

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 13, 2006**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 06/03/13

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Youth Consultation

503. Mr. Danyluk moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government, municipal governments, and community organizations to develop mechanisms to formally consult the youth of Alberta on issues that affect their future.

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

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to discuss Motion 503. It is often said that youth are our future, and I do not believe anybody would disagree with this comment, including myself. Therefore, if youth are our future, we need to listen to their voice so that they may help to shape this future which we talk about. This is what Motion 503 proposes.

I feel that it is important to have ongoing and consistent input from youth in order to have an impact on the true needs and challenges of Alberta youth. We must have a structural change to hear the voice of our youth. This must be ever clear, Mr. Speaker. Youth must be involved at the community level, the municipal level, right up to the provincial level.

Presently what we have is youth forums – and they are held throughout the province – that give input for youth. We also have some networking that takes place between those groups to the Youth Advisory Panel. I sit on the Youth Secretariat for the province of Alberta, and there is the Youth Advisory Panel, which consists of 16 youths from throughout the province, yet we do not have any formal connection between the forums, the networking, the Youth Advisory Panel, and the government.

In this province there are approximately 840,000 children and youth. The voices of these individuals must be heard by us as adults and, more importantly, as legislators. Youth should be viewed as a resource. They have the solutions that we are often searching for. They know better than anyone the issues that affect them, but they also have valuable and insightful opinions on all issues that affect this province. It is time that we listen to their voices on a constant and consistent basis. They have the ability to enhance our province as a whole with their input.

As of yet we really do not have a co-ordinated and constant mechanism for consultation with youth at every level. Some may argue that youth simply lose interest in the process. I believe that in order to keep youth engaged, they must be provided with a system with meaningful input. In giving them such an opportunity, our youth are quite likely to be interested in formal consultation.

One of the best features of this motion is that it in fact does not set how the government, municipal governments, and communities should go about consulting with the youth of Alberta. This allows groups in the community, municipalities, and at a provincial level the space and flexibility to decide on a mechanism that works best for their community. My concern is that the youth of this province be consulted; the method for this consultation is up to the government and community organizations in which they are involved.

Mr. Speaker, we need to consult with the youth of today. The

youth of today are the ones who will be running our province. We must have Alberta's youth voice their opinions, concerns, and thoughts on the future direction for this province. As the chair of the Youth Secretariat I have worked with and worked for young Albertans a great deal. It has been my experience that the youth are very bright and very enthusiastic as a whole. They have good ideas, and given the opportunity, they can give valuable inputs on issues that affect their future.

Part of the role of the Youth Secretariat is to identify and work to address the needs of adolescents. The key part in reaching this goal is the Youth Advisory Panel. The advisory panel youths work with the Youth Secretariat to come up with solutions to issues that impact the youth of our province. They come up with new ideas and suggestions that enhance our secretariat as a whole.

Our group is made up of a wide variety of individuals, ones of different experiences and different settings in their community. Therefore, I suggest to you that this group represents a great mixture of youth from our province, and their input is priceless to the government of Alberta and to myself as chair of the Youth Secretariat. With their help we can work to address the challenges of the use and abuse of illegal drugs, such as methamphetamines, by young Albertans. We can work to enhance services for youth and fill the gaps in such services. We can do a lot of great things when youth are involved. The answers they have, Mr. Speaker, are often the solutions we are looking for.

Mr. Speaker, the Youth Secretariat is only one form of youth consultation. There are others within the province that are also listening to the voice of youth. We have the Alberta youth forums, as I stated earlier, the Alberta children's and youth initiative under our youth networks, as I previously mentioned as well. These are only some of the programs at the provincial level.

We also have programs at the municipal level. For instance, there is the City of Edmonton Youth Council, which acts as a voice for those youth in the city. The city of Calgary also has input from city youth. They have the opportunity to voice their opinions on such things as Calgary Transit and to be part of groups such as the mayor's youth council.

Mr. Speaker, we do have some youth input in this province. I believe an enhanced mechanism for consultation would be a good thing for all Albertans. Youth change a great deal from the time they are children until they become adults. They know how to work with new technologies before the majority of adults do, and the technology is changing so rapidly. They seem to be able to keep up with these changes. Youth are adaptable, and they can help us a great deal in many ways, only one of which is the technology.

The reality of the youth of Alberta can be used as a resource to help us realize and attempt to address the challenges that face them as a group and all Albertans in general. We have to make sure we are consulting the youth of this province from a community position up to and including a provincial position. We need to transpose the voice of our youth into a positive direction for youth, which, as a result, would be successful for all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the importance of the youth in Alberta having a voice.

8:10

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tonight we're discussing Motion 503, which wants us, the Members of the Legislative Assembly, to urge the provincial and municipal governments and community organizations to develop mechanisms to formally consult

the youth of Alberta on issues that affect their future. Well, let's see here. This motion is from an hon. government backbencher, right? Why didn't the hon. member just discuss this within his own caucus or meet with the Premier one-on-one or talk to the minister or ministers involved?

Actually, let me try to determine who the ministers involved are. I know we have a Minister of Children's Services, so is she the one responsible for provincial policy pertaining to youth? Ontario, for example, has a Minister of Children and Youth Services; Saskatchewan has a Minister of Culture, Youth and Recreation; British Columbia runs youth programs under its Children and Family Development ministry: different names but the same emphasis on young people and their needs.

It doesn't matter what you call the ministry or how big the minister's title is. The issue in question is: what attention is being offered to youth programs, and what effort is devoted to engaging young Albertans? Do we need a law to tell this government it needs to do more? Can we force this government to consult with young people on everything, particularly things and decisions which primarily affect them?

