

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

**Title: Thursday, March 9, 2006**

**1:30 p.m.**

Date: 06/03/09

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I have two groups of guests that I would like to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly. They're all outstanding representatives of Alberta's public service, and of course they're all working in Alberta Municipal Affairs. I would like to first of all introduce a group of employees from Alberta Municipal Affairs that are touring the Legislature, having an opportunity to see the political side of life as they deal with the practical side of life in their day-to-day operations. I would like to introduce to you 11 individuals. They are Kristine Jonah, Brenda Putz, Jay Merchant, Sarah Severyn, Mandi Carroll, Mike Haugen, Dave Wheeler, Jeff Bazinet, Michelle Austin, Nicolle Germain, and Brad Kopp. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Speaker, Municipal Affairs has a program that I'm very proud of and works extremely well. It's a mentorship program where new employees have an opportunity to get a lay of the land from some of the more experienced folks that are within our department. Today I would like to introduce to you two representatives of that mentorship program. They are Elysia Johnson, who is an administrative assistant with the planning and co-ordination union, and her mentor, Kari-Ann Kuperis, who is a public affairs officer in our communications branch. I would ask that they rise and receive the recognition of the House as well.

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions to do today. It is my pleasure to rise on behalf of my colleague the MLA for Stony Plain to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House two of his constituents who are visiting with us today. The first is Karen Snethun. She is the mother of Carter Snethun, who recently won a Great Kids award in the Stony Plain region. With her is Deanna Sanche, who is visiting the Assembly to observe the process of our Assembly. Deanna is very interested in the work that our pages do and has expressed a desire to try that one day. I would ask our guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction to you and through you to all members of the House is to introduce to you Christine Barker and Sam Ludmer, who are residents of St. Albert. Christine and Sam are visiting the Legislature Building today and are joined by three of their guests, Hy Ludmer and Brad Stowell, visiting from the United States, and Aaron Ludmer, visiting from Ottawa. I'd also like to add

that Christine and Sam are getting married this weekend. Congratulations to them. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House as well.

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

**Mr. Stelmach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mr. David Benoit, his wife, Sylvie, and children Joseph, Catherine, and Patrick. The Benois are here today to learn about Alberta's legislative process. I'm certain that they are very familiar with the federal system as their uncle is the recently re-elected Member of Parliament for Vegreville-Wainwright, Mr. Leon Benoit. The Benois are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mrs. Ady:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce a school group that I have in the members' gallery. It's not very often that I get a school group up. In fact, this group comes up every year. They're the Trinity Christian school, and they had a tough time getting here today. They slipped and slid over those roads and made it anyway to better show their kids how government works. The parents with them are too numerous to mention, so I'll just mention the teachers. It's Mr. George Graffunder, Miss Kim Schellenberg, and Mr. Clement McLachlan. If I could ask them to rise, we can give them the traditional warm welcome of the House.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Highwood.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a group of children from the Edison school north of Okotoks. The grade 6 class is accompanied by their teachers Mr. Joseph Smith and Mr. Blair Maciura along with parent helpers Mrs. Lynn Perkins, Mr. Rick Festa, Mrs. Lana Smith, Mrs. Shelley Rizzo, Mrs. Baby Hornaday, and Mrs. Sabrina Birrell. I'm sure these people, along with Cindy's people, slithered their way up here in less than ideal conditions, and I'm certainly happy to have them here. I suspect that they're back in the public gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Marz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not often I get guests up here, but I was pleasantly surprised twice today. Over the lunch hour a former constituent approached me and is visiting today. She will be introduced later on. It was great to see her.

I also have two friends from Olds that work for accredited supports, an organization that provides excellent services to persons with disabilities in my community. I believe they are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask Linda Maxwell and Verlie Weiss to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Tougas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 14 members of the board of the Family and Community Support Services

Association of Alberta. They are in Edmonton-Meadowlark tomorrow attending a board meeting. I would like to welcome them. They're here to watch question period today, led by president Joe Ceci. They asked not to be identified because they're all very modest civil servants. If they could just rise and accept the traditional warm greeting of this House.

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to welcome a group to our Legislature and to introduce to you and through you to the members and the officers of this Assembly a group from one of the best and greatest multicultural schools in our province, the John Barnett school in Edmonton-Manning, accompanied by teachers Mr. Barry French, and Mrs. Pat Robinson and parents Mrs. Denise Hugman and Mrs. Carol Lycan. Please rise and have the warm welcome of the members of this Assembly.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Karla Kincade. Karla is here visiting her brother David, who is a valued member of the Liberal caucus staff, and of course she's visiting my constituency of Edmonton-Centre. After spending five years in New Zealand, she's just moved back to Canada and will be residing in Kelowna, B.C. She is finishing her masters in medical physics at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand. I would ask her to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: 1:40 **Oral Question Period**

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

#### **Income Support Class Action Settlement**

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For years this government ignored its own laws by denying the most vulnerable Albertans what they were entitled to: fair treatment according to the law with respect to their payments under AISH, social assistance, and widows' pensions. Now this government is trying to sweep the issue under the rug by claiming they didn't know, quietly agreeing to huge out-of-court settlements, and by blaming the so-called errors on staff. My first question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Will the minister admit that this lawsuit was not the result of 20 years of bureaucratic errors but resulted from a policy directive carried on with the minister's knowledge and support?

**Mr. Cardinal:** Of course, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before in this House, it is very unfortunate that people with so many needs were caught in this particular situation. As you're aware, this issue goes back to 1979. That involved two other premiers and no doubt a number of cabinet ministers and no doubt a number of staff in those various departments. I believe that the staff at the time followed the policies that were in place at least as close as possible depending again, of course, on the type of information they received from the clients, and sometimes that's where there are some differences.

Again, I'd just like to say that it's unfortunate this happened. I believe the agreement has been settled now to the satisfaction of the clients, and the process is to proceed with the payments that are owed to certain people.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you. Well, we'll all agree that it was unfortunate. Again to the same minister: did the minister take this multimillion dollar class-action settlement to members of the provincial cabinet, Treasury Board, or Premier's office before it was made public?

**Mr. Cardinal:** Of course, Mr. Speaker. Any issue as sensitive as this always goes through the whole process to ensure that it is dealt with appropriately. Maybe the Justice minister may want to also supplement my answer on this.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is actually to the minister of seniors. Did this minister take this multimillion dollar class-action settlement to members of the provincial cabinet, Treasury Board, or Premier's office before it was made public?

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

**Mrs. Fritz:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to respond to this issue because it is a serious one. We have acted upon it as you know. As my colleague here mentioned to you as well, it did go through the appropriate processes. If the hon. Leader of the Opposition would like to hear further about that, I'd refer that question to the Minister of Justice.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The process behind this class-action lawsuit remains something of a mystery. The fact is that this government appeared to try to hide this lawsuit before the last election. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Will the minister deny that instructions have been given to staff in his department to destroy documentation relating to the lawsuit and its settlement?

**Mr. Cardinal:** I don't believe, Mr. Speaker, that such an action would have been taken. We do have valuable staff, well-qualified staff, and they're very sincere. They try to deal with the clientele as effectively as possible. No, I don't believe a directive of that nature would ever be given to anyone.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you. My next question, Mr. Speaker, is to the Premier. Given that the Premier has denied any knowledge of the settlement of the class-action lawsuit before it was in the newspapers, can the Premier deny he had any knowledge of the lawsuit when it was launched in the fall of 2004 prior to the last election? Did he know about it then?

**Mr. Klein:** No, I don't believe so. The only knowledge I had of a lawsuit as it pertained to AISH, or maybe it was seniors – I don't know. There was a class-action lawsuit launched some time ago relative to one of those issues. Relative to that specific lawsuit, maybe I had some knowledge; maybe I didn't. I don't know. To answer the question – and I don't know if it was asked – it did go to cabinet, and it did go to Treasury Board.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you. Then my final question is to the Minister of Finance. Given that this issue went to cabinet and the Treasury Board, will the minister table the list of meetings and attendance records for Treasury Board meetings in which the class-action lawsuit was discussed?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Mr. Speaker, if I could see any benefit to the clients who are being dealt with in this situation, it would be one consideration, but I see absolutely no benefit in providing what are dealt with as confidential meeting minutes. The Premier has clearly stated that this matter was before Treasury Board. I will confirm that. I see absolutely no benefit to the clients, if that's what the hon. member is trying to deal with, in having that information.

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

### Health Care Reform Consultation

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the section on allowing doctors to work in both systems, the government's Alberta's New Health Policy Framework: Questions and Answers document indicates that "we're looking at many scenarios." It also says: "Private insurance is one, but only one, of the options we're looking at. We're also looking at what other ways there are to publicly insure Albertans." My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Exactly what other scenarios is the government considering for doctors working in both systems?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, the most important scenario is to make sure that if doctors work in both systems, they must ensure and we must ensure that we do not impair the capacity of the public system to provide a strong public system of care. That's one of the most important things that we would look at.

We would look, Mr. Speaker, obviously, at the situation in the community, the kinds of capacity that the community had, and what sorts of criteria would be developed in consultation. We spoke last night with the AMA and with the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the other colleges that would be charged with providing health care for the professionals that would be a part of any type of private establishment.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that the meeting that was held with various representatives, the AMA, et cetera, last night was behind closed doors and you're not providing any information here, how is the public supposed to be able to judge your framework when you won't give them any details at all?

**Ms Evans:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there was really only one group of the four last night that requested to have a private conversation. The Health Sciences Association of Alberta, Bow Valley College, and Mount Royal College had open conversations. The conversations that are private are always at the request of the group that is coming to present. We recognize that they may reserve comments until later. We have committed to get them additional information and continue the dialogue.

It's my intention throughout this process to continue to consult, to continue to listen to people, and when we have more benchmarks or more established guidelines based on our interaction with the consultations, we will provide them.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. Again to the same minister: well, Madam Minister, will any of these other options or other scenarios or whatever else is discussed behind these closed doors – will any of these details be presented to the Alberta public before the legislation comes before this Assembly?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, although I cannot provide exact timing of what we would do in release of the consultation issues that came forward or some of our options, it's my full intent to provide as much as possible to the public, to be absolutely transparent about why we would make any decision, why we would table legislation with any provision to do anything. I think almost every member of this House would agree that when this government does table legislation, it provides rationale for all of those particular approaches. Right now our job is to listen, and that's what I intend to do.

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

1:50

### Health Care Spending

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since day one of the spring sitting the Premier has been doing his best Chicken Little imitation, saying that the sky is falling and raising the spectre of health spending soon consuming the entire provincial budget. But when you look at the government's actual books right through to this year's third-quarter update, you'll find that health care spending is at the same 34 per cent of total program spending as it was five years ago. Health spending is going up at exactly the same rate as other areas of government spending, and there is no evidence that other priorities are being crowded out. My question is to the Premier. Why doesn't the Premier stop distorting the facts about health spending and, instead, adopt innovative ideas like a pharmaceutical savings agency that would keep a lid on the biggest health care cost driver, prescription drugs?

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, that is a good suggestion, and we're going to work on that. As I mentioned in the Legislature earlier, we would like to do it on a national scale, but it involves the co-operation of the federal government and all the ministers of health and all the Premiers. That's not to say that we can't do it provincially, and we're going to work on that. That's not to say that we can't do it in conjunction with, say, British Columbia because they've proven to be very co-operative with Alberta, and they're interested in those kinds of things. So we can do that.

It goes beyond that, Mr. Speaker. They concentrate on pharmaceuticals. They don't want to mention bedpans, swabs, uniforms, gowns, bedding, you know, just a multitude of supplies that could be co-ordinated and purchased on a provincial basis. But for every upside there is a downside, and one of the downsides is that it may offend some of the unions that are active in some of the regional health authorities, and it may offend the NDs. Those are the kinds of things we can look at in terms of bringing down costs.

Relative to "the sky is falling," I would suggest that the NDs are the ones who are spurring on the notion that the sky is falling.

**Mr. Martin:** I don't remember asking about bedpans and gowns and bedding.

Mr. Speaker, given that government spending in all sorts of areas is running ahead of inflation due to unbudgeted billions being added

every year, why does the Premier want only health spending growth to be kept at the rate of inflation when all other costs are running above?

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry that I didn't answer this question, but it's a question that more appropriately is put to the Minister of Finance, and I'll ask her to respond.

**Mrs. McClellan:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the facts really do show that in the last five years health spending has increased at a rate that we don't believe can be sustained over the long term. We note that other provinces are making the effort to contain their health spending in about the same manner with inflation, growth. We're striving for those numbers because we know that Alberta has the best health delivery system in Canada, the best programs in Canada, and centres of excellence that are not matched anywhere in Canada. In fact, we provide many very important programs to citizens across Canada, such as pediatric heart transplants. So this government is determined that our health system will not be put in jeopardy because we don't look at the fiscal reality that's facing us.

**Mr. Martin:** Mr. Speaker, one could only hope that they would look at the fiscal reality of all the other government spending that's out of control rather than just scaring.

My question to the Premier is: why doesn't the Premier admit that the real agenda behind his Chicken Little routine is to frighten Albertans into accepting what they have consistently said that they oppose; namely, the Conservatives' privatized, two-tier health scheme? That's what it's all about.

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the controversial and the confrontational nature of the comments – i.e., the Chicken Little attitude and the sky is falling kind of situation – I would remind the hon. member that it's not this government and it's not the Minister of Health and Wellness that's organizing and orchestrating protests on the steps of the Legislature. It is the NDs.

I would like to commend our hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. As one MLA put it, she came across as a queen on television, whereas the person sponsored by the NDs came across not so well because he was incoherent and he was yelling and he was screaming. It might be good for television. I don't know. But I'll tell you that the Minister of Health and Wellness was calm, cool, and collected.

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

### Education Property Tax

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. The Manitoba government announced recently that it is eliminating its portion of their education property tax. The president of the AUMA, Bob Hawkesworth, is again renewing his call for Alberta to do the same. My question to the minister: will the minister follow Manitoba's lead and eliminate the province's portion of the education property tax?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, as you know, things are not always as they appear to be. While it's true that Manitoba has recently eliminated the province's portion of the education property tax, what is not clear at first blush when looking at this is the fact that the system in Manitoba is significantly different than here in Alberta. I'm sure you remember when several years ago in Alberta the

province changed the way that education was funded and began to collect education property tax in all municipalities throughout the province and then to distribute those funds equitably to school boards.

Manitoba has historically had three sources of funding for their education: general revenue, like Alberta; education property tax, like Alberta; but a significant portion, in fact 42 per cent, of all costs of financing education in Manitoba still comes through the local school boards requisitioning locally for those education property taxes. Those remain in place, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: can the minister tell the House why Alberta can't simply get out of the education property tax once and for all?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that's something that I've been quite vocal in advocating ever since I became Minister of Municipal Affairs. Someday I would like to have the opportunity for that to in fact take place in this province, but we've got a long way to go before we get there. It's about a 1 and a half billion dollar problem to deal with, and that's not just a one-time problem. That's 1 and a half billion dollars this year and every year thereafter. It's not as simple as in the case of Manitoba, where it was a relatively small amount, less than 10 per cent of the problem that we would be dealing with here.

