mentioned in the Speech from the Throne. The commitment to fighting all drug abuse in Alberta is extremely important. One of the main things that we as legislators should focus on is how this particular drug harms us, not only as citizens of the province but in our environment as well.

It has been mentioned that the waste that is produced from manufacturing of this meth drug is quite substantial. I know that many today have talked about the mess that is left behind after the

extraction of ephedrine in the final stages of meth production. The waste is very damaging and in many cases has the potential to do irreparable damage to the facility that it is housed in and the surrounding environment.

Before us we have a bill that addresses this problem, and we have to look at this bill in an outside-of-the-box context. This amendment to the existing act is another attempt at snatching those who make the meth. The bill gives provincial authorities the opportunity and some power to go after meth makers without meddling with the federal crime jurisdiction, and this is something that I think the province needs. Those who make meth are not concerned about anything that surrounds them. Meth production itself does incredible harm to the person who makes it, and if the producers neither care enough about themselves nor care about the damage to the human lives of drug users, what makes us think they would have concerns for others or even the environment?

Now, I realize that some critics of this bill will go on about how we need to help those who are in the business of addicting our children. They talk about how we need to ensure that there are enough community supports and social programs to ensure that a person making the meth can be made into a good person and made a productive member of society. Now, while this might be the case, we need to also punish those who hurt our children. My question to the critics who would rather have the social programs instead of punishment is: if you had a daughter who came home one night and was having a mental breakdown because of an addiction to this meth, would you be calling your government and asking for more social programs to help the meth makers? I don't think so. I think you would be calling your local police station and trying to do everything you could to ensure that those who produced and sold this drug to your little girl were put away where they could not hurt anybody else. I believe this is what the bill does. Currently there are many ways to go after the makers of this drug, and now there could be one more.

There is one thing about this bill that I find very interesting. I do have a concern that we are allowing meth makers a small window to get around the law by figuring out the different ways of making a drug similar to meth but not specifically defined by the amendment we are debating. Are we limiting ourselves to one name of a drug, or do we need to make it more general so we can roll with the punches as we adapt it to the drug makers? We all know that this is not the last drug we will wage battle against. Every time the grip of the law comes down on one substance, a new one shows its face and becomes a new target. This has been the case throughout the last 50 years when it comes to the war on drugs. Take out one, and they make another one. I think we should look at this and figure out a way to adapt more readily.

Mr. Speaker, I'm in total support of the idea behind this bill. What I find extremely rare is the fact that the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, sponsoring this bill, came up with a very interesting idea, an innovative way to fight this drug without getting into the federal jurisdiction. I commend the member on this initiative.

I think that by supporting this idea, we will be showing our province that we will bring the fight to the meth makers or any other drug makers. We are not going to stand idle while a very few destroy the many. We will fight this battle, and we will get more ideas like this one. We will surely come out on top.

Again, I commend the Member for West Yellowhead on attacking this drug's social ills. I appreciate the time to speak, and I look forward to the rest of the debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

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

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and join the debate on Bill 202, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006. I want to sincerely thank the Member for West Yellowhead for bringing this bill forward.

Mr. Speaker, segments of our society are gravely ill. The individuals who encourage and feed the culture of drug abuse are like a cancer that eats away at everything we hold dear. It attacks our families, it threatens our children, it consumes the lives of thousands of Albertans, and it is a disease that we must fight with every tool at our disposal. We have a long and hard road ahead in this fight. The criminals who make and distribute these poisons to our friends, our relatives, and our kids are crafty and manipulative. They feel that they can trick law enforcers. We must in every way possible show them that they cannot. We must hit them hard, hit them repeatedly, and hit them where it hurts the most with everything we've got. Above all else, we must send a clear and distinct message to those who would profit from human misery that we will not in any way tolerate their behaviour.

In the fight against meth we've recently added several weapons to the arsenal. Bill 202 may be the most significant of them all as it will introduce another method of inflicting justice on these purveyors of poison. Cicero once said, "Let the punishment match the offence." Taking away a meth producer's freedom by incarceration is just and proper. Fining them to the tune of up to \$100,000 is just and proper and fitting. These individuals poison not only the residents of Drayton Valley and area, not only the citizens of the rest of Alberta, but they poison our environment as well. They make thousands upon thousands of dollars producing meth and leave a wasteland of shattered lives and toxic chemicals in their wake. They profit from this misery and destruction, so it is only fitting that they should be held financially accountable for their actions. Just as they profit, Mr. Speaker, so, too, should they pay.

Bill 202 would amend existing environmental legislation by making specific reference to the toxic by-products of methamphetamine. The law already provides heavy fines for those who violate it. This bill would make it easier and more practical to bring the full force of our environmental law and its fines against those who make meth. In short, this bill would be not only a powerful weapon of justice but a powerful deterrent as well. Criminals will be made aware that crime truly does not pay in Alberta. They will come to know that making meth will in fact be a very expensive undertaking. When the potential financial loss outweighs the potential financial gain, I believe we will see a dramatic drop in meth production.