You know, Mr. Speaker, I couldn't help but think about how age plays a role in how things move forward and how various decisions are arrived at. Take, for example, myself as the youngest opposition member in this House and the second youngest overall. I look around this esteemed place and compare myself to some of the older members across the way. I come with energy and ideas, and I'm really interested in dialogue and co-operation, whereas most of the members across are jaded and exhausted.

I take this to a bigger sphere and compare the Liberal Official Opposition caucus to the other caucuses in the House.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, the hon. Deputy Government House Leader is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Zwozdesky: Under 23(h), (i), and (j) I think there's an attempt to impute some false motives there along to several of our members. I'm sure the member didn't mean it the way it came out, but perhaps he should just revisit that comment about members opposite because he has some members sitting beside him on both sides that are just opposite him, and I don't think they would appreciate that either.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung on the point of order.

Mr. Elsalhy: Okay. On the point of order, Mr. Speaker, I would just appreciate some clarification from the member opposite who raised it: what motive was I trying to impute?

An Hon. Member: Lack of respect.

The Acting Speaker: Well, this is not a kind of question/answer back and forth. A point of order has been raised. He had an opportunity to respond, and I have the task of providing a ruling.

Hon. member, the Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order, citing 23(h), (i), and (j). Let's see what 23(h), (i), and (j) say.

A member shall be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that member:

- (h) makes allegation against another member;

- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another member;
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

That one I can see possibly being within the realm of the argument being presented.

Hon. member, I'd just caution you in terms of – you know, the language that you use will incite reaction, and maybe you want to get to your point and continue arguing on the debate that's before us.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this clarification. I in no way intended to offend anyone across the way.

Okay. I can move on, Mr. Speaker.

Debate Continued

Mr. Elsalhy: I'll say, for example, that I can communicate with some members from the other caucus more than I do with others. For example, I can communicate and work with the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, who is, by the way, the youngest member in this House and the youngest member of his caucus. He presents, from time to time, useful and attention-worthy suggestions like his soon-to-be-debated idea around allocating our huge provincial surpluses.

Back to my point though. I was saying that the Alberta Liberals are the youngest caucus in this House, and as such we would definitely hope that any discussions, dialogue, or consultations would definitely involve us too. I would be interested in seeing the stats on the average age per caucus. One would even extend this survey to how old and what the average age of candidates was in the last provincial election, in 2004.

Now, should we be expanding this to discuss things like the percentage of female representation as well in each caucus? The Alliance and the NDP have none. The Tories have 14 per cent, and we the Alberta Liberals have 19 per cent. We can all do a lot better.

Some member across argues that this motion is only for youth and that we shouldn't be talking about the age of the members. Fine. How do we define youth, and what age group is captured under this definition? Teachers, health professionals, the legal system all have varying definitions for who's considered a youth.

The intent of the motion is good, of course, and I agree that we should look at ways to engage more young Albertans, but couldn't this have been accomplished by a simple letter or face-to-face dialogue with cabinet, like I mentioned earlier, instead of eating up a spot on this valuable and precious private members' time?

I'm also thinking about the recent stories and news commentaries about how the Progressive Conservative Association is having difficulty attracting young people to their party and how, in particular, those young people are not interested in attending the convention and the leadership review this March 31. It is my observation and belief that fewer and fewer young people still or would find the PC Party appealing and attractive. Quite a few Albertans, many of them young, told me that they can no longer align themselves with the provincial Tories. They are more comfortable aligning themselves and believing in the federal Tory party policies, but they cannot do the same thing here provincially.

We can probably look outside to only a few months ago. We celebrated our provincial centennial, and each of the 83 constituencies had a centennial ambassador. Most of them were retired, and the majority of them were either former candidates in provincial elections or friends of current MLAs or even constituency presidents. We didn't treat the centennial as a look to the future. Why didn't we find 83 outstanding young Albertans to act as centennial ambassadors? Is this province 100 years old, or is it 100 years young?

Another wrinkle is that everybody in this House is apprehensive and uneasy about the proposed two-tier health care changes, or the so-called third way. Shouldn't the consultation process, which is very short, one month only and by invitation only, be extended to include our provincial youth? Is it not their future or an important part of it that we're shaping here? Does the government believe that these young people are not entitled to register their opinion whether or not they want a health care system which is publicly administered, fair, and affordable. It is their future we're deciding here. What happens if the government insists on privatizing health care delivery? Some changes are going to be irrevocable, or they would be very hard to undo. What voice or recourse will these young people have when they graduate and join the workforce and plan to have little families of their own? Would it not be too late then?

On a small scale myself I started a group called the Young McClung, which is a nonpartisan youth group where young constituents between the ages of 15 and 30 gather at a local coffee place once a month and discuss issues. We go to a different coffee place each time, all within my constituency. I serve as their host. I buy them their coffee and donuts. What they do is sit around the table and discuss issues that are either current or pressing or whatever is on their mind. The kids came up with the name Mocha with Mo for that group.

The group is led by a young person who is in her fourth year of university, and I must say that everybody around that table is bright, articulate, opinionated, and enthusiastic. Like me, Mr. Speaker, they still have faith in some politicians and they have hope for a better Alberta. These young men and women meet and talk amongst themselves, sometimes asking me to explain things, or they give me their positions on the various issues, and I enjoy being a listener and taking notes. Like I mentioned, they're very bright and they're very opinionated. They're current, and they're aware of the issues.

Now, there's an example of one MLA going to the young people directly, not through an entry on an Order Paper receiving just under an hour of debate.

8:20

Another thing I have done, Mr. Speaker, with my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Decore was go to the students at Queen E school back when we were discussing Bill 202, dealing with the treatment and protection of children abusing drugs, in the First Session of the 26th Legislature. We went to the kids – there was a gym full of high school students, grades 10, 11, and 12 – and we asked them what they thought. They even had fill-in ballots that we gave them and they gave back to us. We listened to the for and the against arguments, and then they filled out a ballot that they deposited anonymously in a box. We tallied the votes. We told them what the result was, and everybody was so pleased and so interested in the process. The principal thanked us, and they said, you know, to do it again.