So we're working with municipalities. We're trying to find alternatives so that someday we may be able to make some reasonable choices and begin to eliminate that education property tax and allow municipalities to have some access to at least part of it.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: have there been any discussions with our municipal partners to examine the province getting out of the education property tax, to eventually free up some of the tax room for municipalities?

2:00

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, yesterday I introduced members of the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability. That council, in fact, spent the afternoon meeting upstairs, talking about these very issues. We're talking about exploring alternative sources of revenue for municipalities, but more importantly we're talking about clearly establishing the roles and responsibilities that municipalities have.

I have consistently made it clear to municipalities that the province is not going to discuss new and alternative sources of funding for municipalities until we have a consensus on what the role and the responsibilities of municipalities are and how much it should cost. Once we know how much it should cost, then we can begin to discuss where the money is going to come from, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Royalty Revenues

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the concerns that the Auditor General addressed in his 2004-2005 annual report, the Minister of Energy continues to insist lamely that the current royalty structure is efficient, effective, and fair. The minister sees

no need to improve a system that has seen the citizens' share of the royalty wealth decline significantly since 2001. In fact, the minister has a copy of a study which states: we should be charging more for our royalties. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. How much of an increase in royalty rates does that study recommend?

**Mr. Melchin:** Mr. Speaker, I'm not certain which study supposedly I have a copy of. There are so many studies that I do have copies of lots of studies. I'm not certain which one he is specifically referring to; therefore, I don't know.

What I do want to say is that we do act and continue to work to improve the structures we have. All of our regulations, our standards, our royalty structures, those suggestions by the Auditor General: we do act upon them to ensure that Albertans do receive their fair share and that things are appropriately managed.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that your department handed out more than \$100 million of Albertans' money in 2005 to, quote, financially assist the oil and gas industry, end of quote, will the minister now tell the House how that money was spent and why?

**Mr. Melchin:** Mr. Speaker, I suspect he's referring to the Alberta royalty tax credits in particular on this one; that one was put in. It's an adjustment of royalties already paid. We've collected close to \$12 billion in royalties alone this year. It was a hundred million dollars. So we still have collected a tremendous amount of royalties from all those companies.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of health: how many health care professionals could your department hire with a hundred million dollars? Isn't it true that you could hire up to a thousand needed health care professionals?

**Ms Evans:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there are many different types of health care professionals, and I would just defer to the Premier if he wishes to provide a response.

**Mr. Klein:** No.

I wish to just ask for a point of clarification. Could I maybe have the hon. member advise the House who he's quoting? He said "quote, unquote" relative to the hundred million dollars. I don't know who he's quoting.

**The Speaker:** We can deal with this as a point of order.

**Mr. Klein:** No. I don't want to raise a point of order.

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

#### School Lunchtime Supervision Fees

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many students in my constituency need to be bused to neighbouring communities in order to attend school. At noon hour they cannot walk home, nor is there enough time for them to be bused home to have their lunch. At the same time, these students are not allowed to stay on school property and eat their own lunches unless they pay \$20 per month per student

for a supervision fee. These fees add up in a hurry in a multichild family. To the Minister of Education: why do these parents have to pay a special fee just to have their children eat their own lunch at school?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, each locally elected school board has the right and the responsibility to make whatever policies they are willing to make. The short answer is that the School Act allows that to be done. But I suspect that school fees that are charged for things like lunchtime supervision are charged to pay those people who are qualified or in some cases perhaps certified to look after the students who will be eating those lunches. There have been a number of situations over the past several years where some children, for example with special needs, have required special types of supervision, and the school board is sensitive to that. I think the local school principals would be as well. So they're trying to ensure that there is proper supervision there.

So the short answer is that the School Act allows it. Not every school board does it, and not every school within a school board charges the fees either. But they go to offset a variety of things, not just personnel. There are clean-up fees, Mr. Speaker. There are games that they buy and provide for students. So those monies get used in a variety of ways.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Mr. Speaker, since these fees pose a financial hardship for many families and many school boards and principals don't care to deal with this issue, where should these parents turn to to resolve this problem?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, obviously, one of the best and most effective things to do is for the parents to talk to their locally elected school trustee. That's a good place to start. They could certainly talk with their school principal even ahead of that. There are parent school councils that deal with these kinds of issues. They can examine all of the different policies. [interjections] Shall I continue?

**The Speaker:** Please. You have the floor.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** I'm sorry. There are interjections from the other side. This is a very serious and important issue.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, they could talk with the superintendents in their area. So there are a variety of ways that they can go about doing this because the policy does vary from board to board, and it also varies from school to school. So those would be some ideas that they might wish to undertake.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Mr. Speaker, would the minister's department consider exempting from this fee students who don't have schools in their neighbourhoods and have no other options?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know that we would jump to the quick and do that. I think that we have very capable school trustees, who have obviously been entrusted by the public's vote to look after these kinds of issues. I think it should first be dealt with there. I think that the school boards, during the meetings that I've had with them and based on the information that I've received from others, are doing a very good job of that at the moment. So if we leave it at the local level, perhaps they can sort this out. The important thing here, I think, is to ensure that we're not necessarily denying any access to some of those privileges.

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

### Calgary Children's Hospital

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The famous line from the movie *Cool Hand Luke* summarizes this sad government's attitude towards Albertans: "What we have here is a failure to communicate." This fearful government attempts to insulate itself from its perceived affliction of public accountability by hiding behind closed caucus castle doors, surrounded by an impenetrable FOIP-filled moat. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Would the minister please clarify whether the Children's hospital in the Calgary-Varsity constituency will be operating at full capacity or in a series of phased-in stages when it opens this fall?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted in one sense that the hon. member has given me the opportunity to respond because initially when I spoke to the media about this issue, I was under the impression that it was going to be at capacity, that it was going to be fully open. My understanding is that there will be additional capacity released at a later time, later than the initial opening date, and I haven't yet received the detailed plans from Calgary health region relative to exactly what they intend to do.

But, Mr. Speaker, if the inference of the question is that somehow this government is at fault because there haven't been resources provided – and that was an acknowledgement that was relayed to me the other day – I don't think it's even fair to adjudicate that before the budget comes out and before the amounts of money are disbursed to the regional health authorities.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the dollars currently committed to hospital bricks and mortar be quickly followed by predictable, ongoing, base operational funding?

2:10

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, clearly in our capital plan we have dollars allocated for a variety of projects in Calgary. We approved over \$665 million for new projects in Calgary just last summer. I think the hon. member would be fully recognizing that. During the release of the dollars – those are done in accordance with the plans provided by the health authority, planning for staff allocation and resources, the functional planning that goes into it, and through the phases of study completion those dollars are released.

Now, obviously, there is staff training and other plans to execute and, Mr. Speaker, I'm very confident that in due course we'll receive those from the authority.

**An Hon. Member:** It's a beautiful hospital.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. And, yes, it is a beautiful hospital.

Given that the bed-per-patient ratio for Calgary and Edmonton is the lowest of all North American cities, when will Alberta's cities' ratio rise to at least the 1.9 North American average?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, I think that when we review the bed ratio lists, we also have to look at the other service elements and capacity provided in communities. We have a tremendous number of outpatient clinics. The primary care networks that have been instituted by my predecessor are growing by leaps and bounds. We

intend to have 18 more on stream this year, and the kind of capacity we are building into services in neighbourhoods is a good part of how we are addressing outpatient needs, mental health needs. The work that's being done on chronic disease management, for example, in the questioner's city I think will satisfy residents there that they are getting very good care.

### Alternative Energy Project in Okotoks

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Mr. Speaker, last year the government's innovation program approved funding for a leading-edge alternative energy project in the town of Okotoks, that will use solar energy collection and storage for heating in a new 52-home neighbourhood. This project was accepted to the innovation program because it was sponsored by Climate Change Central and Alberta Environment. There was a lot of excitement when it was announced, but the project has experienced delays due to the flooding last year and other cost overruns. My constituents are concerned that the project will be in jeopardy without additional funding. The federal government has committed to provide additional funds if there is matching funding from Alberta. My first question is to the Minister of Innovation and Science. Can the minister tell the House whether the innovation program will provide the necessary additional funding to ensure that this program can be accepted?

**Mr. Doerksen:** Mr. Speaker, as the member has indicated, this project came to us from Climate Change Central. In addition to their involvement, Natural Resources Canada was a partner, ATCO Gas, as well as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. As he has indicated, this is one of the unique projects that we have funded through our innovation program to look at some alternative energy uses.

The member has brought to our attention the fact that there were some severe weather events that have affected the infrastructure building of this particular closed-loop system that we have to look at. Mr. Speaker, I would let the member know that as we have our discussion with the other partners, I would be prepared to reconvene the review panel to see if further participation is warranted.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. As the minister responsible for disaster relief, will you follow up on the flood claim and expedite that claim payment as quickly as you can?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the severe weather events of this past summer were devastating in many parts of Alberta. We have in place, in fact, a disaster recovery program to assist individuals and small businesses and municipalities in dealing with recovering the uninsurable portion of losses for essential items. I understand that an application from this project has recently been submitted to my department. We're in the process of reviewing that application, and I can assure the member that should the losses qualify for compensation out of our program, I would certainly be supportive of paying appropriate levels of compensation up to the limits of the program.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to try them all. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Environment. As this is a leading-edge technology not only in Alberta but all of Canada, as the sponsor of this project will the minister commit that

his ministry will provide the funding to ensure that this project proceeds?

**Mr. Boutilier:** Mr. Speaker, Climate Change Central, for all Albertans to know, is the only kind of private/public partnership in all of Canada. There's no other province in Canada that has such a program. Its sole intent is to leverage dollars, and that's what we've done in this particular case, and it is quite a remarkable environmental initiative. We're, I understand, meeting again tomorrow with Science and Technology. Certainly, we will continue to leverage dollars in terms of securing to make sure that this project is a success. I want to say that I know that the Member for Calgary-Montrose, who sits on Climate Change Central with me, is committed to also working towards making this become a reality.

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

#### **Trial within a Reasonable Time**

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 11(b), guarantees to any person charged with an offence that they have the right to be tried "within a reasonable time." This is a fundamental right upon which our justice system operates. However, judges have commented that they are reluctant to revoke bail because of the undue wait times spent languishing in correctional facilities like the remand centre, forcing defendants to live with the sword of Damocles hanging over their heads for months if not years. My questions are for the Minister of Justice. What will the minister do to shorten unreasonable wait times for trial, or is it government policy to do nothing and, in effect, sentence the accused before they have a trial?

**Mr. Stevens:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises a very important point. He is quite right that a speedy trial is an important part of the justice system in Canada, and it's an important part of the justice system in Alberta. The criminal courts for the most part are found in provincial court, and I can tell the hon. member that we've been doing a lot in that regard. I can use Calgary for an example. The time to trial has gone down each of the last three years and at this particular point in time is the lowest it's been for some considerable time. We have put additional resources into that court, for example, in terms of two additional portable courtrooms, additional judges, additional staff to go along with that. In fact, the lead time will likely be reduced again when the Calgary Courts Centre will be completed next year.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. I'm glad he raised the issue of resources. Will the minister immediately take steps to add more Crown prosecutors and especially more provincial judges to ensure that justice is administered fairly in Alberta?

**Mr. Stevens:** I think, Mr. Speaker, it's important to understand that the issue of resources is an issue across Canada, and it's certainly an issue here. Alberta is doing very well on a comparative basis – that is, compared to other jurisdictions – in wait time. Having said all of that, the throne speech indicated that we, in fact, would be looking at putting additional judges, additional prosecutors, and additional staff into our courts, and I can tell you that that's our intention. Of course, we'll be debating that later. The hon. Solicitor General last

year put additional police officers into the field to do their job, and part of the result of that, of course, is that there will be additional charges that need to be dealt with in our courts.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that other jurisdictions in Canada and internationally have set timelines for the completion of cases from arrest to preliminary inquiry to trial, will the minister commit to implementing timelines for the determination of cases in Alberta?

**Mr. Stevens:** Effectively, we have timelines that are followed. Some 10 years ago the Supreme Court of Canada in a case ruled that if an accused did not have a timely trial, then the charges would be stayed or dismissed. In fact, as a result of that case, in one other jurisdiction there were a number of dismissals. I believe that that case had a timeline of something in the order of six months. The timelines in Calgary, for example, at this point in time are somewhere in the vicinity of 20, 21 weeks, so we're well within that. We monitor that on a regular basis. We have no intention of doing anything other than addressing that in a positive way. Effectively, as a result of the Supreme Court case, for the past 10 years we've paid very, very close attention to it. As I've indicated previously, Mr. Speaker, Alberta is doing very well relative to other jurisdictions in Canada.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

2:20

#### **Rural Physician Recruitment**

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Instead of a charm offensive from the Health and Wellness minister, the time has come for the truth offensive to begin. Two days ago Dr. Brent Piepgrass, vice-president of medical services for the Peace Country health region, spoke the truth about the negative impact that the Conservatives' privatized, two-tier health scheme will have on rural physician recruitment. Dr. Piepgrass called the third-way proposals frightening and morally questionable. I will table the relevant document at the appropriate time this afternoon. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: will the minister provide her personal assurance that courageous physicians like Dr. Brent Piepgrass will not only not face any kind of disciplinary action but will in fact have her full support to continue to speak out about the impact of third-way proposals on residents of their health regions?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister. [interjections] The hon. minister has the floor.

**Ms Evans:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have invited every Albertan to come forward and provide us their views either by accessing the Internet, by getting the material from their library or their MLA, and we will give them all due consideration.

In the case of health care professionals that contradict the government or have alternative points of view, there has never been any intent to have anything but the most open and transparent process. Mr. Speaker, I suppose that the question is in order, but I would just challenge the member opposite to define any time when this member, either as a minister of the Crown or in any other position, has taken an offensive position to someone who's spoken in criticism of government policy or the member herself.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll hold the minister to her word on that one.

What does it say about the government's third-way proposals when outstanding physicians responsible for recruiting rural doctors are calling them frightening and morally questionable?

**Ms Evans:** Well, Mr. Speaker, initially there are comments that have been made by people – and they may hold to those views throughout the process – that have been in opposition, but there are also comments, equivalently warm and enthusiastic, about trying some new approaches to make sure that we do things in different ways to improve health care. We're trying to improve access, we're working towards sustainability, we're going to gather in all of these opinions and impressions, and then we're going to deal with them accordingly. I would remind the hon. member that in an effort to make sure that we attract doctors and international medical graduates to Alberta, this week we released \$3 million to assist in residency placements for almost 14 positions, with the very strong view that many of them will ultimately practise in rural Alberta and support the needs of rural Albertans.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why is the minister choosing to side with the Premier, who wants his rich golfing buddies to be able to queue-jump ahead of the rest of us, rather than siding with physicians like Dr. Piegras who believe it's morally questionable for those with money to get better or faster access to medically necessary services?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, the health policy framework that this government has provided to Albertans gives all Albertans an opportunity to comment. It gives us a chance to reflect on those comments, to define legislation that will be in accordance with what we believe is the appropriate strategy to undertake for accessibility and sustainability. Until such time as we table those responses, I think the remarks are purely conjecture.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

### Gun Registration

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recently elected federal Conservatives have promised to scrap the Liberals' billion dollar boondoggle gun registry. The majority of Albertans and the Conservative government of this province have long opposed this wasteful and unfair harassment of law-abiding firearm owners. My question is to the Minister of Justice. In light of the anticipated repeal of the federal gun registry, would you consider instructing Crown attorneys in Alberta to cease enforcing those sections of the Criminal Code that deal with the gun registry?