We will also see Alberta emerging once again as a leader. No other province currently has specific provisions in their environmental legislation to make reference to meth and its by-products. No other province is actively pursuing this environmental approach even though they technically could with their existing legislation. Essentially, each province has in place prohibitions against releasing toxic or noxious substances into the environment, but the by-products of meth and the chemicals used to make it all fit the category. Things like phosphorus, acetone, ether, and benzene are present in large quantities in any meth lab, big or small. Any amount of meth manufacturing can cause a significant environmental impact, but as of yet there has been no action in this area. Why not? I honestly don't know. Perhaps there's a perception that criminal law is the only way to deal with meth producers. Since we've always dealt with drug offences in the same way, perhaps

we've been blinded by tradition. If so, it's time to take off the blinders.

Mr. Speaker, meth is unlike any drug we have dealt with before. Old-line, hard drugs like cocaine and heroin are bad – make no mistake – but meth is worse. It's worse. It's worse because it's cheap, it's easy to make, it's highly addictive, and its by-products are nightmarishly toxic. Meth can be cooked by anyone anywhere. As you heard, we're seeing it in houses, apartment buildings. We're even seeing mobile labs in the back of vans. Lured by the promise of easy money and low overhead, criminals are cooking it at every opportunity in record numbers. They produce as much as they can with the sole objective of addicting Albertans so they can turn a fast buck. Using environmental legislation to go after these criminals is not only innovative; it is logical and necessary. These people poison the environment, so it's only fitting that they be punished accordingly. The punishment is not only appropriate to the crime; it is an effective and potent weapon to drive into the heart of drug production.

Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker. We are at war. It's a war of attrition, and the decency and values that we as Albertans cherish are being eroded. The innocence of our society is drowning in a tide of methamphetamine, and traditional methods and strategies can't hope to hold it back. To fight meth, we must take the fight to the enemy. We have made a commitment, and we must commit totally with every resource at our disposal. Not only will this bill work in Alberta; it has the potential to inspire other provinces to follow our lead. As I mentioned before, they already have in place environmental legislation that can be used against meth producers, and a small, simple amendment such as the one we're discussing now would bring the full force of that legislation into play easily and effectively.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, meth is not just an Alberta problem. It's not just a Drayton Valley problem. It knows no borders. Right across the country there exist thousands of covert labs and operations that are pumping out this poison as we speak. Every minute new people are being sucked into a private hell as they become addicted, and the problem gets worse by the day. If left unchecked, there is no limit to how far it will go. A unified approach is vital. With meth it is a case of hanging together or hanging separately, and we have a unique opportunity with Bill 202 to help not only ourselves but to help our friends and our neighbours across Canada as well. We can be a source of inspiration for the nation. We have in our hands an idea that has the potential to benefit every Canadian, so why would we not support it?

I suppose the argument could be made that this amendment and the approach of environmental prosecution of meth producers in general isn't desirable. It may be seen by some as too harsh or restrictive. Some may call it excessive in light of the criminal penalties that already exist for producing and trafficking in drugs. Well, I don't agree with this argument. The people that this bill will target are not worthy of our sympathy, Mr. Speaker. These are not the people who in a moment of weakness and bad judgment tried meth and became addicted. They're the people who have made conscious and deliberate choices to poison and destroy the lives of others for money. They cause untold pain and suffering, and they don't care. They pollute our water and our land with toxic chemicals, and they don't care.

Mr. Speaker, we have the opportunity with Bill 202 to make them care. We can with this simple change make it easier to force these individuals to pay for the harm they have caused. We can more effectively deal with the toxic messes left by meth labs, and we can make the guilty parties pay for the cleanup. With environmental charges added to criminal charges, the potential jail time for these offenders could increase. In addition to facing huge fines, they

could also be made to pay back any profits that they might have made from their illegal activity. In short, this bill will make it easier for the good people of Alberta to take back what these criminals have stolen from them.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 will help Albertans to get back the things that we cherish. It will help us get back our clean air and our water. It will help us get back our neighbourhoods and our peace of mind. Most importantly, it will help us get back the safety of our children.

I think that Bill 202 represents an innovative and necessary next step on the war on meth, a step which I feel must be taken for the good of the province and for the good of humanity as a whole. We have nothing to lose and everything to gain by endorsing this idea, and I urge my colleagues from all sides of the House to join me in offering it full and enthusiastic support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to speak to Bill 202. This bill proposes an interesting solution to reduce the harms caused by methamphetamine production. As other members of this Assembly have mentioned, meth labs cause considerable damage to individuals as well as the public health at large and the environment. The manufacture of methamphetamine is a dangerous and volatile process that generates a significant amount of waste, the volume of which is about five times greater than the mass of the product produced. This waste is rarely, if ever, disposed of properly and can cause substantial damage. It is often dumped down sinks, toilets, or drains or dumped into rivers, streams, or lakes or even just dumped on the ground. The disposal of the toxins may lead to the poisoning of water supplies or soil. In addition, the cooking process itself severely contaminates the surrounding areas and can thoroughly taint the structure in which it takes place.