My colleagues and I are also hoping to do the same this year, this time around when we discuss Bill 204, Parental Consent to Medical Treatment for Minors Act, which received its second reading today. We're hoping to engage students again in at least four high schools in Edmonton and ask them for their opinions. We not only invite them to talk and debate the issue; like I mentioned, we get them to vote and we tally their votes and tell them how it went.

The point is, Mr. Speaker, that through our own initiative and because we do mean what we say, members of the Liberal opposition do in fact engage young Albertans regularly and effectively. Young people are our future leaders, as the hon. sponsor of the motion indicated, and they are the ones who will continue to move this province forward.

You notice, Mr. Speaker, that I did not even begin to touch the issue of voter apathy and how young people distance themselves from politics and elections, et cetera. I know that some of my hon. colleagues are going to speak about this in more detail. Like I stated before, the youths of this province should be encouraged to participate also in the democratic process.

Many young people, Mr. Speaker, worked on my campaign. The youngest one was 12. This guy came with his mom, and he offered to do pamphleting. I said, "Well, you know, you're probably not old enough." He goes, "No; give me the map and let me do it."

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but the 10 minutes allocated have elapsed.

The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Motion 503. I have my honours degree in philosophy from the university, and when I took that course, the one thing that I learned was that you always have to define your terms when you're debating any issue. So I have two issues with this motion that I hope we can clarify as the debate goes on, and hopefully at the end the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul can clarify his definition of those terms.

The first is a definition of "youth" in this motion. When most people talk about youth, they conceptualize it as sort of that age of 10 years old – yeah, just knee high to a grasshopper – to 18 years old. But to be honest, though youth fits in that definition, the youth that I think is very important to be discussed in this motion is the age group of 18 to 35. Under 18, formative years and still developing – and I've noticed because I don't go to a community in my constituency without going to see the grade 6 class and discussing with them the politics, the legislative process, municipal, federal, and provincial politics because they take it in the grade 6 curriculum. To be honest, Mr. Speaker, they get excited. They get passionate. They talk about voting, and they really discuss issues.

But, Mr. Speaker, the youth age group that typically is disenfranchised and turned off and doesn't get engaged and doesn't talk about issues is the 18 to 35 age group, the group that is just starting to get out into the real world. They might be dating. They might be married. They might start to have kids. It's not until they get to be 35 that they really get engaged because then they start to pay taxes. It's critically important to get that age group of 18 to 35 engaged, so I hope that the hon. member can clarify if that's the group he's referring to.

I have to disagree with the previous two members who both spoke. Both times they used the phrase that youth are the leaders of tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, and I believe that's fundamentally wrong because tomorrow never comes. We are always at today, and these youth, 18 to 35, are the leaders of today and need to be engaged as such.

Now, the second issue that I hope the hon. member who brought forward this motion can clarify is the word "consult," consult on issues that affect them, Mr. Speaker, because that's very vague. I'm not sure what that exactly means. What issues particularly affect youth besides maybe young issues? Quite frankly, every single issue that we debate in this Legislature, every single decision that's made at the municipal, provincial, or federal level affects youth because they have to live with the decisions that we make today for the next 20 years. They need to be consulted on the best ways, the greatest ideas on how to deal with seniors' housing issues. If it costs one level of government something, it's going to be paid for by youth.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, it's always been my experience – and I'm talking about people younger than me – that younger people

have the most creative, innovative, flexible ideas that I've ever heard because they don't have so much history and so much past that they repeat themselves, that they do things over and over the same way.

So those are the two issues that I hope the hon. member can clarify.

Now, when it comes to consulting youth, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to emphasize that there are three levels of consulting youth that most everybody goes through. They always start at the first level of consultation, and that's when you invite a group of youth in, whether they're 10 years old or 35 years old, and you ask them what their problems are. Then you say, "Thank you very much," and they leave. You've consulted them, you've heard all their issues, and that's where it stops.

Some groups, some people move on to the second level of engagement of consultation where you invite the youth in. You ask them what their issues are, and you ask them: what are some things we can do to solve them? They tell you, and then you ask them to leave. Then you actually try and implement some of them. You actually try and work on them. That's the second level of engagement.

Very few people reach the third level of engagement, which is so critical, and that's when you invite the youth in, you ask them what their problems are, their challenges are, you ask them what the solutions are, and then you ask them if you can fix it together, Mr. Speaker. When youth are being consulted, they have to be consulted in a meaningful way where they have to come up with the solutions and help implement them as well.

Now, as I mentioned before, I try and do everything in my power to engage youth. I visit every grade 6 class in every community I'm in. I don't leave without offering to come in and talk to the grade 6 class or the grade 10 class, to engage them in the curriculum and try to get them excited about politics. I have also, in partnership with a few other members, some of which are in this Assembly this evening, started to work on a group that for lack of an official name or title now is future leaders. I know that I'm succumbing to my own. They're future leaders or they're present leaders. We haven't picked a name. It's to engage young people from 18 to 35 to become leaders, to get involved in their community, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, looking on the Internet – anybody can do this. If you look up information on young leaders, there's an organization in the United States called 18 to 35, which focuses specifically on educating young people about being future leaders. Just information on how to run a meeting, *Robert's Rules of Orders*, and how you organize volunteers is critical to forming young leaders. We're hoping to accomplish a lot with this organization when we get up and running.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is an important motion for the mere fact that it talks about community-level engagement, municipal-level engagement, provincial engagement. It doesn't specifically refer to federal engagement, but it carries on. In every municipality that I've been to in the province, I have almost always been the youngest person in the room at every single meeting. I'm not just the youngest politician or legislator in the province of Alberta. It appeared for the longest time that I was the youngest politician in the entire province at any level of government. Since the last municipal election it seems like a lot more young people have gotten engaged.