**Mr. Stevens:** That, Mr. Speaker, is a very good question. In fact, Alberta's position with respect to prosecution under the Firearms Act has been very clear since the get-go. The provincial Crown prosecutors have very clear instructions, and perhaps it's worth while just to outline what those are so that everybody knows. Alberta Justice will not prosecute any charges under the federal Firearms Act. If police services need assistance in reviewing the charges, then they are to seek those services from Justice Canada.

Alberta Justice will not prosecute firearms owners under the Criminal Code if possessing an unregistered firearm is their only offence. Alberta Justice will prosecute registry charges that are laid along with other Criminal Code offences, such as the accused being unlicensed or the firearm being used in the commission of a crime. Lastly, Alberta Justice will prosecute, as we always have, firearms offences under the Criminal Code that negatively impact community safety.

**Dr. Morton:** I must say, Mr. Speaker, that that's a very enlightened policy.

The repeal of the federal firearm registry is anticipated but has not yet occurred, so my question is: would the minister consider communicating to his new federal counterpart in Ottawa that as far as Alberta is concerned, the sooner the better?

**Mr. Stevens:** Well, that is indeed a very good observation, and I say that because I've already done it, but I do thank the hon. member for the suggestion.

Just briefly, the background with respect to this, Mr. Speaker, is this. Alberta Justice is responsible for ensuring that we contribute to the largest extent toward safe communities. We believe that our resources must be used wisely in that regard, and candidly we believe that the registration of long guns does not contribute in any sense whatsoever to safe communities. The federal government is spending large numbers of dollars on this particular program, and they can be diverted to better purposes.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member?

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

### New Home Construction

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All my questions are to the Minister of Government Services. Given the current housing boom and the rush to produce a quick product, what is this government doing to ensure that new homeowners have a quality product?

**Mr. Lund:** Mr. Speaker, there is a bit of a problem out in the industry currently where some people are having difficulty with contractors. There are a number of things that people can do to help the situation themselves, things like having an agreement before construction begins. There's the ability to have a holdback until the deficiencies are addressed, and of course there's the ability to take out home insurance that would cover some of these situations. Certainly, it's not a desirable thing that is happening in some cases, but I would urge people to investigate how they can protect themselves prior to getting into the agreement.

**Mr. Bonko:** Given that in the past the government approved pine shakes, how can new homeowners be assured that contractors aren't cutting corners in order to boost their bottom line?

**Mr. Lund:** Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, of course, when you're entering into the agreement, you can specify certain things that have to be done and certain materials that have to be used. You can do that before the project ever begins.

**Mr. Bonko:** What is this government doing to ensure that home inspectors are actually qualified to do home inspections?



2:30

**Mr. Lund:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question, and I thank the member for asking it because there is a very great need for these types of people.

There is a national organization with people in Alberta that are members. What we are currently doing is that we have asked those people to come together and present to us a mechanism where we could certify them and license them so that, in fact, when someone hires a home inspector, they know that they are getting an individual that is qualified because, Mr. Speaker, when you look at the qualifications that are necessary for a home inspector, it's very substantial. They've got to understand all of the codes: the building code, the electrical, the plumbing, the whole issue. They've got to be able to understand cement work; they've got to be able to understand structures; they've got to be able to look at and test the roof and tell you whether it's in good shape; then, on top of that, many of them are even qualified to look at appliances. I've seen the check sheet that they use, and there are some 400 items on there. You can imagine that a person that would be qualified to do that inspection is going to have to be well-trained, and they're going to have to have been in the business for a fair length of time.

Thanks for your question.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, today in the question period there were 77 questions and answers in a 50-minute time frame. That's pretty good.

#### Vignettes from the Assembly's History

**The Speaker:** Our reflection on the history of Alberta today deals with elections and election periods. Since the 1979 election in Alberta the election period in our province has been 28 days. Fourteen days after that issue of the writ have been nomination days, and 14 days after nomination day has been polling day. This has not always been the case.

The shortest election period, 23 to 27 days, was in effect for the elections of 1909, 1913, 1917, and 1921. For elections held between 1924 and 1955 the election period was between 30 and 40 days. For elections starting in 1959 and ending in 1975 the election period was between 39 and 49 days. For these latter elections: 1959, 1963, 1967, 1971, and 1975, nomination day was 25 to 35 days after the date of the writ, and polling day was 14 days after nomination day. Currently it's 28 days.

In 30 seconds I'll call upon the first member to participate.

head:

#### Members' Statements

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

#### Colin David Price

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take this opportunity to thank the sponsors of the Great Kids award ceremony that took place on March 5 and recognize a great young man from Whitecourt-St. Anne.

West Edmonton Mall, Fantasyland Hotel, IBM Canada, TransCanada, and the government of Alberta all deserve high praise for their part in honouring 16 special Albertans that have displayed leadership, generosity, and the strong spirit that makes our province so great.

Premier and Mrs. Klein and the Minister of Children's Services joined members at a ceremony that recognized Great Kids from our constituencies. We listened to biographies of these young Albertans

that revealed how great they really are, and I want to share with you all a brief glimpse of my great kid, Colin Price from Sangudo.

When Colin's brother was diagnosed with cancer, the life of his family was immediately turned upside down, but this quiet, brave 12-year-old was generous with his love and support while completely putting his needs on hold to stand by his brother's side. Colin never complained when the family made numerous trips between their home and Edmonton and spent many days and nights in the hospital. He helped keep the routine as normal as possible but, most importantly, Mr. Speaker, could always be trusted to improve his brother's mood.

Colin became an incredible source of strength and stability to his family during this extremely difficult time in which there were, obviously, many bad days. Colin has continued to develop a remarkable maturity since his brother lost his battle with cancer. Faced with such hardship, Colin's courage, strength, and love continue to shine. Many, many people in my constituency and throughout the province for that matter, Mr. Speaker, have shared happiness and heartbreak with the Price family. I'm sure that they join me now in congratulating Colin Price on his so strongly deserved recognition as someone who makes our province so great.

Thank you.

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

#### Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Initiative

**Mr. Tougas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday I had the pleasure of attending the formal public release of the latest stage of the Edmonton urban aboriginal initiative. This report, which I tabled in the Legislature on Monday, paints a timely portrait of urban aboriginal life in Edmonton. From July to December 2005 the first part of the process included a wide-ranging community dialogue with a cross-section of the aboriginal community, engaging more than 1,800 people. They held talking circles, open house information sessions, and a major gathering of community leaders, who provided input on issues, concerns, and opportunities facing the Edmonton urban aboriginal community.

Most significant, perhaps, was the use of the Your City, Your Voice workbook and survey. More than 500 of these workbooks were returned, and the comments contained in the workbooks can be found in the appendices of the report. I would recommend that anyone interested in gaining an understanding of the urban aboriginal experience in Edmonton should obtain a copy of this report.

Statistically, the report reveals that Edmonton has the second largest aboriginal community in Canada as of 2001, with 30,365 aboriginal residents and double that number within a two-hour travel radius of the city. It is a fast-growing population as well, growing at a rate of two and a half times the city's population growth. Aboriginals represent 4.6 per cent of the city's population, but there are only a few Edmonton neighbourhoods where the aboriginal population exceeds 10 per cent, including some in my constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Unfortunately, this young and fast-growing population is troubled. In many neighbourhoods more than 50 per cent of the population lives in poverty. The poverty rate is one and a quarter times higher than Alberta's aboriginal average and two and a half times higher than that of all Edmontonians. Sadly, the majority of those surveys did not find Edmonton to be a welcoming city.

This report is not the end of the process. As elder Vic Letendre said in the report, "The City has welcomed the Native people in. Now it is going to be up to them to pick up the torch and go." This is the most ambitious and wide-ranging urban aboriginal initiative

ever undertaken in Canada. I commend all of the partners, the Edmonton urban aboriginal initiative, the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund, the Edmonton Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee, Western Economic Diversification, the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development department, and particularly the city of Edmonton, for moving forward with this much-needed initiative. The future of urban aboriginals looks a little brighter today thanks to their efforts.

Thank you.

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

**Giselle Kutrowski  
Elyse Merriman**

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday as we commemorated International Women's Day, our hon. Minister of Community Development quoted a great Chinese leader who said, "Women hold up half the sky." I would suggest that sometimes women hold up more than half the sky.

Yesterday in Red Deer the Soroptimist International of Central Alberta, a volunteer organization for business and professional women whose mission is to improve the lives of women and children, presented two cash awards to two young women who do more than their share of holding up the sky. These young women, who juggle full-time school with family duties and part-time jobs and still contribute to their community, are an inspiration to all women.

The 2006 women's opportunity cash award was presented to Giselle Kutrowski, a single mother who is taking her social work diploma at Red Deer College. As she cares for her small children, works hard to meet their needs, and studies for long hours in order to improve her economic situation, Giselle makes herself available for those who seek her help.

The Violet Richardson award was given to Elyse Merriman for her dedication and hard work in her volunteer job at the Red Deer regional hospital. While attending high school full-time, Elyse has clocked in over 290 hours of volunteer work at the hospital since 2003. Her dedication as a volunteer is also an inspiration to others.

Mr. Speaker, the Soroptimist International of Central Alberta join with 95,000 Soroptimists around the world to contribute time and financial support to community-based projects benefiting women and girls. I ask members of this House to join me in congratulating Giselle Kutrowski and Elyse Merriman on receiving their awards and to thank the members of the Soroptimist International of Central Alberta for their work in improving the lives of women and girls in local communities and around the world.

2:40

**The Speaker:** Should the Assembly also congratulate the hon. Member for Red Deer-North for receiving a woman of the year award this week? [applause]

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

**Israeli Water Treatment Technology**

**Rev. Abbott:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and acknowledge the beginning of a new era of innovation and co-operation in the field of waste water treatment. Recently four prominent scientists from Israel, Hileel Lerman, Yohanan Montagne, Yosef Ron, and Erez Abou paid a visit to Drayton Valley. The town of Drayton Valley, MP Rob Merrifield, and myself had the pleasure of meeting with this distinguished group to discuss an issue important to all Albertans.

These four scientists, who are with the Mofet B'Yehuda Technol-

ogy and Business Incubator research centre in Israel, toured the town's water treatment plant and made a presentation to town council. The focus of this presentation was a new water treatment system that has been developed in Israel, a system that uses innovative new technology and has the potential to be more cost effective and environmentally sound than current processes – clean water before and after its use.

Mr. Speaker, following this first step, enthusiasm toward and interest in this new technology is high in Drayton Valley. Should it be considered feasible to apply these new Israeli concepts, Alberta could once again be in a position to lead the country in innovation. This sort of forward thinking is the reason our province continues to remain at the forefront of technological and social development. New technology and ideas aimed at making our world a better place shouldn't be confined by international borders, and these recent events in Drayton Valley have affirmed the spirit of co-operation and vision that continues to make Alberta the best place in the world to live.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to encourage my colleagues to join me in extending my most sincere thanks to our new friends from Israel, who were instrumental in developing this technology, as well as to town councillor Gary Carter and to all those whose hard work facilitated this fresh and exciting exchange of ideas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Enron Activities in Alberta**

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to commend the authorities in the United States of America who are willing to stand up and speak up and defend their citizens against corporate fraud and greed. Today, as we speak, U.S. courts are prosecuting former Enron executives for ripping off energy consumers for millions upon millions of dollars.

Some of the accused were involved in the deregulation of Alberta's electricity market. The relationship that existed between this provincial government and Enron and its affiliates is very troubling. In August 2001 the Minister of Energy stated that he looked forward to: working with Enron on the continued development of a competitive electric industry in Alberta. End of quote. In fact, the minister allowed Enron's lawyers to write amendments to provincial regulations in a manner that best suited Enron's needs.

Even though Enron has been exposed as a corporate fraud that manipulated the electricity market to steal millions of dollars, this provincial government still remains silent. After being in power for so long this Progressive Conservative government has forgotten the difference between right and wrong. It is wrong not to investigate Enron's market manipulations in Alberta. It would be right to stand up for this province's energy consumers and seek justice. It was wrong to allow Enron to design Alberta's electricity market to suit their needs. It would have been right to design a market that benefited Alberta consumers.

Enron and its affiliates donated thousands of dollars to this Progressive Conservative government while deregulation was imposed on Albertans. Years later, with Enron executives facing justice in American courts, this government still remains silent. A political donation should never – never – serve as a down payment for government inaction. Albertans deserve better. It's now; it's time for a full, independent public inquiry into Enron's activities in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Royalty Revenues

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the Energy minister bends to oil patch pressure and lets royalty revenues slide, it's just the same as if he spent that money. Millions of dollars in lost royalty revenue leave this province every month, and it's high time that this government stepped in and stopped the bleeding. In the 2004-05 report the Auditor General once again was critical of how the Department of Energy and the EUB monitor production levels for oil and gas and natural gas. We're not even meeting the very modest benchmarks that this government has set for royalty collection, and the method of accounting for royalties is faulty at best. Albertans will be stuck with the cleanup of this government's gold rush mentality towards resource development. The companies are making billions of dollars off the extraction of our resources, and we'll end up paying for the environmental cleanup.

The Environment minister had a good idea earlier this week. It's actually an idea the New Democrats have been promoting for some time, which is to add an environmental levy to the existing royalty structure. Such a levy could be used for research initiatives and for the efforts to expand green transportation and other measures to counter the harsh impact of the oil and gas industry. All it took was one phone call from – guess who? – the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers for the minister then to back down. We hope we can see more of that later, perhaps.

Lost energy royalty revenue is the problem from which so many other troubles flow. Health care, education, and infrastructure struggle to keep pace with the growth because our royalty structure bleeds money. Consumer utility bills are too high because the energy companies don't pay their fair share. Whose province is this anyway? These resources are not meant to be consumed all at once and at fire-sale prices to boot.

A modest adjustment in royalty rates makes good business sense, and it's the right thing to do.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition with 150 signatures on it. The petition urges the government Alberta to “eliminate private clinics and private delivery in the health care system, and develop a comprehensive plan to strengthen and extend Medicare.” This brings the total number of signatures on this one to 538.

Thank you.

head: **Notices of Motions**

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

**Mr. Stevens:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday a motion will be made that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 2.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday a motion will be made that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Strathcona.