4:30

I will not delve into the personal or public health effects of exposure to the chemical by-products of meth labs, but they are devastating.

Currently no other Canadian jurisdiction makes specific reference to the by-products of illicit methamphetamine production in their environmental legislation. However, a few jurisdictions in the United States have taken specific measures to deal with the environmental contamination caused by meth labs. Several states, including Colorado, Kansas, and Washington state, have taken legislative or regulatory action regarding the cleanup of meth labs. These states and several others have been forced to deal with the devastating environmental and public health consequences of methamphetamine production and have taken steps to deal with these effects. While these states may offer interesting insights as far as dealing with the effects of meth labs, their legislation does not go as far as Bill 202 would. Bill 202 is a more proactive legislation and seeks to get to the heart of the problem and limit production itself.

Minnesota is one jurisdiction that offers a comprehensive methamphetamine strategy that seeks to limit and address the negative effects and limit meth production. Its legislation makes specific reference to restitution for meth crimes by persons convicted of manufacturing or attempting to manufacture methamphetamine, to pay restitution to all public entities that participated in any needed emergency response and also to property owners who may have incurred removal or remediation costs. The legislation also contains provision regarding limiting the over-the-counter drugs used to produce meth, harsh penalties for the manufacture and possession of

chemical reagents with the intent of manufacturing meth, and meth lab cleanup procedures.

One proactive and innovative measure which I find interesting is provisions dealing with the purchase and possession of anhydrous ammonia and associated container crimes. For example, the legislation makes it illegal to put that ammonia in a container that is not designed, maintained, or authorized for it. This, like the provisions in Bill 202, offers one more enforcement tool for officials to aggressively pursue meth producers. Minnesota's legislation offers an innovative approach to dealing with both the cause and effect of meth production.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to see that Alberta is heading down the same path. Bill 202 would offer one more instrument to fight against methamphetamine production and penalize meth producers. This bill also brings more attention to the environmental harms and the public health risks that accompany meth production. It is important to recognize these effects, which are not discussed as prominently as the individual or social consequences of meth use and production.

I would like to thank the hon. Member for West Yellowhead for bringing forward another original solution to the meth problem facing our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to be here before you in the Legislative Assembly to speak to Bill 202, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006. I'd like to extend my thanks to the Member for West Yellowhead, who has brought this bill forward. The insightfulness of this proposed legislation truly impresses me, and I say this because it brings attention to an issue of which I suspect some Albertans have little knowledge. This is the true mark of excellence for legislators. Creating solutions ahead of the curve is always a difficult task, but it is certainly a welcome approach.

When I think about the devastation of drugs such as crystal methamphetamine, I think about elements like addiction. I conjure up images of producers, distributors, and users caught up in a deadly game of dependence. I think about all the lives that are impacted by this carousel of destruction, especially the children who will be raised in these situations with little support or direction towards a healthy and positive lifestyle. I also try to think of new methods that we can utilize to battle against those supporting the drug trade, the goal of such efforts being the creation of secure homes for all Alberta families.

Mr. Speaker, we don't think of the environment often enough. However, this is of great concern because of the negative impact of methamphetamine production on the environment, and the impact of that is extreme. Thankfully, we have the opportunity to develop legislation in the form of Bill 202 to address this issue.

In Alberta and most of western and central North America crystal methamphetamine is created through two different chemical means. Though different in some regards they share a common thread: the use of harmful chemicals and the creation of hazardous by-products. The list of substances used in the process includes hydrochloric acid, sulphuric acid, toluene, benzene, and charcoal lighter fluid. This is a potent mix, and it gives a clear indication of the severity of the problem. However, the starting elements also create an obscene combination of wastes as end products. Included in the effluent is a toxic brew containing a variety of potentially flammable sludges which spew harmful gases, such as hydrogen chloride.

One must realize that the wastes and by-products associated with

meth labs will not be disposed of properly. For obvious reasons, it would be unlikely for any of these operations to spend their free time hauling empty containers to the local eco station for disposal. It is unlikely that profits are spent on equipment to ensure that gases are filtered or scrubbed before they are released through a vent. Excess chemicals will not be transported in a certified vehicle to an appropriate provincially regulated facility for storage, destruction, or reuse. Effluent will not be treated to any standards set by anybody, including Alberta Environment, before it's flushed down the toilet, washed down the gutter, or thrown into the closest field. Illicit drug production and the illegal handling and disposal of hazardous chemicals go hand in hand in this case. Both are threats to society, and both require actions by us, the legislators of Alberta.

Meth labs have been known to exist in homes, hotels, vehicles, and warehouses. Dumping grounds around these sites could include everywhere from the local ravine, park, or even schoolyard. Liquids poured down drains collect in plumbing systems and often lead to the release of noxious gases. This means that all of us could breathe in fumes from meth labs, and our children could be playing in the toxic waste that these drug producers have dumped illegally within our neighbourhoods.