Now, I'm not criticizing anyone in this House, but just to point out, Mr. Speaker, that I was first elected when I was 29. I was the sixth youngest politician elected in the history of this Legislature. I also would like to point out, though, being the youngest, that I am 20 years, almost to the day, younger than the average age of the MLAs in this House. I am 40 years younger than the two oldest MLAs in this House, and I have to point out that the two oldest

MLAs are from other parties, not from our party. This House right now is experiencing one of the highest average ages it has ever had in its history, yet this province has the youngest population on average of any province in Canada.

Mr. Strang: Because they're all making money.

Mr. Griffiths: Well, maybe some of them are making a lot of money. This being in politics isn't exactly a highly profitable business.

Now, it's more critical than ever to engage youth – I'm talking about the 18- to 35-year-old group – to get them involved in the decisions we make today that we're going to have to live with for the next 20 years, Mr. Speaker.

8:30

Now, the last item I want to talk about, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to youth is rural development. I've worked for the last four years as an MLA on rural development. We identified that health care, education, community infrastructure, economic development, growth, small business development, not just agriculture but both, youth, seniors, aboriginals, the environment, arts, and culture are all critical elements to successful rural development, but not one of them was more critical than engaging youth. For every four youth that are born in rural Alberta, three of them leave rural Alberta to go to the city and only one comes back. That causes incredible depopulation of rural Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the most creative, innovative ideas come from young people. Our volunteer base comes from young people. Our energy comes from young people. When those communities lose their young people, they lose their energy, they lost their creativity, and to some extent they could be doomed to die. So when most communities in this province are looking at rural development, they're trying to engage and activate themselves to find solutions to some of their problems, the first thing they are doing is engaging youth in their community. They're trying to get them involved at the municipal level, at the provincial level, on community volunteer organizations. Whether it's getting involved with the Elks or the Legion or on an economic development group, they're trying to get them involved.

Mr. Speaker, we have succession planning for agriculture across this province. That's where people who are 60, 65 years old who are thinking about retiring find ways to help transition the farm to the next generation. There are actually a couple of communities in this province now – and they're leaders in this – that have started to engage young people to find out what sort of businesses they would like to take over or start in town so that they don't have to leave to find something to do, and hopefully they'll come back. They try and get them involved in the community, involved in businesses right away.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say – and I know it's probably going to sound partisan because I'm 33 – I still classify myself as a youth because I've put it up to 35, and when I actually hit 35, I'll keep moving the bar up a bit.

An Hon. Member: You're a baby.

Mr. Griffiths: Yeah, I know. I'm a baby.

Mr. Speaker, this is a critical issue, and I hope everyone supports it.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the youngest youth of the Assembly, but the 10 minutes allocated has run out.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As one who has had the privilege of working with youth for many years, I realize that youth have changed a lot over the decades, and I identify with the former speaker in asking: what do we mean by youth? There are lots of different definitions, but I need to point out that youth today have roles that aren't normally attributed to them: workers, parents, and taxpayers. Youth are also increasingly independent consumers specifically targeted by corporate marketing.

Youth, I believe, can enrich our political system and our communities, but the fact is that for a variety of reasons they are less active in the formal politics of their communities than older residents. We find that approximately 1 in 4 – that is, 25 per cent – youth voters 18 to 24 voted in the 2000 federal election, whereas approximately 4 in 5 – that is, 80 per cent – of voters over 48 years old voted in the 2000 federal election. Age seems to be a primary determinant of whether one is going to vote. Only 3 per cent of Canadian party members are under age 25. The average is 59 years. So the concern is that the growing trend is that youth will not outgrow their disengagement, driving electoral participation down further.

When we talk about engagement – we use that word a lot, I think – I, too, want to say that I have worked with the youth in my community. I had them helping in my campaign, and we have some good things that are happening. While it may be true that young people are less cynical about politics than our older citizens, research shows that they do feel a profound sense of disconnect from political institutions. Elections Canada research shows that the young people who are active in volunteering in community organizations are to a considerable degree the same ones who will turn out to vote. In other words, civic engagement and voting tend to go together.

In Mill Woods we have a couple of youth groups that are doing quite well. One is called a youth federation; the other one is a youth council. They have different mandates, but the overriding thing that they have in common is the meaningful and sustained involvement of themselves in an activity focusing outside themselves.

Engagement has cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components, that is, the head, heart, and feet. When you're working with youth, you need to engage them. You need to have them participate by being active, by going out and helping people in seniors' homes, or helping in hospitals, or anything that you can find that is meaningful, that they agree is meaningful. You give them the opportunity to actually see the results of their actions then they are more likely to become engaged.

In this bill we're talking about the need for that engagement and participation. If what is taking place in our political institutions is real and offers an opportunity to make a difference, youth will participate. I think the idea of consulting with youth is well and good, but it must be more than tokenism, must be more than the public consultations that ask for opinions and then ignore them, and it must be more than staging the questions to come out with a predetermined conclusion. If political leaders really want to consult with youth, they have to be prepared to be called on the carpet without excuses or evasions and be able to admit when they blew it: the same direct kind of language that youth will use when they talk to each other. Then we have a hope of meaningful consultation. If that type of consultation is the intention of this bill, then it is an act of courage, and I will support it.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words on this motion. I find this motion to

be rather important, even though it's only a motion. It's not a piece of legislation. I think the very fact that we're having this dialogue over here and becoming more conscious of the fact that there is a need out there for engaging our youth in the political process is important within itself. But with one caution: as I listened to some of the previous speakers, I noticed that there was a tendency to politicize this conversation. All of a sudden this has become a Liberal versus Conservative or perhaps NDP versus Liberal conversation. I think that in itself misses the very essence of why the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul has put the motion forward because in my opinion that kind of dialogue is the very reason why youth don't engage in the political process.