### Bill 21

#### Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act

**Mr. Lougheed:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to request leave to introduce Bill 21, the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Act.

This act replaces and updates current legislation and, along with its forthcoming regulations, will provide the AISH program with increased flexibility to better respond to the needs of Albertans with disabilities. The new legislation continues our efforts to renew the program by updating the language, streamlining processes, and improving income recording procedures for clients.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a first time]

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

**Mr. Stevens:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 21 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

### Bill 22

#### Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2006

**Mrs. McClellan:** Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 22, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2006. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a first time]

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

2:50

### Bill 210

#### Election (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2006

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my hon. colleague for Edmonton-Riverview, Leader of the Official Opposition, I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 210, the Election (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2006.

The purpose of this bill, Mr. Speaker, is self-explanatory, and I hope it receives its due attention.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 210 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

**Mr. Doerksen:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table in the Assembly today five copies of the 2004-2005 annual report for the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research, otherwise known as the Alberta ingenuity fund. Just a couple of the things that are highlighted are the prion research centre, the centre for water research, as well as how it uses industry associates to assist industry in applied research. A copy of this report has been forwarded to all MLAs directly from Alberta Ingenuity.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I referred to a document during my questions earlier today, and I would like to

table that document and the requisite number of copies of it. It's titled Alberta's New Health Policy Framework: Questions and Answers, February 28, 2006.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of five of the many letters that I have received from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens voicing concern about the cancellation of the national daycare program. Letters I am tabling today are from Sarah Bulfone, Kamla Singh, Cheryl Dixon, Shandale Walker, and Danette and Lee Gordon.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a news release issued by the leader of the NDP and a graph which illustrates a point I was making in question period today. It shows that despite a dire projection by the Mazankowski report of health care spending eating up half our budget, actual spending has stayed essentially the same.

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to table five copies of the many letters received from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens voicing serious concerns with the cancellation of the national daycare program. The letters I'm tabling today are from Sandra Phelan, Lesley Truman, Melanie Toth, Tina Peeters, and Christina Pegoraro.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to table a number of copies of five of the many letters we've received expressing concern about the cancellation of the national daycare program. These letters are from Tammy Porsnuk, Tammy Kynock, Yvonne Oshanyk, Doug Birch, and Vicky Arlidge.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is from a constituent of mine, Ms Heather Gordon, who questions the Premier's hurry to implement his third-way changes. She states her objection to a two-tier health care system and her concern about the lack of real consultation with Albertans.

The second, Mr. Speaker, is on behalf of my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods: five of the many letters that she received from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens voicing serious concerns with the cancellation of the national daycare program. Today I'm tabling them from Peggy Rehaume, Trudy Dickerson, Margaret Riordon, Kate Lowther, Lauren Crane.

Thank you.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of the document which contains Dr. Brent Piegrass's observations. Dr.

Piegrass is the vice-president of medical services with the Peace Country health region.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Tougas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a number of letters voicing serious concerns with the cancellation of the national daycare program. They are from Jessica McKinlay, Juanita Roy, Jan Stewart,\* Sammi Huber, Barbara Ritson, and Susan Iwaskow.

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

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of five letters received from concerned parents, daycare owners, staff, and other citizens voicing concerns over the cancellation of the national daycare program. The letters are from Heather Hollands, Tiffany Phelan, Rosemarie Brown, Bobby-Lee Wingo, and Russell Greenhalgh.

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

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. I have the appropriate number of copies of five of the many letters I have received from concerned parents, daycare owners, staff, and other concerned citizens voicing serious concerns with the cancellation of the national daycare program. The letters I'm tabling today are from Gail Hadfield, Connie Johnson, P. Littlejohn, C. Callihoo, Donna P.

The second tabling is from my constituent Mr. James Sexsmith, who is a veteran and retired, living on a very low income. He's concerned about free parking at hospitals for veterans and seniors like himself. He wants to know where the monies collected from the hospitals go, where it is spent. He's asking for a complete investigation on this matter and a report to the public through the media.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today, the first being an e-mail letter from a constituent of mine, Evelyn Abbott, who is writing with her concerns about health care. She admonishes that "once you get mixed up with Insurance companies and NAFTA – well you know the rest."

The second letter is also from a family in my constituency: Dave Haynes, Dianne Harke, and Nicolas Haynes. They indicate, again, grave concern about the proposed changes to health care. They say, "While we strongly support innovation in health care, we are unconditionally opposed to anything that undermines the principals of the Canada Health Act."

Mr. Speaker, a further five letters regarding the cancellation of the national daycare program, and these letters are from Alison Ortwein, Rhonda Arlidge, Jennifer Kelley, Debbie Callihoo, and Rosanne Callihoo.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

**The Clerk:** I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness, pursuant to the Public Health Act: the Public Health Appeal Board annual report 2005.

\*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

head: **Projected Government Business**

**The Speaker:** The Official Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to Standing Order 7(5) could I ask the Government House Leader to share with us projected government business for the week commencing Monday, the 13th of March.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Stevens:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to outline the projected government business for the week of March 13 to 16, 2006. Starting with Monday, March 13, 2006, of course, is private members' business in the afternoon and in the first hour of the evening, between 8 and 9. Government business begins at 9 with the second reading on bills 22, 1, and 2, and as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, March 14, in the afternoon we have Government Motion 11, dealing with Ray Speaker and his address to the Assembly on March 15, 2006, and second readings on bills 18, 20, and 21. That evening, commencing at 8, we have Committee of the Whole on bills 22, 1, 2, 3, 9, and 17, and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, March 15, in the afternoon commencing at 1:30 it's worth noting that prior to calling Routine and Orders of the Day there will be the 100th anniversary Alberta Legislative Assembly commemorative celebrations, with the daily Routine commencing at 2. Government business will start around 3:15 in the afternoon with third reading on bills 22, 1, 2, 3, 9, and 17. The Government House Leader, pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) and the Speaker's memo dated March 8, 2006, will at 4:30 p.m. move that the House adjourn until 1:30 p.m. March 16, 2006, to accommodate the dinner for the 100th anniversary of the Assembly that evening. As such, with the anticipated success of the motion that evening there will be no evening sitting to accommodate the dinner for the 100th anniversary of the first sitting of the Legislature.

On Thursday, March 16, 2006, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders there will be second and third readings as per consultation with the opposition and as per the Order Paper.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, before I call Orders of the Day, just an information update. I appreciate the co-operation of the members of the Assembly with respect to the events next Wednesday. All hon. members will receive a memo from me – it was signed earlier today – which includes all of the people who are registered for the 100th anniversary dinner next Wednesday as well. There are some 400-plus people, including nearly 130 former members and, in addition to those, some 16 or 17 widows or widowers of former members who are coming as well. The information will be there for all members to basically feel comfortable with recognizing people from the past if names are forgotten and the like. I very much appreciate that co-operation as well. So everything will go very, very well.

3:00

You will also get a copy of the agenda for the evening. There will be a refreshment period from 5:30 to 6:30, and then we'll begin at 6:30. Actually, there will be very, very few speeches, but there will be some very interesting little mementos that all members will receive for their contribution to the history of Alberta.

head: **Orders of the Day**

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

**Bill 11**

**Architects Amendment Act, 2006**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 11, the Architects Amendment Act, 2006.

I would like to acknowledge the significant contribution of the Alberta Association of Architects. This organization ensures that its membership is competent to practise architecture in Alberta and thus serves the public interest.

The Architects Act was just amended in March of 2004 to provide an up-to-date definition for the restricted architectural practice of interior design and allow licensed interior designers to formally become members of the Alberta Association of Architects.

The Architects Amendment Act is needed to enable the Alberta Association of Architects to require its member architects and licensed interior designers to demonstrate continuing competence in their professions. By so doing, they will maintain their membership with the association. These amendments would include licensed interior designers within the definition of an authorized entity, allowing these individuals to be governed by all of the pertinent provisions of the act, clarify that licensed interior designers and their employees can engage in the practice of interior design, and allow licensed interior designers full voting rights to elect architects and interior designers to the association's council. These amendments would also ensure that up-to-date regulations and bylaws can be developed for licensed interior designers and that licensed interior designers are registered in the same manner as architects.

Mr. Speaker, this act will help to clarify and strengthen the architect profession by allowing the Alberta Association of Architects to clarify its governance of licensed interior designers and enforce the requirement for mandatory continuing competence in their profession.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 11, the Architects Amendment Act, proposes changes that would allow the Alberta Association of Architects to clarify its governance of licensed interior designers and enforce the requirement for compulsory continuing competency in their profession. This bill clarifies that licensed interior designers and their employees can engage in the practice of interior design, and it allows them full voting rights to elect architects and interior designers to the association's council. If passed, the changes will also ensure that up-to-date regulations and bylaws can be developed for licensed interior designers and that they are registered in the same manner as architects. It will professionalize more so the practice of interior design. Licensed interior designers are practising within the realm of architecture when dealing with interiors of buildings over 5,000 square feet.

The stakeholders that we from the Official Opposition have consulted on this issue, Mr. Speaker, support the change. The changes help improve the practice of professional interior design, and this profession improves the quality of life for all Albertans.

The work that licensed interior designers are doing does fall within the scope of the practice of architects. The Alberta Association of Architects is the regulatory body responsible for registering

and licensing all architects and licensed interior designers legally entitled to practise the scope of architecture or licensed interior design in the province of Alberta. The AAA, Alberta Association of Architects, or the association, is a self-governing professional association charged under the Architects Act with the registration of architects and the licensing of licensed interior designers and with the regulation of the practice of architecture in the province of Alberta. The association regulates the practice of architecture in the protection of the public and the administration of the profession.

An interior designer can give advice on preparing designs, plans, detailed drawings, specifications, or graphic representations respecting the interior finishes in a building, either fixed or loose furnishings, equipment, fixtures for use in a building, or partitioning in a building that is used to subdivide a floor area. They can administer construction contracts, inspect work, assess the performance of work and the quality of materials related to the work described above.

We have consulted the very capable Naomi Minja, the executive director of the Alberta Association of Architects. They've been fully involved in the consultations and, I understand, support the changes to the act. As well, the Interior Designers of Alberta were consulted and do support this act.

Licensed interior designers are the people that help make many of our major buildings beautiful and also functional. All of these public spaces that we enjoy are helped along in our enjoyment of them by professional interior designers. They select the appropriate materials that have the right flammability rating, are durable enough to stand the test of time, and are also pleasing to the eye. How high should a handrail be? What type of flooring should be installed? The drapes and all the many other types of facility furnishings and whatever that will be used are recommended to us and supplied to our buildings and structures by professional interior designers.

Mr. Speaker, the Official Opposition supports this piece of legislation. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to indicate our support for Bill 11, and we thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing it forward. It has sort of an awkward name, though: Bill 11. I hope that doesn't give us some ominous precursor to things later this spring.

The bill, as we see it, certainly helps to clarify and structure things in regard to allowing the Alberta Association of Architects to clarify its governance of interior designers and to enforce the requirement for compulsory competency, which always has to be good. We know that it's very important for us to allow the professional associations to govern themselves. This certainly extends the responsibility that we have here through the Legislature, so that's a good thing. The Alberta Association of Architects certainly is in favour of these amendments, and from my understanding they said that it would help them to enforce their requirements for licensing and membership and things such as that.

3:10

The amendments clarify roles and responsibilities, which has to be a good thing too, and seem to bring things into sort of a sense of order in the Architects Act, which otherwise heretofore seemed to have, to quote from someone in the AAA, a rather haphazard past. These newly spelled out requirements and regulations are analogous to those defined in the act for architects, and the amendments appear to be neither discriminatory nor cosmetic, which is good.

Licensed interior designers find themselves for the first time fully

included in this act instead of tacked on as an afterthought. I'm sure that they are looking forward to functioning under this act as equal partners and on the level of architects across the province. Given that the Alberta Association of Architects supports this substantive inclusion, I think that the rest of Bill 11, then, is sort of housekeeping, to have all of that fall into place.

We're happy to be in support of this Bill 11 without any amendments, and we look forward to seeing what comes next. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow to close debate.

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Seeing the support that we're receiving from the opposition parties, I would like to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a second time]

## Bill 12

### Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Government Services.

**Mr. Lund:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill 12, the Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, one of the fast-growing crimes in the province is mortgage fraud, and to that end we set up a committee that had representation from the Solicitor General's department, the Attorney General, Finance, of course from my department, the Edmonton city police, the RCMP, financial institutions, and the Law Society. They made a number of recommendations, and we believe this amendment to the Land Titles Act will in fact help accomplish some of the things that they've talked about.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The first and most important thing that this act does is allow the registrar to question when someone comes to the counter or someone brings forward a land title. The current situation is that if all the i's are dotted and all the t's are crossed, the registrar doesn't have a choice but to register it. Under these amendments the registrar will have the ability to actually question, even to the point of the identity of the individuals that have signed the documents. We believe that that way there will be the ability to probably find out if, in fact, there's something wrong with the document. Of course, there are probably still going to be some cases that will get by because even though the registrar will have the ability to do this, we have to be careful that we don't hold up the process unduly. Under this act we will also be making sure that if the registrar doesn't register immediately and does more investigations, the assurance fund isn't going to be liable under every situation. So that's really the most important part of it.

Also, we are defining the purpose of the land titles registry. This is a request from the FOIP office because they're having some difficulty at times determining whether, in fact, release of information that's on the title is in keeping with the purpose of government collecting that information and filing it. There are, as well, a number of other, minor amendments that really could be called housekeeping, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I will be moving second reading.

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

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure to rise as the Official Opposition critic for Government Services to participate in the debate during second reading of Bill 12, the Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006. It's also noteworthy to mention that I'm really considering this bill in conjunction with its sister bill, Bill 13, which is the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2006, as they're both attempting to deal with the same problem, mortgage fraud, each within its own sphere.

Before I go any further, Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the hon. minister for having agreed to meet with me ahead of time, before the legislative session started. I appreciated his time and his admin staff's time when they met with me and my researcher to go through the changes that were being proposed. I sincerely appreciate this. It allows us to conduct a dialogue professionally and intelligently.

Now, mortgage fraud, Mr. Speaker, is real and scary. It is a lucrative crime. We all know that crime doesn't pay. That's the way we were brought up, and that's the way we were taught. But until these criminals are caught, they're really making a ton of money fairly painlessly and quite quickly. Their return on investment, if we can call it an investment, is really quite high and quick. It appears to be the in crime, definitely one of the crimes of today. Crooks are getting craftier and more sophisticated, more creative and high tech. With that, the damage and loss are magnified manyfold. They lure unsuspecting victims and prey on people's basic dream and, one would argue, their right to own a home.

We're not talking about petty theft or a little kid stealing a chocolate bar. We're examining crimes which cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and have the potential to ruin lives and destroy families. Mortgage fraud can also drive up the cost of home ownership for genuine, honest, and hard-working people hoping to either own their first home or move from one home to the next. Insurance rates or registration fees or things like that may actually soar and may become another hurdle that homeowners have to overcome.