When these operations are found and busted by our trustworthy city police or RCMP detachments, who do you think currently pays for the cleanup costs of the pollution which is uncovered? You guessed it, Mr. Speaker: the taxpayers of Alberta. The very people who suffer from the effects of the pollution and the effects of the drug trade have their hard-earned tax dollars spent on cleaning up the aftermath too. The funds spent on the cleanup of these facilities are then unavailable for use in programs dealing with future prevention. No progress is made in the fight against drugs, and no people involved in the production, sale, or use of meth are assisted in getting their lives back on track. The money is simply used to clean up one site while another sets up across town. We can change all that by giving our continued support to Bill 202.

Bill 202 recognizes the dangers of methamphetamine production on the environment and acts to ensure that the proper people, those who cause the mess, are actually responsible for cleaning it up. This legislation seeks to ensure that those operating a methamphetamine laboratory will be held accountable for the reclamation of the facility and its associated waste. We'll also rightly penalize such groups with appropriate fines for damaging the environment. Such measures will not only help to preserve and revitalize the air, water, and land we all enjoy but also decrease meth production because this legislation will also provide another deterrent in the fight against drugs within our province. With our strong law enforcement presence in the province it's only a matter of time before meth labs are brought to justice, and if the fiscal costs through environmental cleanups and fines are substantial and binding, then this will be a definite deterrent against starting one in the first place. Therefore, we're killing two proverbial birds with a single stone.

By supporting Bill 202 we can protect our environment and decrease the availability of methamphetamine for trade. With less methamphetamine production comes less methamphetamine on the street, fewer methamphetamine users, and decreased social and environmental impacts. The overarching result is the protection of Albertans, the safeguarding of our children from the dangers of meth use and the drug lifestyle, and, of course, the elimination of exposure to the pollution associated with its production. We don't want to live in a place where methamphetamines are commonplace in our schools. We don't want them in our homes, and we don't want them on our playgrounds. We don't want the damage that the production of methamphetamines has on our environment because we must realize that our environment includes our schools, includes our parks, and includes our homes.

4:40

The environment, Mr. Speaker, is a shared responsibility for all of us. We all have to work to uphold the integrity of Mother Nature and all it includes. After all, it is one of the few things that all of us share and enjoy. We're in many ways connected to it and through it. The threats from methamphetamine labs show that now more than ever we must be concerned about our environment, which is why it's so appropriate for us to be discussing Bill 202 here today. Although it's not one of the first aspects that most of us think of when discussing the obscene dangers of drugs, it certainly should be. Just as the playgrounds of our children must not be a haven for the evils of methamphetamine, our environment must not be the dumping ground for the toxic waste of crystal meth labs. Just as it would be absurd for the Alberta government to pay for the production of methamphetamine, it's unacceptable for us to pay for the cleanup and disposal of the by-products from these facilities. Just as it's our duty to protect our children and the environment, it's our duty to stand together in support of Bill 202.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutillier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to first of all compliment the hon. Member for West Yellowhead for bringing forward Bill 202. As Minister of Environment I want to say that crystal meth presents a serious and challenging issue that this government is committed to addressing. The waste products of crystal meth production can cause significant environmental damage, as has been mentioned by others here this afternoon. Legislative tools will ensure that those convicted of operating crystal meth labs are held responsible for any environmental cleanup costs caused by their illegal activities. While effective provisions already exist within the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, Bill 202 gives prominence to an issue affecting so many communities and so many Albertans.

I am working closely with the hon. Member for West Yellowhead to realize in regulation the full spirit and intent of this important initiative. I applaud him and applaud those that are so active in this important initiative, such as the first lady of Alberta, Dr. Westbury as well, in creating this awareness, in righting something that is so wrong. I want to congratulate the hon. Member for West Yellowhead and all those who are working so hard to make a difference in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to join the debate on Bill 202. Since I was named the chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, in December 2004, I've learned more about methamphetamine than I ever imagined I would. I've heard countless stories, disturbing and heartbreaking stories from Albertans whose lives have been severely affected by meth abuse. I've heard tales about lives and families torn apart by meth addiction. Methamphetamine is a highly potent, highly addictive illicit drug that has become a growing concern as its production and abuse increases. Communities across the province are seeing first-hand the horrible effects of this drug, and they're forced to deal with the serious health, social, and economic consequences that accompany methamphetamine use and production.

Mr. Speaker, you've heard the long, long list of health effects of meth abuse. It's a very, very ugly list. But the harmful effects of methamphetamine use and drug abuse in general, I may say, extend

far beyond personal health issues. Drug abuse often leads to deterioration of personal and family and professional relationships. It leads to reduced effectiveness at work and school. Drug abuse often leads to criminal activity to pay for the addiction. There are also broad social, economic, and public health costs resulting from the use of illicit drugs, and productivity is diminished. The public health system is further strained by the costs resulting from drug use. Illegal drug use, production, and distribution bring increases in property crime and violent crime, and resources must be expended to repair this damage. As you can tell by the list of effects, we're talking about a very nasty drug. Crystal meth is an exceptionally addictive drug as well, so easily accessible and relatively inexpensive for users to purchase.