I think the youth of today are much more open minded and much less affiliated to very well-defined doctrines and regimes and political parties and are much more likely to be shifting based on personal convictions and on the topic being debated. To try to polarize our youth now between political lines is self-defeatist because that's the way to detract as opposed to attract the youth.

It's not a secret that all political parties within this country are seeking greater input from youth and are seeking larger enrolment and membership of youth, maybe not necessarily in the formal process of purchasing a membership but just sheer engagement in the process and in development of policy. I think every party not only provincially but even federally. We had all major parties federally having drives to get the vote out during the last election on the federal scale, recognizing the fact that we're losing youth's attention. How are we losing it? Because of the politicized debate and the very derogatory and, perhaps, overzealous arguing of topics, and that loses their attention.

Mr. Speaker, we need to engage the youth. If we are to get fresh ideas, if we are to be in touch with a large segment of our voting population, we need to know what their thoughts are; we need to know what their dreams are; we need to know what they like and what they dislike about what we do. And they are a large percentage. If you use the 30 per cent bracket or 35 per cent bracket, we're looking at a large percentage of voters. Imagine if we chose not to engage males in the political process or chose not to engage females in the political process. That would be unthinkable. Yet somehow perhaps not on purpose, perhaps not by design, simply by our conduct we choose not to engage the youth, and I think it's incumbent upon us to engage our youth in the political process. Not in the traditional political process. They don't need to buy memberships, but they need to be involved. They need to read newspapers.

8:40

Mr. Speaker, I would argue that we're in a very troublesome situation. If you combine the sales of the *Edmonton Sun* and the *Edmonton Journal* and compare them to the population of the readership, less than one-quarter of individuals – and that's allowing for shelf life of a newspaper – read daily news. That means they're disinterested. They, frankly, are not interested in what's going on in the House. They're not interested in the political process. Why? Because, frankly, they don't think it engages them. They don't think it has anything to do with them, and it's almost a fatalistic approach. They feel that they can't influence the process at all.

So I commend the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul for thinking of this motion, for bringing it forward, and for at least getting us to reflect on it. If it's only for an hour, perhaps some of this residual conversation will carry on outside of this Chamber and motivate some of us to get the youth involved in the process.

As such, Mr. Speaker, I will support that motion. I think it's a noble one, and it carries a lot of potential. Thank you.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pleasure to rise and speak to this interesting motion from a relatively young member of this Assembly, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul. It was, indeed, very interesting to hear the youngest member of the Assembly speak on the motion and about issues of youth and age and these demographics that we seem to take as unproblematic, as if once you turn 25 or 30, you all of a sudden overnight change.

The motion similarly has the intention of focusing on engaging younger members of our communities, of our province. I presume engaging them in matters of public interest, public policy because this Assembly's responsibility primarily is not with the private lives of individuals, whether they're young or old, but more with their public status as citizens, as members of communities, and the issues that are relevant in terms of public policy to them.

So I think the motion lacks some sort of focus on what exactly it calls on this Assembly to do by way of consultation and exactly whom. It's easy to slice populations in terms of age, but does age really matter all that much when it comes to, for example, issues of war and peace, issues of environmental pollution or environmental health, or the future of our health care system? I think there are many issues, public policy issues, over which distinctions of age blur relative to other variables or other identities that people might have. Whether people are poor or rich might matter more whether they're young or old on a certain issue. Whether people live in rural areas or in urban areas may be yet another matter. Consumption of culture is another issue, you know, what kinds of tastes, lifestyles, people adopt. Age may be more significant, for example, in that regard.

So simply referring to youth without exactly indicating what we are talking about, does raise some of these issues which must be addressed. Questions that are begged by this are, you know: is youth an identity, or is youth just a matter of numerical, sort of, configuration? You're over 25 or 30. I know that in the youth wing of the New Democratic Party, you know, the top age is 25. CIDA, the Canadian International Development Agency, has a cut-off age of 30. There are various measures, various positions on when youth ends and the sort of postyouth period starts. So it's not clear exactly what youth is going to be consulted and for what reasons.

The identity of being young is another matter because once people begin to define themselves as belonging to a certain group, in this case being youth, then that matters socially; that matters politically; that matters in terms of policy. So I think these are questions that are germane to the debate on this motion before we proceed to the consultation issue.

A second one on the issue of consultation that worries me a bit: consultation over the last little while has got itself a black eye, if I may use that term. People ask: what does it really mean? Is it getting a few people together behind closed doors and talking with them about matters that you have on your agenda, or is it really public participation in a public forum where youth argue with each other, youth exchange ideas with each other and with others who are not so youthful or young? The whole question of consultation sounds very nice but raises questions about what exactly, if this Legislature voted on this motion and endorsed it, consultation would mean. What form will it take? Will it be open? Will it be transparent? Will it be engaging? Will it ensue into healthy debates about issues of the day, or will it be exercised again in selectively picking people and then sitting with them to interest them in issues that may be on the top of the mind of those who want consultation. For me to enthusiastically support the motion, I would like to have some answers to these questions. What is this group that we are talking about?

There were references to the oldest members of the House being on this side of the House or that side of the House, and I just want to

assure those young members of the House that age may not in fact separate us as much as ideas might. It's not so much a matter of years; it's a question of what ideals move you, what ideas you espouse and embrace, what kind of dreams you have about not only your own future and about your own cohort of aging people but about the world in which you hope we'll all walk into in the next few years or the next decades.