Now, we all know how active our economy is. This booming and bullish economy has led to a correspondingly scorching hot housing market with significant increases in sales, a widespread building frenzy, and an increase in the average sale price for sold properties. Land titles staff apparently processed more than 1 million land title registrations in the year 2004-2005. One million transactions.

Bill 12, the Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006, tries to deal with this issue. I'm willing to support this bill as it doesn't really appear to be contentious at all. It's quite useful and timely. In fact, its main aim is really simple: to clean up and update some of the language which is used in the old act to make it consistent with the current situation and the current practices. For example, I noticed that all references to inspectors and assistant inspectors have been removed under this amendment as those positions are now obsolete and no longer used. So we're making it conform to the current practice, which is good.

It allows the deputy registrar to function just like the registrar himself or herself and not only when the registrar is ill, away, or absent or when the position is vacant. So, really, we're empowering the deputy registrar to undertake more responsibility and to evolve in his role and his mandate to become equal to and a replacement for the actual registrar. It allows the registrar, in essence, to delegate to his or her deputy, and they can both do the same work together. Nothing bad there.

The second goal of this amendment is to bring the registrar of land titles into the battle against mortgage fraud and to afford him or her more power to help combat this growing problem. This bill also allows the registrar to refuse to register an instrument when fraud or

an improper transaction is suspected. I think that this is good, of course, but the question here will be: is this going to be subjective? What kind of training and special skills are we going to offer to our land titles staff to be able to detect if something appears fishy or something is not kosher or appropriate?

3:20

Will they have a certain protocol to follow, a manual to refer to, or a list of things to watch for? We don't want it to be left to their judgment entirely, and then one genuine transaction is denied while one criminal transaction goes through and is not stopped. Will they have the required training and continuing education as the crimes evolve and as the criminals, as I mentioned, get craftier and change their ways? Will these officers receive additional training as time goes?

Also, will they be required to report questionable transactions to police or law enforcement, or will they just refuse to register that instrument right there and then, and that's the end of the story? I would hope that if they intervene and if they intercept something or stop it, they would have good record keeping and maybe save a log with all the pertinent information and offer this to law enforcement for them to be able to track the magnitude of this growing problem, for them to be able to maybe look for similarities in how the crime is committed, or for them to be able to thwart additional crimes in the future because now they have trends or patterns that they can refer to in their investigations.

Mortgage fraud, as I mentioned, is a growing problem. I can actually spend 10 minutes, at least, talking about examples of mortgage fraud, but I'll leave this for a later date. It's noteworthy to mention that the Real Estate Council of Alberta, or RECA, has put out a bulletin on mortgage fraud. I would refer all the hon. colleagues in this House and people who might be listening on the Internet or reviewing *Hansard* later to visit their website and try to go through these recommendations and pieces of information because it really allows them to understand how these crooks commit these crimes. I would refer everybody to their website: [www.reca.ab.ca](http://www.reca.ab.ca). Their bulletin was actually produced in April of 2004. It talks about things like straw buyers, flipping property, low down payments, and so on, and it alerts people to the red flags that they should be watching for.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, this is relatively useful. It doesn't appear to be contentious, and again I thank the minister for having given me the opportunity to discuss it ahead of time. I welcome further comments. I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie has further to say.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and debate Bill 12, Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006. It's a very interesting debate for me because my background is as a real estate agent. I've been doing this job for a long time, especially the land title experience. Some problems facing the land title sometimes cause difficulties for buyers as well as sellers.

According to the data in this bill, the first objective of this bill is to clean up and update some of the language within the act that is no longer used or no longer up to date. The impact is very clear. The bill wants to give additional responsibilities or more duties to the registrar. This is a noncontentious bill with no apparent negative impacts. Further, the bill incorporates the registrar into the battle against mortgage fraud in Alberta, which is a positive thing.

We need some caution on this particular bill. It needs some

amendments, I think, because when you pay \$7 or \$10 for one particular land title, sometimes you get very little information. People expect a full property archive report in the land title. Suppose you buy a car. You are entitled to know the last four or five owners of the car: who bought it, when they bought it, the sale price, and condition. I used to live in England. We used to get the full history of some products, especially cars. When you are buying property or land, maybe a house, it's a huge amount involved, and I think it's very important that we get the full property archive report when we get the land title.

The land title history is operated and maintained by Alberta Government Services, and it is the responsibility of the government. We should look at it very carefully. I know that RECA is doing a good job, but still, as I said before, we should have a commissioner who would look into this matter very carefully. In other states some laws are different. The assumption of a mortgage: in other states it's not possible, but in Alberta the people assume somebody else's mortgage. Then they flip the property, and they make lots of money. We don't see those changes in the land title report.

Another complaint I hear from some people on the land titles is that sometimes it takes more time. In rush time sometimes the people get the land title report in 10, 15 days. Maybe sometimes it takes more than two weeks. When some buyers and maybe some sellers write an offer for the property, the possession date takes three months. After three months it takes two weeks for the land title, so it's close to four months. The market value sometimes goes up, and the buyers and the sellers sometimes make settlements under the table. That's happening in Alberta. This, in other words, is fraud, and it shouldn't happen. If we have a vigilance department who can look into this, this will not be beneficial for the buyer but good for sellers and good for the citizens in Alberta.

Another thing I want to mention here is that when we pay some amount of money to the registrar for a land title, they don't highlight some properties bought and sold by the government. In some states it's compulsory if government is involved in the property. I mean, maybe it's discriminatory, but it's up to you. If the transaction is done by the government, it should be highlighted. It should be highlighted. People should know that this property is bought or sold by the government, as with other properties. Property archives should be there, even five, six times flip-flopped, especially if it's government involvement. It should be highlighted, the mortgage information especially.

### 3:30

Suppose the mortgage is refinanced a few times. I mean, it happens in Alberta. Some lenders are playing foul games. They buy one property. If one lender turned down the mortgage, then they go to the other lenders and get the mortgage. After financing from one place, they go to the other place. There are lots of problems in this one as well. I think we must consider some grey areas in this particular issue before we pass this legislation.

We need to educate buyers and sellers both. I mean, some people are innocent, and they buy the property. They don't go to a licensed realtor. They just find a for-sale property, and if they're asking even 20 per cent more in price and the seller says, "Okay, I'll take \$10,000 less than the asking price," they think: oh, my God, it's cheaper. But they don't realize because they don't ask the people who are experts in the field, and they pay more for that. Afterwards, when they find out that they bought the property for 25 or 20 per cent more than the actual value of the property, then they repent that.

That's why I'm suggesting that we should suggest to RECA or maybe make the legislation so that there should be some sort of awareness. I mean, we should educate the people, especially on

buying a property. Some people don't even inspect the property. I don't know. Some inspectors have the licences, but they charge \$200, \$300, \$400 for a small house. When they write reports, it could be in five years, could be in four years, and some innocent people don't understand those things. It's very important to educate the new buyer, the first-time buyer. First-time buyers always suffer because they don't have the full knowledge about the whole thing. If they are leasing the property or they are buying a house or buying land, the problem is there. They don't understand sometimes.

So we need somebody to guide them. I know that they don't contact the licensed realtor because they think: oh, they have to charge some commission. Just to save some commission, they contact some person who doesn't have the knowledge. In a case like this, the only way, I think, is to educate the people on how they can, you know, save some money. I think that saving money is more important than anything else.

The provincial committee, with representation from the government, is also important. I think the minister already indicated that they are concerned. RECA is involved. They are doing a good job.

Other than that, I don't think there's any problem with this bill. I believe this is a good bill. I'm willing to voice my support for this bill as it appears to be primarily aimed at cleaning up or updating the language. I'm very happy with this bill. It's good to see that we are making the needed changes in the land titles in response to the problems we are facing associated with mortgage fraud in Alberta.

That's all I have to say. Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with some interest to speak this afternoon on Bill 12, the Land Titles Amendment Act, 2006. I'd like to thank the hon. minister and representative from Rocky Mountain House for bringing this forward. I believe that there are a number of issues here within the bill that were wanting attention. As far as I know, we as the New Democrats will give it tentative support. I guess I just wanted to go through a couple of the places where we don't necessarily find contention, but perhaps we can look for future clarification just to make sure that we know what you are trying to do here.

These amendments, I believe – correct me if I'm wrong – are sort of required in response to a recommendation made by the Advisory Committee on Mortgage Fraud in its final report, issued last year in November. The language in this proposed bill seems to be changing to reflect existing positions. There are no longer any inspectors or assistant inspectors. Rather, there's only the registrar and deputy registrars.

Therefore, most of the changes are of that sort of nature, which is fine: adding some regulations here, I see, to permit the registrar to refuse a registry when fraud is suspected, which certainly has to be welcomed by most of the real estate community, I believe, and by the public as well, and adding regulations permitting investigation of the registrar for suspicious dealings and to access personal information, which again is perhaps necessary considering the magnitude of purchasing a home for most everyone. It's the biggest purchase that they make, so we want to make sure that there's adequate protection in place to reduce the incidence of fraud.

Alberta is the mortgage fraud capital of Canada, unfortunately. We have more fraudulent incidents in Alberta than in any other place. Certainly, it's a reflection of the hot market and movement of property throughout the province, which I guess is a good thing in some ways, but we have to be here to stand on guard, to regulate on the other hand, I suppose.



3:40

The amendment as proposed here raises several additional questions, and I believe, in my mind, that it raises more questions than perhaps are addressed in the bill. Just a couple of places to watch for, and we can continue the debate when we meet in the other level of debate here.

Section 13, for example, of the proposed amendment is stipulating that proof of identification may be required in order to register rather than leaving it up to the discretion of the registrar. As to who or what group may need to produce identity, in the interest of transparency we would suggest that perhaps that could read that proof of identification must be required, period. I mean, who's to say why someone would have to be excluded from that? I think that it's just easier to use a one-size-fits-all for that particular section.

Another example of a section that might require some adjustment or at least clarification is in section 14 on page 4, which gives the registrar the right to refuse registration if fraud is suspected. While of course we can support the right to do so – in fact, we support that to reduce the incidence of fraud – as far as I can see, there's no provision made for appeals by the individual to be refused. Perhaps I'm missing something. Nor are there provisions for the registrar to report suspected fraud. Perhaps if I could get some clarification on that so that we can just have that out in the open: perhaps referring it to another level of inspection or the police, I guess, if necessary.

Also, if the stated purpose of the amendments is to give the government another tool to prevent and detect fraud in its registries, how does the hon. minister, then, perceive these proposed amendments given that fraud is still ongoing in our privatized registries in general? I would suggest that a tightening up of the privatized registries and the problems we see associated with that might be working in concert with this bill to protect citizens because, of course, we always have to be vigilant. We have seen individual cases of privatized registries not following the rules, so perhaps that would be a nice one-two punch to reduce real estate fraud in the province and to better serve and protect the public, which is our job otherwise.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Anyone wish to speak under 29(2)(a)? Under 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to ask a few more questions. Why couldn't RECA or the provincial government stop assumption of the mortgage in Alberta when some other provinces don't have this? There was a rumour last year that they are going to stop assumptions of the mortgage because of a few frauds in Alberta. Why did we let it go that far? Can you answer this particular question: why are we still waiting?

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is to ask a question of the previous speaker or to make a comment. Anyone else?

**Mr. Eggen:** I can respond, certainly. That's a great question. As a real estate owner, not a real estate dealer, I would be curious to know about that actually. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie brings a wealth of experience in the real estate trade to the House, to the Legislature, and I appreciate his comments. It's refreshing.

Thanks.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Government Services to close debate.

**Mr. Lund:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just be brief. I'm going to address some of the concerns even though normally we just deal with the principle of the bill at this point, and I want to take this opportunity to thank the Liberals and the NDP for their support on this bill.

The Member for Edmonton-McClung talked about the training of staff. Yes, that is a very important component. As a matter of fact, currently we spend a considerable amount of time when someone comes in and becomes an employee in the land titles office. As they move up, in order to have the final sign-off, it takes them a considerable amount of time to get there. Of course, any time that we find or the registrar would suspect something and is pretty sure that there's something suspicious, the police would be called in. That's all part of the investigation the way we would work it.

The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie talked about releasing a lot of information. Mr. Speaker, one of the amendments in here is to add the purpose of the land titles: why you have land titles and the registrar, the registry of them. The purpose, then, will help the commissioner dictate what kind of information can be released off those titles. It's not totally in our hands, but certainly we're hoping that with these amendments it'll clarify it somewhat.

He also mentioned the number of sales and mortgages rolled over and those sorts of things. That's exactly the kinds of things that the staff will be trained to look at and will be able to start asking questions because they get really suspicious if a property has been rolled over, say, four times in a year. There could be – not necessarily, but there could be – something going on. That's the type of thing that they would identify and would start asking a lot of questions and would start backing it up to see if the people that signed the documents are who they say they are. They would be getting all that identity.

The mortgages as they are rolled is another area that the registrar will be looking at. It's quite amazing, these people that are in the business of defrauding the public in the mortgage area and in land, the various schemes that they have. Now, when we talk about the training of staff, we have to also remember that the people that are committing these crimes – their techniques are changing. So we have to keep up with that. We have to keep recognizing that, you know, there's something different here today than there was yesterday. Those are the kinds of things that they'll be dealing with.

The Member for Edmonton-Calder was wondering about the appeals. No, there isn't an appeal. What will happen, of course: if a registrar is holding up an instrument, then in fact the opportunity will be there for the individual that's trying to register it to clarify and justify everything that's before the registrar. If it turns out that, in fact, the registrar refuses, then of course it'll go over to court. That would be the appeal.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I would call the question on second reading of this bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a second time]

3:50

**Bill 10**

**Engineering, Geological and Geophysical  
Professions Amendment Act, 2006**

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move second reading of Bill 10, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2006.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta,

more commonly known as APEGGA, has made to the development of this legislation. The association has worked closely with the staff of Human Resources and Employment. The membership of APEGGA strongly supports the provisions contained in this bill. Also in support are other professional regulatory organizations, including the Alberta Association of Architects, the Alberta Institute of Agrologists, the College of Alberta Professional Foresters, and the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists.

Mr. Speaker, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act governs the practices of engineering, geology, and geophysicists in Alberta and requires that people who wish to practise as engineers, geologists, and geophysicists belong to APEGGA. The legislation also grants these individuals the right to vote for and become members of APEGGA's governing council and to vote on all proposed bylaws and regulations put forward by APEGGA.

In 2002 the legislation was amended to include the registered professional technologists, or RPTs, in engineering as APEGGA members. In 2003 RPTs in geology and geophysics also became members of APEGGA through the creation of a new regulation. None of the RPTs, however, were granted full voting rights or council membership rights in the association. Bill 10 would allow RPTs in engineering to have the same rights as APEGGA's current professional members, the right to vote on and to be elected to the governing council and to vote on bylaws and regulations.