The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission has worked hard to assist Albertans struggling with addiction, including addiction to meth. AADAC offers counselling and treatment services to individuals and their families who are seeking help. These services may be accessed through AADAC's confidential 24-hour help line, visiting any AADAC office, and via aadac.com. AADAC also provides further treatment options for individuals with addiction problems. This past November AADAC began two new treatment programs designed to help youth aged 12 to 17 recover from substance abuse. This treatment initiative includes residential and detoxification programs located in Edmonton and in the Calgary area that assist with recovery from abuse of a range of substances and includes a special treatment protocol for meth users.

Detoxification gives youth support during withdrawal and prepares them for residential treatment or other treatment options. The voluntary adolescent detox program is usually a six- to 10-day program, or longer if required, in a safe and supervised environment. The program provides stabilization, assessment, referral, information sessions, introduction to self-help groups, and addiction treatment planning facilitated by an AADAC counsellor.

Residential treatment is intended for adolescents with severe, chronic substance abuse problems. The voluntary, no charge, 12-week AADAC residential programs include an urban-based model here in Edmonton and a wilderness adventure program based outside of northwest Calgary. The treatment includes on-site schooling, group and individual counselling, a family program, and recreational activities. Having seen these two programs with my own eyes, Mr. Speaker, I am very, very impressed with the work that goes on with these individuals every day. These two programs, I might add, are linked to family aftercare counselling provided by AADAC.

Mr. Speaker, with all that being said, they're just one part of the government's overall drug strategy. AADAC has actively been working with other government departments, regional authorities, community agencies, drug coalitions, families, and individuals. Why? To develop an overarching strategy that will effectively address the problems associated with drug abuse. AADAC focuses on four key elements – prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and policing and enforcement – to ensure a balanced, comprehensive approach in responding to the issues associated with drugs, which brings us right back to Bill 202.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead should be commended for his tireless work in finding ways to reduce the production of methamphetamine. Bill 202 offers another opportunity to address the source of the problem, methamphetamine production, while protecting the environment and public health at the same time. We need to consider more innovative solutions like this to slow and eventually eliminate the production of methamphetamine and other illegal drugs.

Now, many of the initiatives mentioned earlier, such as counselling and support, treatment and detox, deal with the harmful effects

of methamphetamine use. Bill 202 also deals with the detrimental effects on the environment and public health. We need to do all that we can to stop the production of methamphetamine. Bill 202 offers another avenue to go after the producers. The additional punishments that could be levied provide more mechanisms to deter meth lab operators and reduce production and distribution of this deadly drug.

In addition to increasing the supply of meth on the streets, meth labs themselves also pose a significant danger to the population at large. The cooking process is highly dangerous. The chemicals involved are extremely volatile, explosive, and toxic. The significant volume of waste generated when meth is cooked is not safely disposed of, and it pollutes our environment. Yes, Bill 202 addresses these concerns and offers innovative enforcement avenues to combat the problem.

However, Mr. Speaker, we do have another problem. While I'm very pleased with the thought behind Bill 202 and I agree wholeheartedly with its intentions, I have one apprehension in a technical aspect of it. Specifically, I'm concerned that this bill's exclusive focus on methamphetamine may be too limiting. There are a lot of illicit drugs out there, and we must be certain to not focus our priorities on just one aspect of the overall drug problem. I am concerned that the phrasing of this legislation may be too narrow and exclude other drugs – past, present, and future – that could have similar public health or environmental consequences.

It's also important to consider that the Minister of Environment has stated that the changes proposed in this bill could also be implemented just as effectively through regulatory change. Now, in light of the concerns of the hon. minister and other members of this Assembly, I propose hoisting Bill 202. If the minister does not implement regulatory changes, then we should revisit this bill when the time is appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 202, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 202, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Methamphetamine) Amendment Act, 2006, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: I'll wait a moment for the amendment to be circulated to you all. Does anyone wish to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Chase: Speaking to the amendment, I very much appreciate the intent of the member who proposed Bill 202. He proposed it because his constituents asked him to do it, and he believed that it was the best vehicle to accomplish the end, which was to limit not only the production but the sale and problems associated with the cleanup of crystal meth. There is no doubt that in the future we're going to be faced with other types of drugs and other circumstances that pose threats, but I think that the member has focused on crystal meth, which at this moment is an extreme problem, and in so focusing on this, has created a bill to address the situation.

I speak against the amendment, which would put it back six months. I believe that the discussion should take place throughout the process of Committee of the Whole and third reading. To further amend the bill if we need to sharpen its focus, fine, but simply pulling it at this moment to me dishonours the member's intent.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think the hon. Minister of Environment stated that he is going to modify the EPE Act to make sure that we look after this dreadful drug production. I'm in favour of that, and I'd at this time call for the question.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to address this shortly as well. I said earlier that I was in favour of Bill 202 but was very concerned, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed is, that it was too inclusive and that we need to go after all areas with this drug.