To me it is that kind of engagement that we need to invite people to talk about: what kind of world they want, what kind of future they envision, and how they think that they can challenge us all – young and old, poor and rich, rural and urban, highly educated and those who drop out of school – how we can all engage each other in asking those important questions, the questions about our future. Youth is our future, but all of us have a future, and all of us have a stake in that future. Surely, if we can get more young people, men and women, participating in our political system, turning up at election time and at least voting, that would be great.

I think we have to really get everyone to ask the question: how can we get all of those people who at the moment sit outside of the political process engaged, be they young, be they old? Why is it that people don't participate? People don't see their stakes in important issues of the day, whether they're talked about in this Assembly or outside by volunteer organizations, nongovernmental organizations, community groups, or church organizations, whoever they may be. There are important issues, there are important questions to be addressed, and there is a concern that the public sphere seems to be of declining interest to a growing percentage of people, particularly young. If we lose people and their interest in the public sphere, I think the whole future of democracy is at risk. If we inspire each other to engage each other in these core issues and core concerns, I'm sure we'll be able to get the youth involved in it too.

8:50

I certainly applaud the member for bringing forward this idea, this opportunity for us to debate, but these are issues that require serious questions about what we are talking about. Are the distinctions and these divisions really as clear cut as sometimes motions such as these assume? I'm afraid my view is that they aren't; therefore, the motion lacks clarity, lacks focus. I hope this kind of discussion will help the member to move forward with a clearer view of what he wants to accomplish with this motion.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and join the debate on Motion 503, youth consultation. I do feel somewhat qualified to speak on the topic. It's, believe it or not, not too long ago that I was actually fitting into that category although, like many members, it's slipping very quickly away.

Motion 503 is an idea whose time has definitely come, and I'm very pleased that we're discussing it here today. Now, that is not to say that this government has not already encouraged the involvement of youth. There are several government initiatives and programs that are aimed specifically at youth and with good reason. As the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul has suggested, the most precious resource in Alberta is not our oil or our wheat; it is our children.

At this point I wonder if it is the will of the fine Members of this Legislative Assembly for me to break into a rousing rendition of Whitney Houston's "I believe that children are our future."

Some Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Rodney: No? No song? Okay. Well, I'll just give you a cliché then, the cliché being: the leaders of tomorrow. Of course, the Member for Battle River-Wainwright has dealt with this already. I'll just say this: the future success and failure of this province will be their responsibility sooner than we think. The ideas they develop in the next 20 or 30 months, the next 20 or 30 years will be directly tied to the perceptions that they form today. So it's vital that they be involved in every way possible.

When I say involved, Mr. Speaker, I speak in the broadest sense. The possibilities, obviously, are limitless. There aren't too many young things Albertans don't have an interest in or won't have an interest in at some point in the future. Many issues we discuss in the present will have great significance for the citizens of tomorrow, so it makes great sense to get them engaged as soon as possible.

Sometimes when we think of a process of engaging youth, we tend to think of only those who are disadvantaged or those who are in need of help. In other cases, we as adults think that youth should be consulted only about so-called youth issues. Sometimes we feel that youth face specific challenges that are different from those we face as adults. In some cases this may be true; however, many of the decisions that adults make are made with the future interests of children in mind – we talked about it earlier today – so it isn't unreasonable that we make every effort to engage them in a wider range of issues.

There are a lot of perceptions about young people – there always have been – that may prevent them from becoming involved. Sometimes younger folks are seen as apathetic, but after having worked for quite some time now, over a couple of decades, I can tell you that what I've seen is the exact opposite. I know that the great majority of our young people are overflowing with ideas, and what I really like about this motion is that it is not restrictive. This is an important gesture which reinforces the point that we want the input of our young people. Sometimes certain adults can get caught up in the belief that experience is the only prerequisite for wisdom. When that happens, we lose sight of the fact that cynicism can then develop, which may prevent new ideas and perspectives.

Young people often look at things from a different viewpoint. We know that. Sometimes a different viewpoint is exactly what's needed to bring clarity to an issue. If there were never any new ideas, no progress would ever be made. Right now, right across the province young people possess great ideas that are well worth investigation. Motion 503 seeks to strengthen input of youth and increase their involvement in decisions that affect their future. We have a duty to make these decisions in their best interest. To do that, we need their help, not only to brainstorm but to create the action plan and then implement it. Some of us may not be around for that implementation, so indeed it is directly related to them.

Therefore, it stands to reason, Mr. Speaker, that we should facilitate in every way possible the involvement of our youth as we continue to improve our province and give consideration to the ideas of tomorrow today. This motion is a vital step towards that goal, and I'm proud to offer it my support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Youth are obviously critically important to us, and youth issues are equally important to them and to parents and to all of us as a society. I have to tell you that as Minister of Education I have the pleasure of being in touch with youth every single day, and I take that responsibility very seriously. It's for that very reason that in my ministry we are going to be hosting a series of round-tables around the province starting

very soon, culminating with a symposium on high school completion rates later this fall; at least that is the plan and that's the target. We want to consult very specifically with youth and for youth about issues that are affecting them.

In the end, Mr. Speaker, we hope to come out with a very thoughtful and thorough game plan that will help us to increase the high school completion rates in the three-year window, which members here would know is where we need the improvements made. We're not doing too badly in the four-year window or the five-year window. We're certainly doing very well when we talk about youth in the 25-year-old range, if we can still refer to those as youth, and the numbers in that age who have completed high school, but that's quite a few years after the normal expected completion date.