Similar changes to the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act regulations are also proposed to give RPTs in geology and geophysics the same rights. As it stands, Bill 10 makes it mandatory for at least one RPT to be a member on APEGGA's council. However, mandatory council membership was not part of the amendment submission presented by APEGGA to the Alberta government. To rectify this matter, a House amendment will be introduced during Committee of the Whole reading of Bill 10 to delete the reference to mandatory council membership for RPTs. In other words, RPTs may, as opposed to shall, sit on APEGGA's council. The House amendment will in no way hinder RPTs' ability to vote or be a candidate for APEGGA's council.

Mr. Speaker, this act will help clarify and strengthen the engineering profession by allowing RPTs to vote on and become members of APEGGA's council and also vote on new and amended APEGGA regulations and bylaws. Bill 10 guarantees that all views of all APEGGA members will be heard. This will ensure that the association continues to serve the public interest and maintain the high standards of safety and excellence Albertans have come to expect.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Bill 15**  
**International Interests in**  
**Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act**

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Affairs.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to the second reading of Bill 15, the International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act. Bill 15 is implementing legislation that will help move Canada toward becoming part of an international registry for large, mobile equipment such as passenger aircraft.

Mr. Speaker, in 2005 the Canadian federal government signed two

international agreements: the first, the convention on international interests and mobile equipment, also known as the Cape Town convention, and then the protocol on aircraft equipment. Eight countries, including the United States and Ireland, have ratified the convention and protocol. Canada and 24 other countries have signed the convention and protocol but haven't yet ratified them.

Mr. Speaker, these two international agreements touch on an area of provincial jurisdiction: interests in personal property. We've been assured that Canada will not ratify them until a critical mass of provinces – Ontario, Quebec, B.C., and Alberta – have indicated their support. Ontario and Nova Scotia have already passed but not yet proclaimed legislation. Quebec and B.C. haven't yet indicated their plans for implementing legislation. However, it is likely that Canadian ratification of the convention and protocol will take place 12 to 18 months from now.

In general, Mr. Speaker, these two international agreements establish a system for the registration of international interests in aircraft equipment. It'll be much like the way the registry keeps track of information on your truck or car. The registry for aircraft equipment, such as engines and airframes, will be based in Ireland. As we all know, when you buy a car through a bank, the bank searches the registry to find out if there are any liens on the car or if it has been used as security for another loan. Airlines also use banks and other financial institutions to finance the purchase of large passenger aircraft. Those institutions need access to the same kind of up-to-date, reliable information about the aircraft to protect their financial interests.

Currently an international registry does not exist to keep track of such important information. With an international registry in place banks will have more confidence about the security of their loans, and as a result they've already indicated that they'd be able to lower their lending rates and save the airlines some money. Now, aircraft are expensive, and even a small reduction could mean savings of hundreds of thousands of dollars on a purchase. Our hope, of course, Mr. Speaker, is that some of these savings would be passed on to consumers. Without Alberta implementing legislation to help establish this registry, firms located in our province, such as WestJet, would be left out, wouldn't be able to participate, and they would not be able to take advantage of the anticipated lower lending rate.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear that Bill 15 does not amend Alberta's Personal Property Security Act. The international agreements are flexible. They allow jurisdictions to make choices regarding their implementation to take into account existing domestic laws and procedures. The new registry on aircraft equipment will have no effect on how provincial registries currently operate and collect information on Alberta's cars, trucks, and homes. The legislation allows Alberta to exercise its jurisdiction in an area where the federal government has reached an international agreement, and it will give Alberta businesses access to lower financing costs when purchasing new equipment.

For these reasons I encourage all members to support second reading of Bill 15, the International Interests in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act.

I also move to adjourn debate on this bill. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Bill 1**  
**Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act**

[Adjourned debate March 2: Mr. Dunford]

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise in support of this bill. The Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act I think is a very important bill and deals with something that has touched on every member of this Assembly in some way and on many of our families. To establish this fund, to establish some of these matters addresses each of the three pillars of many of the things that the Alberta Cancer Board has been looking for and wants to have in its strategy, and those three are prevention, early detection, and research.

4:00

Some of the many problems we see in cancer are shown in the statistics for Alberta and the Northwest Territories. In Alberta an estimated 13,200 new cases of cancer will be expected in 2005, 6,800 for men and 6,400 for women, and 5,500 deaths from cancer. For prostate cancer among men it remains the most frequently occurring cancer in Alberta, and in 2005 an estimated 2,200 men will be diagnosed with this and 400 will die. Breast cancer is incredibly difficult for many women, and it's the most frequently occurring cancer for them. An estimated 1,950 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer, and 430 will die from it. Lung cancer, the most preventable of all human cancers, continues to be the leading cause of cancer death in Alberta for both men and women. In 2005 an estimated 1,660 people, 850 men and 810 women, will be diagnosed with lung cancer, and 1,410 people will die from it. Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer in Alberta for both men and women, although both incidence and mortality rates have declined steadily over the last decade and a half. In 2005 an estimated 1,560 people will be diagnosed with it, and 600 people will die.

The above findings were drawn by the Canadian Cancer Society from the Canadian Cancer Statistics 2005 booklet. These are shocking numbers. I hope and pray that the numbers will be decreased through this important initiative and that what we see through a co-ordinated approach and an increased amount of funding and an increased amount of focus on this issue will be important in reducing these tragic deaths.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to participate in second reading in the discussion on Bill 1, the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act, as sponsored by the hon. Premier. Of course, you know that when an opposition member rises, you get people from across the way with their ears perking up and they circle their wagons and they think that we're going to attack them and criticize them. They expect the worst most of the time, but today I am pleased to disappoint them because I am standing in support of this bill. Actually, one would argue that it's really long overdue.

This bill is useful. It has positive outcomes or favourable impacts. It establishes the new cancer legacy fund, which is about half a billion dollars, \$500 million, which I think would yield about \$25 million annually. It's good because this way you have a steady stream of something that is forecastable, something that is relatively guaranteed, relatively secure, that keeps coming every year. I think this is better than ad hoc decisions or grants or, you know, one-off prosperity dividends or payouts. This is good because now people in the field can rely on \$25 million, or more if revenues increase, coming their way every year. I think that's positive.

It also intends to encourage national, international partnerships with the private sector in screening and research, and this is useful of course. I'm going to talk about the issue of screening in about a minute here.

The third clear impact or positive outcome would be funding and establishing a virtual institute, a cancer research institute, which will increase capacity for researchers in this province to collaborate on research and development projects. It offers additional leverage for attracting outside grants because sometimes you go to the federal government or you go to venture capital people or whatever the source is, and they say: "Okay. We will match whatever you can muster, whatever you can come up with." So we're opening doors now to places like the Canadian Institutes of Health Research or other agencies that would match whatever funds we can come up with here provincially.

In terms of a background, the Alberta Cancer Board has been pressing for a significant commitment by this province and by this government to expand its capacity and resources to deal with cancer in terms of not only treatment but also detection and prevention. In addition to the legacy fund, the board has submitted some capital requests to the government, to the treasury, of some \$350 million for expansion to the Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton and is in the early stages of preparing a proposal for a similar one for Calgary to expand cancer-related capacity, which is going to be worth \$500 million to \$600 million in that city alone. This is a good first step, but the government should be expecting that more demands are going to follow.

Now, I said in the beginning that I wholeheartedly support investing in cancer research in all disciplines, be it early diagnosis and detection, like I mentioned, or be it medication and pharmaceutical care protocols or surgery or restorative surgery. In fact, on the issue of early detection and diagnosis you know, Mr. Speaker, of my experience in the health care field. As a pharmacist I not only see patients afflicted with the various forms of cancer – and we all know how devastating and destructive and terrible a disease it is – but I also see and talk to their family members and their spouses. People are usually very comfortable with their pharmacist, and they share things with you that sometimes they don't share with their physician even. One of the themes that I can detect now is that people are concerned about misdiagnosis, or not having a correct diagnosis made at the beginning. Sometimes they blame it on how busy the specialists are or maybe because there aren't enough specialists and so on.

If you don't detect it early enough or if you detect it but you diagnose it the wrong way, then it adds to the negative impact of that disease. If you catch it early enough and if you detect it the right way and you prescribe the right medication or the right surgical procedure, then your chances of survival are really higher. Scanning techniques have improved. I really have to emphasize that I'm not criticizing the advances that were made over the past 10 years or so. We definitely came a long way, and we have a lot more to offer. We have a lot more to improve upon. The population is aging, and the rate of morbidity or multiple diseases is increasing, and the challenge is still here. So I hope that one of the things that this fund is trying to address is in the area of early and accurate diagnosis and detection.

Also, Mr. Speaker, what about the underlying causes of cancer? It is good to be able to finally attack or tackle the problem of cancer. It's definitely a growing concern. But what about the causes that might actually cause people to come down with cancer? One of the risk factors is going to be family history. Maybe there is nothing much we can do if somebody has a gene that predisposes them to coming down with a certain form of cancer, be it colorectal or prostate or breast cancer or whatever.

My grandmother herself came down with a very rare form of cancer, oral cancer, which basically affected her jaw and her tongue and her teeth. She actually had to undergo surgery, and they

removed about two-thirds of her lower jaw and about one-third of her upper jaw. She was really devastated by it because from that point on she actually had to eat all her food preblended, almost like Gerber for kids. It was really, really awful. They couldn't tell her where she got it from. She did not have a family history. She did not have all the other determinants of cancer. They said that maybe, possibly, because she was a headmistress or a principal of a school, she drank too much coffee. They couldn't tell. That was about 26 years ago, and I think that today they should be able to do a better job with all the scanning routines and all the techniques that they use in our health centres.

#### 4:10

Back to the underlying causes. I always quote the saying about an ounce of prevention versus the pound of treatment. This is where I'm going, Mr. Speaker: to try to alleviate or to prevent the causes that contribute to cancer. Certain things are not stoppable, but certain things are. Questions come to mind. What specific prevention initiatives is this money going to support? What are we going to do to educate our public? What things should we ask them to avoid? What things should we ask them to look for?

Also, if we're going to invest hundreds of millions of dollars – and I'm saying that this is a first step; we might have it next year or the year after – what are we going to do for environmental risk factors? Two examples in very recent history: within this last year we had the Wabamun train derailment and a spill. I know that they did contain it. Maybe they didn't contain it fast enough. At least is there going to be an agency or a board that's going to look at these risk factors and re-evaluate, test the water, do environmental impact assessments over a period of time to make sure that the water really did go back to its former quality? We also heard about the water being contaminated by coal-bed methane fracturing. People are claiming that they can actually, literally, ignite their tap water. They can't bathe in it; they're getting some terrible skin rashes from it. They can't make their farm animals drink it, and they can't drink it themselves, so now they're relying on water being trucked in. These are just examples of natural or artificially occurring toxins that could be averted, that could be avoided.

The issue that is on everybody's mind: are the province and the government going to strengthen our smoking legislation? Smoking is definitely one of the main causes of lung cancer. It has been proven. It's in the scientific wisdom. People know that smoking, with all the tar and all the garbage that is in cigarettes, causes lung cancer. So are we going to strengthen smoking legislation?

I'll go back to my experience as a pharmacist, Mr. Speaker, and I'll tell you about something that I was personally involved in. I ran for the College of Pharmacists board six or seven years ago, and I hoped to become one of the councillors because I had an idea. I wanted to remove tobacco products from pharmacies. Some pharmacies are relying on tobacco sales not as a revenue-generating stream but as a traffic maker. If all the independent or small stores stop selling tobacco, the bigger stores like Safeway and Shoppers and Superstore are still selling them. Because of their huge size the government and its bylaws tell you that you don't need to separate that section of your store from the rest of it.

I ran on the idea that I would present a motion to ban tobacco sales from all drugstores regardless of size. I came in fourth. We were five people running, and I came fourth, 27 votes away from the first-place winner. It's noteworthy to mention that the first three were hospital pharmacists. People in the hospital pharmacy industry voted for their own because they didn't know me, but they liked the idea. I'm hoping that one of these days, now that I'm a member of

this esteemed House, we can actually discuss the feasibility of removing tobacco products from all drugstores regardless of size.

Evidence shows that cancer in a majority of cases is also caused by social reasons or causes such as poverty or malnutrition or things like that. This is a growing concern for myself and my caucus colleagues because regardless of the wealth and all this money that the government is bringing in and that people are relatively better off than before, the gap between the really rich and the really poor is widening. So I think our middle class to some extent is being pulled, polarized. The rich are getting richer, which is not necessarily bad, but the poor are getting poorer, and this is something I take issue with.

Also, treating cancer involves palliative care, or terminal care. It's an important issue because these people are in the last period of their lives. What are we doing? What are we hoping to accomplish with this bill to try to afford them the dignity and the pain-free status to ease them in their last days in this world? Palliative care is important; 27 to 45 per cent of all cancer-related costs pertain to palliative care. So it's a growing expenditure, but it's also something that we have to be aware of. As people get older and as medical treatment gets better, more and more people would require palliative care because we're diagnosing them right – or so one hopes – and we're going to look after them.

You know, people are living into their 80s and 90s now with comorbidities, which means they have multiple diseases, and we are definitely going to spend more on looking after them in their last days. So palliative care: it opens up the discussion on things like long-term care as well and continuing care. It all fits together. We shouldn't really look at these policies as piecemeal or, you know: I'm today talking about cancer; I can't talk about long-term care. They all fit together.

**An Hon. Member:** It's silos.

**Mr. Elsahy:** Yes. Leave the silos away and look at the bigger picture because, you know, it's one person and it's one taxpayer that we're looking after. You can't really split them and say: oh, I'll look after his health and I'll look after his education and I'll look after his social needs and I'll look after his legal rights and so on. It's one person. You look at it from a holistic approach.

Also, other than just pouring money or investing into this fund, what is the government going to do to increase training, graduation, and retention of qualified health professionals? You would hope that people that are graduating – and you've heard the statistic that the admission quota is going way up and that people are finding it extremely difficult to go into medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, physical rehab, and so on. What are we doing to promote more open . . . [Mr. Elsahy's speaking time expired]

Ah, well. Okay. There are more chances, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you for this opportunity.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. I know that the member was sort of cut off mid-thought on the issues that he was pursuing, and I'm wondering if he can just complete the last section that he was talking about.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Well, hon. member, Standing Order 29(2)(a) has been used for that reason before, so the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I promise to be brief. I was just talking about training and recruitment. We all know that admission quotas have become restrictive. People are not seeking those professional programs because of the length or the amount of money that they have to fork out to be in them. It's costly and it's long. Medicine, for example: seven, eight, nine years to become a physician. The more specialized you want to be, the longer it takes. People are shying away from becoming specialists and only graduating as family physicians because there's a quick buck to be made, and that's it.

The other thing, too, is – and I can tell you this from my experience as well – that half of every graduating class from the University of Alberta's pharmacy department goes to the U.S. Why do they go to the U.S.? They get offered better wages. Sometimes you hear stories about them hiring their spouses and offering them relocation bonuses. They give them a house and so on. What are we doing here to be competitive in that job market? We all know that we have a job shortage.