I don't understand. Last spring we came together as a House and moved the crystal meth bill in short order, and I feel that we should be able to get an amendment and bring it forward here with the unanimous consent, I believe, of all parties. We need to be able to move on this quickly, and six months seems like a tremendously long time to me. I would like to see an amendment come forward to move to make this a more inclusive bill but in a much shorter term than six months from now.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

**Bill 203
Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway)
Amendment Act, 2006**

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to move second reading of Bill 203, Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, 2006, on behalf of the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

The hon. member regrets that he cannot be here today but has expressed to me how important he considers this bill to be.

As the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka I am familiar with the Alberta Central Railway Museum, which is located near my riding. This fine organization provides the citizens of the area and the entire province with something truly special, a glimpse into the past. The name Alberta Central Railway Museum recognizes the historic railway which served central Alberta from 1913 to 1981. It originally ran from a location near Red Deer to a point beyond Rocky Mountain House. The museum site represents the 1907 Wetaskiwin Canadian Pacific Railway depot in a scaled-down form. It is a public venue that prides itself on its wealth of knowledge of pre-1965 CPR artifacts and history.

In conjunction with the museum's 10th anniversary celebration in 2002, the final spike was hammered to complete a full-gauge rail line on the museum grounds. This mile-long loop of track is utilized by visitors who board a restored 1926 passenger car. This vintage, first-class equipment gives passengers a first-hand look into Alberta's history. Having a track of this nature allows for something more than a site. It offers an experience. To feel the cool steel of a passenger car as you climb aboard while the unmistakable beat of the engine begins to fill the air is truly remarkable. I know that for me personally, being able to visit these heritage sites and relive a part of the past is something I cherish and enjoy very much.

Through its active rail yard and exhibits the Alberta Central Railway Museum is able to tell the story of train travel in Canada. This includes a vivid portrayal of the work involved with the railroads and the incredible importance of railways to western Canada. The railway is something more than our highways, and a train is something greater than our cars. The railway built our country and gave birth to the province of Alberta. The railway was the only means of transportation other than walking or riding a horse or a cart. Really, it was the only fast transport available in the entire western part of the country.

The laying of each new length of track gave rise to great opportunity for many of the first Albertans. It is still apparent from glancing at a map of our province that towns grew on the routes of railways. This is because the railways brought not only settlers but a steady source of supplies and a reliable means of transportation to export markets.

The once countless wooden elevators are wonderful examples of this aspect of railway transportation. These elevators symbolize farming and the location of communities themselves. Railways and elevators were synonymous symbols of service for farmers and the west for many years. Though the role of these structures has diminished in the new era of agriculture, their importance in terms of our heritage is still evident. Thankfully, organizations such as the Alberta Central Railway Museum are working to preserve them. In 2002 the museum was able to acquire a 1906 Alberta Grain Company elevator. According to Alberta Central, it is the second oldest standing grain elevator in the province.

Despite the success of the Alberta Central Railway Museum they have approached the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, in whose riding this museum sits, with an issue that is troubling them. While their passionate spirit for their cause bodes well for their operation, in the case of their active track this is simply not enough. This is because the legislation and regulations that currently apply to the track at this museum are making it difficult for them to operate.

A great example of this is the fact that the folks at the Alberta Central Railway Museum have to complete an inspection of their track just as often as major rail companies. This means that heritage railways are checking their line just as many times as CN and CP. It is my understanding that under the current regulations an inspection must be done twice per week. It is easy to identify that this is difficult for the small organizations that run heritage lines. It is also easy to see that two sets of regulations would be more appropriate.

It is clear that there is a huge difference between national carriers and heritage operations. Under the proposed legislation heritage railways would operate at speeds below 30 kilometres per hour and travel less than 240 kilometres per day and would not operate for the purpose of transporting commodities. National carriers travel much faster, cover much more ground, and carry many dangerous goods. In fact, a typical train that would run through my constituency, down the track between Edmonton and Calgary, would have as many as 100 cars, each car weighing more than 100 tonnes, which is over 10,000 tonnes at high speed many times per day. Alberta Central runs about 20 weeks per year, two trips per day, about a mile per trip, which is 10 trips per week, with one engine and one or two other cars at very low speeds, mostly below 10 miles per hour. So just as we cannot compare apples and oranges, we cannot judge national carriers and heritage railways with the same degree of scrutiny.

5:00

The difficulty the Alberta Central Railway Museum is facing is not an isolated case. There are three other active sites in Alberta that utilize vintage equipment on full-gauge tracks. These include the

lines at Fort Edmonton Park, Calgary Heritage Park, and the Alberta Railway Museum. All three of these organizations are dealing with the same challenges as the Alberta Central Railway Museum. These difficulties can be erased with a simple amendment which is proposed in Bill 203. By creating a heritage railway designation under the Railway (Alberta) Act, we will build a platform to free them from the unnecessary burdens they currently face. By following this legislation with more appropriate regulations, we will be giving them a chance to operate under more fitting guidelines.