I also want to mention quickly that there will be considerable consultation going on with respect to the Premier's Crystal Meth Task Force. This is another serious way that we are consulting with and for youth. It's not restricted to them, obviously, but we will be talking with them a lot. Last year I had engaged my officials in a crystal meth study to find out what the issues were out in the community. In fact, I talked with every single school board when I met with them about this issue, and they, too, are speaking with their youth more actively perhaps now than before.

Finally, in my role as Minister of Community Development over the past few years, before I took on Minister of Education, I can recall our annual Vitalize conference. Vitalize, as people here would know, is a conference for volunteers essentially. This is a conference well past its 20th year, as I recall. There was a specific component every year within that particular conference for youth to meet and to speak, to gather, to chat, share ideas, and typically, if memory serves, we had about 150 to 200, perhaps more, representatives in the youth category. In 2009, of course, we're hosting the international skills competition, which is all about youth as well, and I don't have time to get into that.

However, I do want to applaud the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul for having brought this particular issue forward because he's trying to share through his motion that municipal governments and community organizations and all of us have a stake in the future of our youth and in listening to what their issues are and responding accordingly. Therefore, I will be pleased to support this particular motion, which has at its heart a formal consultation mechanism or series of mechanisms at all levels of government to advance the issues that are on the minds of the youth today and how those issues will impact their future.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would urge other members to seriously consider supporting this. Let's give it a chance to work its way through and see what we can do to make things a little better for the youth of Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul to close debate.

9:00

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank all hon. members of this Legislature for their comments and, I guess I'd have to say, for their song.

I do want to make a couple comments. The first one is to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, who basically brought forward the concept that age is very relative. From that aspect, saying that age is relative, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona looked at me and suggested that I have some youth, and of course I look at the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, and I suggest that he has youth. But I want to say that who I am trying to address in this

motion specifically, or maybe I want to say isolating, are individuals who do not have a legislated opportunity to have input because presently if you have legislated opportunity, you do have some ability to have input. I'm not saying that it should be constrained to that age group, but that's mainly where the focus is.

I would also like to compliment the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, when he talked about the leaders of today. I very much agree that it is not the leaders of the future; it is the leaders of today. But we very much need to give them that opportunity to hear their voices and be the leaders of today.

I want to also stress that I feel it is very necessary to get youth involved. The question that came up is: what type of consultation? As everybody here knows, this is a motion. I believe that consultation, as was stated by one of the hon. members, is possibly the first step. There needs to be an avenue in order to have meaningful and, if I can say to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, transparent and open discussion. I think it's very, very important.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to close by saying that in order for us to be successful as a province, we need to have input from youth at all levels. I stress again: at all levels. They need to be able to give meaningful input to community organizations, municipal governments, and also to us at the provincial level.

Mr. Speaker, our future is today. We must work harder to hear the voice of Alberta's youth. For this reason, I ask all members to support Motion 503.

Thank you very much.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 carried]

head: **Consideration of His Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mr. Johnson moved that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate March 7: Mr. Bonko]

The Acting Speaker: Any other speakers?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried]

head: **Government Motions
Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne**

10. Mr. Zwozdesky moved on behalf of Mr. Klein:
Be it resolved that the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

[Government Motion 10 carried]

Address to the Assembly by Mr. Ray Speaker

11. Mr. Zwozdesky moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta on March 15, 2006, welcome to the floor of the House a former

member, Mr. Ray Speaker, to address this Assembly to mark the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the convening of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta on March 15, 1906.

[Government Motion 11 carried]

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

**Bill 13
Real Estate Amendment Act, 2006**

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

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 13, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, the Real Estate Council of Alberta is responsible for administering the Real Estate Act. These amendments will strengthen the Real Estate Council of Alberta's authority to combat mortgage fraud by adding this statement to their purposes: "to protect against, investigate, detect and suppress mortgage fraud as it relates to the [real estate] industry."

[Mrs. Ady in the chair]

This amendment may appear to be small, but it will do two important things. First, it will clarify that the Real Estate Council of Alberta has the appropriate investigation powers to carry out activities related to combatting mortgage fraud. Second, it will enhance the Real Estate Council of Alberta's ability to share personal information about mortgage fraud perpetrators while respecting the privacy rights of individuals. These amendments are a direct result of the recommendations of the advisory council on mortgage fraud.

In summary, the proposed amendments will go a long way toward ensuring that the government of Alberta tackles mortgage fraud as effectively as possible and that the Real Estate Council of Alberta can play a fuller role in combatting it.

Mr. Speaker, thank you. I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 13.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Bill 4
Daylight Saving Time Amendment Act, 2006**

[Adjourned debate February 28: Mr. Stevens]

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a modest amount of pleasure to rise and speak about Bill 4, the Daylight Saving Time Amendment Act, 2006, in second reading.

I chuckle a little bit at that because, of course, we've just come through an hour of debate on Motion 503, which was all about consulting youth. There was some discussion – I won't call it an argument – back and forth on the floor of this House as to what constitutes youth, who are youth, and when we are no longer youthful. As the Member for Battle River-Wainwright will discover in the fullness of time a few decades hence, middle age doesn't really begin until somewhere between 65 and 75.

9:10

In any event, because we were discussing youth and youthfulness

and things like that, I was taken back a year or so to my misspent youth, growing up in southern Ontario in the small city of Sarnia in the late '60s, early '70s, when the band Chicago had a hit called *Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is*. That song had a certain resonance for those of us who grew up in southwestern Ontario because at that time from I believe the last Sunday in April until the last Sunday in October nobody in Sarnia ever really did know what time it was or could tell by turning on the television because, of course, this was before cable, before satellite, before any of that. We had five channels: one from London, three from Detroit, and one from Windsor.