You know, you talk about importation of temporary foreign workers: what are we doing for our international medical graduates? People are coming from overseas, and they're really qualified. I know that the Minister of Health yesterday or the day before issued a press release talking about some 14 residency spots for international medical graduates, which means that if they share them, we can possibly get 28 of those international graduates through per year, and basically we're getting 28 more physicians every year, which is great.

But what are we doing to maybe encourage people to go in now, and what are we doing to encourage our government to retain them within this province? Maybe we should pardon some of their student debt. If people are graduating with heavy student debts, we can pardon some of it.

**An Hon. Member:** Time.

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Well, I still have three minutes, I think. I'll come back to it in committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. member, five minutes is allowed under Standing Order 29(2)(a), so you still have three minutes.

**Mr. Elsalhy:** I appreciate it. Thank you, sir.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Anyone else in the remaining time under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

**Mr. Tougas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I'd like to rise and discuss Bill 1 briefly. It's kind of hard to argue against an all-out attack on cancer. There are not going to be too many people in this room right now or hardly anyone in Alberta who hasn't been touched by cancer in some way.

I remember that last week when we were here, I heard from the Minister of Economic Development about his current battle with cancer, and it was a very interesting and inspiring story. I recall a few years ago in my own family I had a call from my dad telling us that one of my nephews had leukemia. His name is Ryan. When you hear something like that, there's a feeling in the pit of your stomach that just makes you sick to think that someone this young – he was probably 13 at the time – would have a disease as poten-

tially horrific as this. He and his family went through just a hellish time fighting this disease – a lot of hospital stays, medication, all sorts of terrible stuff – but it worked, I'm happy to say.

Thanks to the cancer research funds over the years and the people in the cancer community in Edmonton he's a big, strong 18-year-old today, and that's a real success story. I think that with this bill there may be a lot more of these success stories in the future. It certainly would be wonderful if sometime – you know, right now there's something called, I think, the Edmonton protocol for diabetes. Maybe some day in the future there will be an Alberta protocol that will solve some sort of horrendous cancer, maybe prostate cancer or something along those lines, and maybe it will all start right here with this commitment of \$500 million to start a real solid battle against cancer.

In that regard, yes, I certainly have to give credit to the government for reaching for the stars. I mean, we've been kind of waiting for this government to do something big with all the petrodollars that have been coming in. Battling the deficit is not exactly something that's going to gladden the heart. It's a good thing; congratulations, it's done. This is a better thing. This is something that could make a difference in the lives of people for years to come and around the world, and I certainly hope that it can succeed. I have to give credit to the government for finally showing some vision.

It's an ambitious goal; that's for sure. We're looking at reducing the incidence of cancer by 35 per cent by 2025 and reducing the mortality from cancer by 50 per cent by 2025. Big goals. I don't know exactly how they found these goals, and how they're going to measure them is another question altogether, but I assume that they've got some sort of plan in place to keep an eye on this.

Mr. Speaker, we have all sort of done our part for cancer research, some in big ways. This is the biggest way, and we've all had our small ways. I know there are a bunch of opposition MLAs who went on a little Cops for Cancer Battle in the Saddle a few weeks ago. We raised over a thousand dollars. I think the members for Edmonton-McClung and Edmonton-Manning – I was sick that day, but I organized it – and Edmonton-Rutherford and Edmonton-Decore were all there. We did our part and raised about a thousand dollars.

**Mrs. McClellan:** They were sick after they did it.

**Mr. Tougas:** I'm being heckled; I can't believe this. I'm saying nice things; I'm being heckled.

**An Hon. Member:** In a good way.

**Mr. Tougas:** Okay. I'll accept that. I'll accept the applause.

I do have to say, though, that there's a little bit of irony in this government launching a battle against cancer in that they have – well, a little over a year ago we had a stronger tobacco law, that was watered down. Tobacco, as we all know, is one of the leading causes of cancer. We had a chance right there to really do something about it, but the government held back. We really should have fought harder for that thing. It just doesn't make a lot of sense that today we'll be launching a big offensive against cancer, yet we have ways that we could be stopping it earlier.

We're talking about things like coal-bed methane. We don't know the impact of this. We have water that's potentially tainted – we don't know – yet we're still going full speed ahead with this. So there is more than just a little bit of irony in this sort of thing, Mr. Speaker.

But, as I said, I'll be brief. I would just like to put in a plug,

though, for the city of Edmonton. I know they're talking about – what was that called again? – a virtual cancer research centre. If it's going to go anywhere, I'd just like to say that it belongs here in the city of Edmonton at the University of Alberta. Just before other cities start making moves on it, this is where it belongs because the real seat of higher education is right here in the city of Edmonton. [interjections] I can hear some complaining from some Calgarians here. Let's be fair here.

**An Hon. Member:** What about the rural folks?

**Mr. Tougas:** Rural people are staying strangely quiet right now.

So I would like to just mention that Edmonton is probably where this sort of thing belongs. I hope the government doesn't worry too much about trying to spread this out between Edmonton and Calgary. The real goal is cancer prevention and a cure for cancer, and we shouldn't worry quite so much about making sure that Calgary gets a bit of it and Edmonton gets a bit of it. If that's going to cost us administrative dollars, I hope this isn't the type of thing that we have to really worry about.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, I said that I'd be brief, and I'm a man of my word. Again, I'm supportive of this legislation. It'll be interesting to see, when it finally comes to pass, what it looks like, and we'll be keeping a close eye on it. Again I commend the government for committing this kind of money to it. I hope that some day in the future we'll look back on this day and say that we've done a great thing here.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Again, 29(2)(a) is available. Anyone on the bill?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Mr. Speaker, I just want to make a very few comments, and I certainly want to add my appreciation to the opposition members that have supported this bill. As has been said by a number of the speakers, there are very few of us that can say that we haven't been touched by this at some point in our lives, whether it was a family, friend, or acquaintances. Too often it's a very difficult disease to manage, and families and friends are affected as deeply as the person fighting the disease, and sometimes it's harder for them.

I want to add one other commendation, and that's to the Cancer Board members. They're a dedicated group of individuals that have really dedicated their time and their efforts, really, on a volunteer basis to fight this disease. There have been a number of people serve on that board over the years. But it's really their plan, working with the minister of health, and their belief that if we make these types of investments, if we concentrate in the areas that this bill outlines, we actually can reduce the numbers of incidences of cancer. Obviously, that will be wonderful for all of us.

I want to also just mention that I'm not sure that we're all aware of the tremendous research that does occur in this province today in the area of cancer. I'm very proud that we have dedicated cancer research funds over the years to ensure that we could attract those very great researchers, those fine people who work in that area.

I want to mention the dedication and hard work of Dr. Turc. He has been a stalwart with that organization. He's an amazing man. I would venture to say that he could have gone anywhere and has been approached, I am sure and in fact know, many times to leave the province and go somewhere else. But his dedication to the people of this province, to what he believes we can do here – I'm as pleased for him and people like Dr. Tony Fields, again one of the

leading people in this area, recognized world-wide, that have chosen to stay in Alberta and fight the fight here. So I think we're very fortunate in this province to have those types of people, and you could add many to that list. That type of dedication and that kind of support and that kind of interest make it tremendously easy for all of us in this Legislature to support this bill and the goals that are set out in it.

4:30

I want to thank all members for their support for this. I want to wish the researchers and the physicians and the caregivers that work in this area well in their goals of bringing down the incidence of cancer in a very, very significant way. I think this formalizes what we all believe in and, most of all, shows the dedicated people in the field that we're behind them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Anyone under 29(2)(a)?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on the bill.

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will not go on long on Bill 1. It's a bill that would be hard to oppose, to say the least. Certainly, we in the NDP will support the thrust of the bill, but I do have some questions and some concerns as we go along. I'm glad that the Minister of Finance is here for at least one of the questions that I will be putting out at some point.

I guess that the point about the bill is that \$500 million, we hope, over the long run will have some impact. I know that the figures that the Premier quoted were pretty ambitious in terms of cutbacks. Certainly, this is one time when we all hope that the Premier is right, that we can do this with this endowment fund. We don't need to go into all of this. I think everyone in this House has known people that have died of cancer. I would point out that one of my colleagues, that many of you would remember, Gordon Wright, the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona, went through a painful time when he was here in the Legislature, and many of you would remember that. We've all had somebody close to us, I think, taken by this awful, awful disease.

The point that I would want to make, then: if we're going to take this disease on seriously, we have to come back to the smoking bylaw. I would suggest that the government at least knew that they made a mistake when we were going to have special smoking areas here and not for the rest of the public. Within a day they at least solved that problem, but it sent out not a very good message to the people. Of course, we know that smoking is one of the major causes certainly of lung cancer. There are many others, but certainly smoking is one of them. I think that if we're doing a fund like this and doing it for research to try to deal with cancer, perhaps we should come back to the Member for Calgary-West, I believe it is, and look for a province-wide ban.

Maybe we can see that as part of the legacy in the next Legislature. It seems to me that it would be quite appropriate, as we're putting in \$500 million here, to begin to look at that. It certainly creates some problems for people, but if we're serious about cancer, I think that's the first step that we should take, and perhaps we can look forward to that in the very near future. Of course, then we can get into a debate – I won't bother here because I think it's been said – about the problems with methane and, coal related, whether there is such a thing as clean coal. Those are all potentially cancerous too, and that's another debate to be held.

A message becomes important. This is the question I have for the Minister of Finance. It's my understanding that the Cancer Board

prepares yearly budgets for the administration of monies, but this particular investment would be controlled by the Minister of Finance, if I'm understanding it correctly. I think there's a key point here. I believe that the Cancer Board has what they call ethical investments. Certainly, an obvious one that they would not invest in would be tobacco, for example. Ethical funds are in all sorts of areas: liquor, people with bad environmental records, but certainly tobacco. I would hope, then, that with this particular fund, at least, the minister would follow the guidelines of the Cancer Board in any investments that they might make. I think that that's an important message. If all of a sudden we're setting up a board here and we're allowed to invest in tobacco companies or other companies that actually could cause cancer, Mr. Speaker, it would not be sending a good message for the endowment fund. I'm not sure that she can answer it here, but I would hope that they would take a look at that and that this particular fund at least would follow the guidelines set out by the Cancer Board. I think that's a very important part of it.

In saying that, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that this money is going in to try to deal with this disease. From our perspective in the NDP opposition we'll certainly wholeheartedly support the bill as it stands.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available again.

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on second reading?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

## Bill 2 Drug-endangered Children Act

[Adjourned debate March 2: Mr. Tougas]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark still has 13 minutes left.

**Mr. Tougas:** No. I think I'm done with this matter, Mr. Speaker. I'm fine.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Then I'd recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that I have the opportunity to put some of my concerns about this bill on the record, and I'll go through these. I have to say that the previous members of my caucus have spoken in favour of this bill, and some people are very supportive. I understand that and I respect it, but I have some cautions around this bill, and I see some similarities to other things that have happened in the past that I want to put on the record because I think that it's important to do that.

Let me distinguish where my concerns lie, especially in light of the last bill that we just passed through second reading, which was the cancer legacy bill. One of the points that I was raising around that is that we have to be much more alive to the environmental triggers or catalysts or causes of cancer than we have been. Aside from making healthier societies overall so that we're just healthier people with better habits and better nutrition and all of those things, we also have to be alive to what's in the environment around us that can also be problematic and likely does contribute to a higher rate of cancer through our lives.

I want to be clear here that when we're talking about meth labs, I don't have a problem with what's being proposed here. I think that it's perfectly appropriate to link an environmental concern for children and their long-term health to the waste that is generated when you have a meth lab. I'm sorry; there's nothing that I can say that's positive about a meth lab.

4:40

I'm noting that for every kilogram of methamphetamine product that's produced, there are 5 to 7 kilograms of waste produced, and that just lies around. It is toxic. There is no legal or legitimate means of getting rid of it, and someone that is running a meth lab is making no attempt to do that. It's not as though they're hauling it out to a compost in the back and containing it in one place. So I have great concerns about children that are in the area of this kind of waste, and I view it as toxic waste. Meth labs are also producing particularly inflammable gas, which of course presents a huge fire and burn danger to children. Also things like air contamination, chemical burns, and chemicals being absorbed into teddy bears and clothing and crib bedding and all kinds of things – that's just a really bad idea.

When I first looked at this bill, I really struggled with it, and I'm still struggling with it. I honestly don't know whether or not I'm going to support this as it moves through. Here's where my concerns lie. This is another state intervention into the home, and I note with interest that this government is particularly reluctant to have intervention into a number of other areas – they shy away from it; it's part of their philosophy – and those are things like environmental protection or laws about restricting business, for example. There are certain areas where this government just will not go, yet I've noticed over the years that there's a willingness, almost an eagerness for the state, in this case the provincial government, to intervene into people's homes. This causes me great concern. We need to be very, very cautious when we start to do this, particularly when we start to take families apart.

Now, I know that there are good social workers out there that work very hard on behalf of the government, and there are agencies that contract with the government to do much of the same work, and they have the children's best interests at heart. I know that they are trying to make sure that they are protecting children, but we've also come to an understanding that in removing kids from the home, you really need to try and work in the best interest of that kid and try and keep that family intact. My concern here is that I don't see a real commitment to try to remove a kid from a dangerous situation but leave them with some kind of family.

Here's the scenario that I'm not comfortable with. Intervention into a home: a kid is yanked out of their room. However terrible that room might be, it's still their space. It's still their bed. It's still their blankie. They're removed from that, from their toys, from the dish they use, from their sippy cup, from everything that is familiar to them, and they are placed not with another family member but with a completely unknown family. I really struggle with that. I don't know how that's really to the benefit of the child.

Remember, I'm not talking about removing them from a dangerous, toxic situation like a meth lab. But the other situations that are anticipated in this bill are things like grow ops, and I'm not seeing a really clear definition of that. So this could be a situation where there are a certain number of marijuana plants in the basement, for example, which people could argue and probably do that it's being grown for their own consumption. There's a more lenient societal attitude towards that right now.

It's also covering trafficking. Trafficking is a difficult one to deal

with and has been a bit of a moving target over the years as well because how much product you have in your home for your own personal use, especially if you're speaking about various marijuana-derived products, has moved quite a bit over the years. There's quite a bit of open talk now about decriminalizing it entirely.

You may well have a family that in all other respects contributes to their community, participate on the parent advisory council at school, coach the soccer team, are involved in their community. They may well attend a faith community on a regular basis and be involved with a certain kind of marijuana product, and their kids could be yanked out of their homes. I'm struggling with how that is going to be of benefit to that kid. I see the intention of this bill, but I question the government's eagerness to intervene into the family with such an aggressive tactic. What we're getting from this is more administration. We're getting more legal rigamarole, for want of a better word, a whole other legal process that we get involved with here that the courts now have to deal with and possibly process, plus the Children's Services administration and placement and the foster family administration. We add in a whole other layer here.