However, it is important to note that we will not be giving them free rein that will endanger visitors. Unique regulations will be established that will take into consideration the risks involved in running these heritage railways. A major risk involved in railways is the wear on track switches and other such devices. This is a valid concern for major carriers whose repeated trips over these tracks include a large number of cars carrying huge loads. The vintage railways dealt with under Bill 203 have a handful of cars with minimum tonnage. I'm not claiming to be an expert, but it would make sense that less weight and fewer trips would mean a lot less damage or wear and tear per day.

With these sorts of differences between the demands on the track used by national carriers compared to those in heritage sites, an amendment to the Railway (Alberta) Act is a much better approach than making exemptions through regulatory reform. Bill 203 achieves the desired end in a simple way and at the same time gives these historic sites a designation of heritage railway which is accurate, fitting, and honourable. It is worth noting that this designation could not be created with regulation changes alone.

The Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose has been assured through the process of stakeholder consultation that safety will not only be maintained but will be the number one, first priority in the creation of the new operating standards for heritage railways. At the same time, these rules will be more appropriate to the capability of the organizations and the vintage equipment they run.

Now is the perfect time to be addressing this issue. The Alberta centennial has made all of us reflect upon the great history of our province. It has made us realize that we have all been a part of making it the success story that it is today. This connection is important because it is a part of who we are.

Because of the vintage qualities of the equipment used on these lines and the regulations that currently govern them, these railways are being unnecessarily burdened. Grouping historical railways in the same category or the same regulatory sphere as major carriers such as CN and CP makes no sense. Creating a separate classification for them as heritage railways is a logical and reasonable solution. Please join me in supporting this legislation in Bill 203.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I rise to speak in favour of this motion.

An Hon. Member: It's a bill.

Mr. Chase: A bill. Thank you very much. I appreciate that clarification.

I speak in favour of this bill for a series of the same reasons that have been put forward before, so I'll not go into great detail. But it's important to connect the number of kilometres travelled with the safety of the line to ensure that the line is properly maintained. Given the small percentage of kilometres that are annually expended in the Fort Edmonton, Heritage Park, and the heritage railways, it makes absolute sense to not require the same strenuous rules. The

vintage railways are a part of our celebration that we just experienced with our 100-year, centennial birthday, and encouraging history in this province, which this bill promotes, is of utmost importance.

Just a very little sidetrack comment. For the three years that I worked as a campground host in Cataract Creek wilderness park, I would travel from Longview along the highway past Eden Valley. Along the Highwood River there was an historic railway car being used as a cabin. The people in the area objected to the use of this stationary rail car as a cabin. They felt it was an eyesore. The cabin owner decided that since stationary was the problem, he would simply mount this rail car on a set of rails that basically extended about 10 feet on either side of his car. So that he was within the Alberta regulations of a vintage rail car, he would make sure that he moved the rail car a few centimetres to the left, a few centimetres to the right to make sure that he came under the legislation associated with vintage rails. I'm sure he will enjoy, as will all other heritage railway buffs, Bill 203, which differentiates historical railways from the regular freight on a day-to-day basis.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, will be very brief. The hon. member has talked very much about this bill and has basically said the majority of what I was going to say.

I would give a little background to this bill. Many people are familiar that there is a railway in Heritage Park. Mr. Speaker, over the past three to four years there have been some significant issues with the Heritage Park railway about the cost of upgrading that, in essence, to the level that would occur on all other railways around the country. You and I both know that in Heritage Park, quite simply, it goes around in a circle. It makes absolutely no sense to have the same regulations for CN/CP as well as the other short lines in Alberta as it does on these closed-circuit railways.

In talking to the railway associations, they in no way want to endanger people. On the other hand, they are spending an inordinate amount of money to go through all of the qualifications, go through all of the track checks twice a week, as was mentioned, and it's causing them severe hardship.

The central Alberta railway, for example, is looking at costs of around \$50,000 a year, which quite simply could be used for other things. It could be used for other things for their museum. To let the Assembly know why we are talking about railways, CN and CP, being national carriers, are governed by federal legislation. The short-line railways, of which there is now just one, as well as the heritage railways are actually under the jurisdiction of the Railway (Alberta) Act and therefore come under our jurisdiction.

This is a case, Mr. Speaker, of quite simply doing what is right. It's a case of some common sense. It's a case that a railway going 10 kilometres per hour or 10 miles an hour, under 30 kilometres per hour, is not going to pose the same amount of threat to people's safety as a railway that is travelling 50 or 60 or a hundred kilometres per hour carrying freight over large distances, yet, as it is today, the regulations are exactly the same. So I really commend the hon. member for bringing this bill forward. It is something that I and my department are completely in favour of, and it is something that I certainly will support.

The regulations will come after this. It will come with some consultation with the actual railways. In no way – in no way – Mr. Speaker, are we going to diminish the safety of these railways. In no way are we going to allow the railways to diminish to such an extent

that they become a safety hazard. What we're going to do, quite simply, is put a level of common sense into this. I feel that that is incredibly important.

Again, I really commend the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose for bringing this forward and for paying such attention to his constituency. Although it may be seen by some as being an issue that is very simplistic, it is a very important issue. In places such as the central Alberta railway, Heritage Park, Fort Edmonton this is a very large issue, so I absolutely commend the member and look forward to the speedy passage of this bill through the Legislature, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, take some great interest in seeing the speedy passage of Bill 203. I had the opportunity to speak to the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose last week, and he informed me of the details of this bill. I can with very little hesitancy say that I certainly agree with the spirit if not the details of Bill 203. We have quite a number of vintage railways operating throughout the province of Alberta. Certainly, encouraging this sort of development as a way for people to learn about the history of our province as well as to promote tourism in the province of Alberta – I think it's incumbent upon us to encourage that as much as possible by allowing these vintage railways to operate in the most economical way possible.

You know, for more than 80 years we've had different companies operating branch lines all over the province, through the mountains and up to the north country and down south to the States. We see a lot of our history directly linked to the development of these rail lines, and some of our most beautiful architecture is associated with rail lines as well. Now, in 2006, we see some of our, I guess, most interesting tourist attractions somehow being linked to these vintage railways. I myself and my family worked for a number of years at Fort Edmonton as costumed animators, as volunteers. We greatly appreciated the vintage rail lines that do exist there, and certainly it was a big draw for tourism in Edmonton, as it is in Calgary and central Alberta, where the member who introduced this bill is from.

I do have a couple of specific questions that perhaps we can work through during the speedy passage of this bill. First of all, we have here in Edmonton a very well-organized and industrious group called the Edmonton Radial Railway Society. These are the people who operate the streetcars at Fort Edmonton, and they operate streetcars of different vintages there. As well, they operate the streetcar that goes over the top of the High Level Bridge. They have been very proactive in developing that as a way to transport people to the south side, back to the north side, and as a tourist attraction too. I know for a fact that the Edmonton Radial Railway Society as well has very ambitious plans and, in fact, has built up the rail capacity in storage to run a streetcar from Fort Edmonton up to the University farm area, where there will be a new LRT station in the not-too-distant future.

I'm curious to know if perhaps this legislation would be pertinent to the Edmonton Radial Railway's plans as well. I know that they are fully deserving of our full support in what they do. While perhaps it's problematic to apply this particular legislation to the route that they operate over the High Level Bridge since those are also, I believe, commercial railway lines, certainly I would like to entertain the possibility of the line that they have proposed from Fort Edmonton up to the university farm. They will put in their own line. They have bridges stored away already. They have rail lines stored

away. If we could perhaps accommodate for their plans for that route under this legislation.

The area, specifically, that I would focus on in regard to perhaps some minor changes is the 240 kilometres a day stipulation which is in this Bill 203. Perhaps we could look at that. I will take it upon myself to contact the Edmonton Radial Railway Society to see if that works for them with their plans because I would like to certainly see them accommodated within the structure of this Bill 203.

As I said before, I think that railways have a very strong connection to our past and teach us a lot about the history of how our province was developed, but they also teach us about the future and how railways will in fact come back to serve us again here in Alberta. They're fun, they're interesting, they attract people from all over the world, people who are dedicated to vintage railway as a hobby and as a field of study, and I certainly hope that Bill 203 will help to facilitate that here in Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a pleasure to join in debate on Bill 203, the Railway (Alberta) (Heritage Railway) Amendment Act, 2006. I support the bill and support the intent of improving the existing legislation in terms of how it addresses certain railways.

Mr. Speaker, the original act, the Railway (Alberta) Act, was debated in this House in 1998, and it had really three purposes. First, it eliminated administrative barriers to individuals or groups in the private sector who were contemplating starting up a public railway. Now, under the old system it was necessary for each railway operator to obtain a special act in the Legislature, as you would recall, in order to formalize their railway. The Railway (Alberta) Act eliminated the need for a special act.

Secondly, the purview of the act was expanded to encompass all full-size railways which operate in Alberta. Now, prior to this, only public railways were identified under railway legislation in our province. Railways operating on industrial sites as well as other railways, such as the one located in the Alberta Railway Museum, as we heard about today, were not included in the railway legislation in the province.

Finally, this act empowers the minister responsible to create and enforce regulations with regard to rail safety under legislation which falls under provincial jurisdiction.

This act is a great improvement on the original act, and I do support it. We do have to allow the Alberta Railway Museum and others to operate in this province, albeit in a very safe environment, and remove some of the administrative barriers.

With that, I support Bill 203, and I wish to adjourn debate on Bill 203. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been a good afternoon of debate, and in view of the hour I would move that we now call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:19 p.m.]