I'm thinking: well, where have I seen this before? You know where it was? It was the PCHIP bill, or what's commonly called the PCHIP bill. At the time I argued that we didn't need that bill, that we had the legal resources through the Police Act and through the then acts that covered child welfare to do what that act did. I still maintain that that act was window dressing. We could do everything we needed to do with the existing law, so why did we need another law that, again, was fairly interventionist into someone's life? I saw that bill go through with no resources attached to it, and in fact there was a real struggle for the first couple of years because girls were picked up and there really wasn't anyplace to go that was actually immediately accessible and ready for them.

I'm seeing this same sort of thing being anticipated here. There's definitely a concern about exposing children to illegal activity, particularly where it's involving toxic substances and illegal substances. Let's face it; this is illegal, right? But I don't see why we can't work with the existing laws that we have in place and the existing processes that we have in place. This to me has that same veneer of window dressing, of grandstanding, if anything.

If the point of this bill, as someone said when they introduced it, was to make sure that the definition of abuse of children included having them in an environment like that, where it's toxic and illegal, then why don't we add that definition into the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, which is where all the other definitions of abuse of children are? We've already got an act that does that. Why are we establishing a whole other act to do something when you already have one that does that? So I still question: why? What are we gaining that's of benefit with this additional act? It's interventionist in a very aggressive way. We could do this by adding to the definition of abuse in the existing legislation.

This bill doesn't come with resources. Now, we've got a budget coming on March 22, but I haven't heard any indication in the discussion so far. This did not come forward as a money bill. There are no resources attached to this. Once again we could have basically a whole administrative level that is now added onto the burden of everything else that these various groups I've described are trying to carry with no resources added to it. What's that about? What's the point of that, Mr. Speaker, when we have the laws already there?

You see why I'm starting to think that this is a little bit of grandstanding, a little bit too much, a little bit extra so that the government's name is on it and they appear to be doing something. But they have all the other vehicles available to them to do that

already. My point is: just do it. If this is really important, then just do it and put the resources behind it so that they're there. Put the resources so that we don't have child welfare workers that are working with caseloads of 400 children, you know, where they've got enough time to be detecting this and working with it specifically.

4:50

One of the statistics that was used when the bill was introduced was that about 30 per cent of meth labs have kids living in the vicinity, in that environment. My question is: what does that translate into? How many Alberta children are in that situation? The government must have the numbers. I'd be interested in knowing how many Alberta children were in that. That 30 per cent: is that 30 per cent of all the meth labs in Canada, of all the meth labs that are known about in North America, or of all the meth labs in Alberta? How many is that? How many children are we talking about here? Are we creating a law to intervene in the lives of 30 children, 300 children, 3,000 children? What's the magnitude of this problem? Again, this relates back to: are we putting extra legislation in here when we could use means that are already at our disposal?

My other concern is that there's nothing in this bill that does anything to stop the root causes. Yes, children will be removed from their homes. Yes, families will be reprimanded or subjected to the full course of the law that's anticipated in the bill. Does it do anything to stop it from happening tomorrow other than the threat of punishment, other than that stick of corrections, that big stick that the government can wield? I don't see that. We're here tomorrow; now we can hit people with a stick. But there's nothing to stop people. There's no disincentive or incentive for them to not be in the same situation.

It's a way of reacting after the fact that I see this government continually doing. I have to say again and again and again: you know, if you don't deal with the social determinants of health, you are going to be standing here five years, 10 years, and 20 years from now with exactly the same problems only more of them. All you did was have a big stick to hit the people that you caught. It doesn't do anything to help all the rest of the families that you never catch up with or you don't locate or who don't come up through the system somehow. It does nothing to address all of those people.

Those are the concerns that I have over this bill. It does look like window dressing to me. I think it's a good intention, but if that's what we wanted to do, then let's open up the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, the existing legislation, and add that definition of abuse in there and go through the existing act. I don't see why we are creating a whole other act to do this. Again, it's like a trophy. You know, you can show it around to people and say: "Look, aren't we doing something important here? Aren't we really concerned?" But I go: did we do anything to really give people an incentive or an opportunity to move out of a criminal lifestyle? Is there assistance for employment? Have we done something? If we're going to talk about the kids, then have we done something specific for the kids? Have we looked at hot lunch programs wherever they're needed in the province? No. So it does nothing to really help those kids but a big stick.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Anyone under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to reiterate much of what the Member for Edmonton-Centre has said. I've talked to some child welfare lawyers, and a number of them have said that we



can already do this. We can already do this. These are the people dealing with the situation. Social workers have told me that we can already do this. You know, the House leader often says that we don't need to just be passing laws for the sake of passing laws, that there has to be a purpose, because we could be overly governed. I would hope that at some point the minister will tell us why she really feels that this need is there. Certainly, many in her department that I've talked to do not believe that. They believe that it was there before.

I mean, I'm like the Member for Edmonton-Centre: I'm not sure whether I should support it or not. The goal is good, the goal of getting children out of abusive situations if there are grow ops and all sorts of bad things happening. But that's the point: they already can do that.

I do worry about it being a little intrusive too – and I think the Member for Edmonton-Centre talked about it – in the sense that an indoor cannabis grow operation is not adequately defined. There may be some members in this House that at some point could have been in trouble, you know, if this bill had been there. I'm not mentioning any names, of course, but they're probably all sitting over on the other side. The point I'm making is that when you get laws like this, that are undefined, it could lead to the possibility of abuse.

Now, again, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre says – and she's absolutely correct – nobody wants kids around abusive situations. The abuse that this bill is trying to prevent is often there. If you're in a grow op and there are druggies around and/or crystal meth and the rest of it, of course that's a serious situation, and we should get those children out of there immediately. The point that I'm trying to make, though, is that I'm told that we can do that already, that it happens all the time. The House leader often says: well, we don't just pass laws for the sake of having laws. I'm wondering, then, why we're doing this.

Of course, there's also the fact – and I'm reiterating the good speech from the Member for Edmonton-Centre – that we've got to deal with the root causes of some of these situations too. This is not going to solve all the problems of those kids overnight.

I worry about two things: one, I don't believe that there's an adequate definition of what this means; and secondly, if we already have a law where they're doing this – and they're doing it every day, that I'm aware of, in these situations – are we passing a law because now it's exciting to say that we're dealing with crystal meth and we're dealing with grow ops and the rest of it? Is this because it looks good in terms of what we're attempting to do here in the Legislature? I think we should ask this question because the Conservative government House leader says that we don't pass laws for the sake of passing laws. I'm wondering if we are in fact doing this.

Again: how do you oppose a bill where kids are in danger? That's the dilemma that you have with these bills even though this bill may not add anything at all to what's already happening, Mr. Speaker. So I hope the minister at some point will give us a better rationale as to why she thinks this bill is necessary.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, Hon. Minister of Children's Services, do you wish to close debate?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll be pleased to address the concerns of some of the opposition questions in Committee of the Whole.

I'd like to move second reading of the Drug-endangered Children Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a second time]

### Bill 6

#### Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate February 28: Mr. Stevens]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General still has 12 minutes.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much. I'm delighted to have the opportunity to talk about one of my – I can't say that it's my favourite area, but it's certainly an area that I've developed a lot of expertise in over the years. It's the maintenance enforcement program. For all the criticism that I've directed towards the government over the nine years that I've been here, I have to say that there has been continued movement forward in improving this program. To me, that's a very good sign.

This is an area that is of absolute, integral importance to children in this province. For whatever reason, we have a lot of families that don't stay together. I don't know why, and I don't want to get into that. What my concern is directed towards is that we have a deal that if you are the parent of a child and you are not living in that family unit, there is a responsibility to contribute towards the child. It's not about the other parent. It's not about the parents. This is about the children. This is about making sure that the money that's necessary for those kids gets to them. We've got a pretty good program, and we continue to improve it, as I said. I think this is another step forward.

5:00

You know, it's one of those situations where every time you think you've figured out how to plug all the loopholes that people manage to find, then there are a few more that pop open, and you've got to figure out a way to plug those as well. People that don't want to pay for the maintenance of their children are pretty creative and pretty stubborn and pretty chronic in not following the law. It's important that we keep the program alive, kind of a living program that continues to adjust as it needs to.

There are a couple of things that are being anticipated here. I think the main one that the minister spoke of was what are called LIRA, which is the locked-in retirement account. There are probably a lot of them because for the most part they're accounts where if you had a government pension and you left, you were able to take that pension part with you, but it goes into this locked-in account, and you can't withdraw from it until you reach, I think, over 50 years of age. You can't draw from it at all. It's locked in there. What we had was, you know, a need for that money to be accessed on behalf of some children, and the way the law was written, we couldn't get at it until the individual, the parent, the debtor in this case, turned 50. Our own laws were working against our ability to access money for children, so part of this act is to address that particular issue.

I saw a statistic the other day that I thought: oh, that's a flow-through from some good legislation that was put in place. You know what it was? It was the number of older women who were in dire poverty, and I think it might have been specific to divorce, from years ago, decades ago, compared to now. I said: "Okay. What that's about is the change that was achieved where spouses were able

to access pensions as part of divorce proceedings and share pensions, you know, for the time that was accrued when the couple was together." The other spouse would be able to access that. I thought: "There it is. There is what we were trying to achieve with that." We have fewer women that are now seniors that are in absolute, bone-numbing poverty. I thought: "That's why you do this stuff. That's why you try and set that in motion." So I'm hoping that this is the same kind of thing.

A couple of other small things are being addressed: the money that is achieved through flexibility in dealing with debtors who are evading the maintenance enforcement program. As I said: boy, they can be creative. I will never understand that. I will never understand why a parent would go to such lengths to avoid paying maintenance for their child. I just won't get it. I mean, people quit their jobs. They move away. They hide their assets under friends' names. It's appalling behaviour, and I just can't understand why you would do that to your own offspring, but people do it a lot, and they're creative about it.

So there are a couple of very positive movements that have been made here. Better flexibility. That's around setting times for financial examinations to a later date so that the debtors don't have to worry about reprisals because of scheduling conflicts. You know, once you get somebody that is actually willing to work along with this, even if they have deliberately withheld payments in the past, if you've actually got them to the point where they're willing to recognize their debt and try and resolve the problem, you don't want to place additional barriers in their way. You've got to kind of coax them along once you've got them on your side. This is making that a bit more possible. It's to make the process less confrontational for the debtors and for the debtors to avoid possible jail time because they've missed a default hearing process.

There's also a section that's dealing with creditors getting all the current money owing to them before maintenance enforcement applies the funds to outstanding penalties and fines owed to maintenance enforcement because of delinquent payments. Now for a long time we actually didn't. There were no interest and fines charged. Those are more recent developments, but I'm glad to see that it's now being organized so that the creditor who needs the money, the custodial parent, is going to get their chunk of money for the kids before MEP takes their fine and penalty money. I think that's perfectly appropriate because, again, the point of this is to direct that money towards the children.

Some people, lots of people, actually most people can manage to go into a family break-apart situation and with a bit of help figure it out for themselves for the most part. It doesn't have to be that acrimonious. You don't have to get that confrontational about it. Lots of folks do get an arrangement between themselves about how it's all going to work, and how much money it is. If the families are satisfied with that, and it's supporting the children, good on them. But there has been a need to be able to have that kind of registered somewhere.

What we had before was that if it was your own arrangement, then it was outside of the MEP program, and we won't get involved with it. Lots of times there are a few little bumps along the way, but it's outside the program, so nobody can help. Ultimately, what we were trying to do here was actually help the kids. So what's being proposed here is that it's going to bring these maintenance agreements, these sort of ad hoc ones developed by the families, into line with provisions in the Family Law Act, and it encourages the families to use these agreements as an alternative before going to court. It's providing MEP staff to take care of things like assisting in the filing of the agreements in the Court of Queen's Bench and

serving notice of the filings. They don't need to have representation to make their own agreements enforceable, and they can be assisted by the MEP staff in all the processes of filing. I'm thinking that this is going to allow for more settlements to be done outside of the court system. Again, a good thing.

The more we can get people to figure out how to manage their own lives and resolve conflict without getting confrontational, the better. We live in a society where confrontation is not polite, and we don't like to do it, but when we're in a conflict with someone, we want to turn it all over to the courts and have a judge make the decision for us. Hopefully, we believe we're right and they're wrong, and the judge is going to make them pay. That just clogs up our courts. It also absolves us from the responsibility of trying to work stuff out ourselves. So we have increasing numbers of mediators trained now and available through non-profits: Catholic Social Services. Some of them are available through the justice system in certain instances. There's a mediation and arbitration society that you can get in touch with. It's a very reasonably priced way of working your way through this, and I strongly encourage people to do that.

The last thing that's being dealt with in the act is financial examinations. Oh, I think I talked about that. It's allowing the director of MEP to apply to the Court of Queen's Bench for an order of alternate arrangements for the examination of a debtor. That was the one where they don't have to worry that they're going to have the full weight of the court come down on them if they miss their default hearing. I've already talked about that one.

#### 5:10

I congratulate the program and all the staff that work in it and the minister for continuing to improve this program and move it along. It's darn hard to do because, really, it's a collection agency. Maintenance enforcement is a very specialized collection agency, which is not what you would usually expect to find inside government. So you're looking for highly specialized people that can do this job, get the money, extract the money, and at the same time they are representatives of the government, and they need to work with people in a way that is sensitive and respectful. Anybody that has ever dealt with a collection agency knows that usually collection agents are not respectful. So it's a tough line to walk. We all get complaints about maintenance enforcement from people that think that they should have gotten more or that it should have been done in a different way.

For a while I think we got into a place where once we found a noncustodial parent who owed money, it was like: "Yay, we got a live one. Let's turn him upside down and shake him until all the change falls out of their pocket." I mean, we just whaled on the live ones that we actually got in our clutches, and that caused some very bad feelings out there. I think that there have been adjustments made, and the program is trying very hard to be respectful to both sides of this. We just all need to be grown-ups about this and move on and deal with what's being proposed.

Back from my very earliest days in this Chamber when I challenged the then Justice minister and Attorney General to do something to move the maintenance enforcement program of the day on to a new level, he took that challenge and established a maintenance enforcement review, which was chaired by the then Member for Calgary-Lougheed. There was an amending act that came in, and I think we've amended that twice more since then, so my congratulations.

The other thing that the program has done is learn to keep the numbers better because the numbers quite disguised what was

actually happening and how successful we were at collecting files that were outstanding. At one point it basically just recorded any activity in accounts. You could have paid a buck, and it would have showed you as active, but the fact that you owed \$80,000 wasn't showing up. That's \$80,000 that belonged to a child, that should have been there to send a child to camp or to pay for their hockey school or their school fees or a bathing suit or food. That's what we have to remember about this program.

I'm proud of my involvement with this program. I intend on remaining vigilant that we continue to move it forward. I'm pleased to see the changes that have been instituted with this amending act, and I'm very willing to support it. I'm not the critic of the act; I just jumped in here because I have such a long and passionate involvement with the program.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak in second reading. I urge everyone to support this bill and pass it on. Thank you.

At this point, I would like to adjourn debate on Bill 6.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

**Mr. Stevens:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn the House until 1:30 next Monday.

[Motion carried; at 5:14 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