Now, I guess the rest of the province of Ontario went on daylight time, as did most of Canada with the exception of Saskatchewan. But Windsor and Essex county in Ontario would stay on standard time because at the time the great state of Michigan, in its collective wisdom, elected not to join most of the other states in the United States by going on daylight time. So Michigan state was on standard time. Mr. Speaker, because historically there have been so many Windsorites who have worked in Detroit and so many Detroiters who came across the border every morning to work in Windsor, it seemed to make sense for the people of Windsor and Essex county to stay on the same time as Michigan. There are many people in many other parts of Ontario who have often wondered whether Windsor is really part of Ontario, but perhaps that's beside the case.

Anyway, all our television programs were on – I can't remember now. Were they on an hour earlier or an hour later? They'd be an hour later, I guess, than what it said in the *TV Guide*. So it was a several-months-long exercise in mathematical gymnastics to figure out, you know, whether the *Tonight Show* was on tonight or tomorrow. In any event, we all survived except for those chronological purists in the state of Michigan, who were eventually forced by the times, the tides, and other Michiganders to join most of the rest of North America and go on daylight time.

I bring this up for no particular reason other than it's just a bit ironic that we get into these sorts of discussions. I mean, there's no question but that this bill is going to pass, and there's no question but that this bill probably should pass. We're not even first off the mark here in Canada. Ontario, Manitoba, and Quebec have already adopted very similar legislation to move daylight time back, to have it start the second Sunday in March rather than the first Sunday in April, and to extend it to the first Sunday in November from the last Sunday in October. Many reasons are given for this: how happy the kids will be at Halloween because now they'll be able to go out in the daylight. I don't think the kids will be happy about that at all. I think the parents will. I think it takes away a certain amount of the boo factor from Halloween if you actually go out trick or treating, you know, in daylight.

One of my colleagues was going on today in a meeting that we had about how wonderful it will be, you know, for all us sun worshippers because we love the daylight. There was even some reference to the ancient Egyptian sun god Ra. I can only assume Ra was named in ancient Egyptian because, of course, in these days of thinning ozone layer and all the rest of that, if you stay out in the sun, worshipping it too long, you're not so much raw as you are cooked or burned. [interjection] Thank you. Well, you know, it's better than singing. What can I say, Mr. Speaker?

Some are saying that it's absolutely vital that we make this move so that we synchronize Alberta's time with that of our largest trading partner, the United States. Now, I made reference to Michigan a few minutes ago and how for a number of years they withstood the peer pressure from the other 49 states to go on daylight time and ultimately succumbed to that. Our next-door neighbour to the east, Saskatchewan, still doesn't go on daylight time. I don't know if it

ever has, but it certainly hasn't in my lifetime. It seems to survive. It perhaps doesn't prosper to the extent that we do here in Alberta, but it does okay. I think that that's a bit of a spurious argument, that we have to change the clocks at precisely the same moment that our American neighbours change the clocks or else the wheels of commerce will grind to a screeching halt here in the province of Alberta.

I mean, we now deal with our largest trading partner across at least four time zones, and we seem to manage that okay. We seem to have worked out the time difference between Calgary and New York, the time difference between Edmonton and Los Angeles, the time difference between Red Deer and Houston. You know, we manage okay, so I don't really think we need to do that. Nevertheless, we will because this is just one of those things that happens.

If you're someone whose children go off to a school where the day starts early, you will have some concerns about this because your children will be walking to school in the dark for part of the year, no question about it. If I could give any kind of advice solicited or otherwise around that, it might be to school boards to take a look in light of what we're proposing to do here, to extend daylight time, at changing the hours of operation of some of the schools so that our small children do not have to walk to school in the dark. That is a very real concern for parents. Otherwise, I can't really see too much problem one way or the other with this. I guess the sun worshippers will be happy.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that I can be talked into supporting this right along with the rest of the House. Thank you.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to briefly speak to Bill 4, Daylight Saving Time Amendment Act, 2006. The member who just concluded his remarks before I rose I think touched on some of the issues that I had in mind, too, the argument that is made in favour of changing daylight saving time. The minister's own comments the other day suddenly focused a great deal on harmonizing daylight timing arrangements with the U.S. in light of the fact that more than 80 per cent of our trade is with that partner and that if these changes are taking place there, they must here as well and that if they don't, then that would somehow affect the efficiency of the flow of goods and services across that very, very long border.

When I start thinking about it, Saskatchewan hasn't really changed its time. It's next door to us to the east. They haven't changed the time during the NDP regimes, during the Liberal regimes, and during the Conservative regimes. So it's obviously not a political issue. It's not an ideological one, so it does remain a question in my mind how Saskatchewan has dealt with the rationale they have for not changing while we are using our rationale to change. I'm not opposed to change, and I support the bill, but certainly it's a question that arose in my mind.

The second question that arose is: if we turn the clocks forward the second Sunday in March – if we'd had this legislation in place for this year, we would have done that yesterday, I think. Given the times of school openings, the other question that did come to mind was: would it add inconvenience, if not add some risk, you know, for children walking to school?

There is an argument made that making this change in daylight saving time would in fact increase safety on the road or on the street for people crossing the street because those of us who are driving in the late afternoon would still be driving in daylight. We'll be able to see people crossing the streets and whatever have you, so it increases safety.

At the other end, early in the day, the issue of the safety of young children going to school certainly did cross my mind. Perhaps that's where the Minister of Education would take note and maybe ask school boards to raise this question at least for discussion and see if there's any merit in adjusting school opening times in view of the change that this bill will bring about with respect to daylight saving time.

9:20

There are other good reasons, persuasive reasons, to make this change. Conservation of energy certainly is increasingly on the minds of all of us, certainly most people in the House and outside of the House. Moving the clock, making this four-week adjustment to daylight saving time, increasing that period during which we use daylight saving time I think will certainly help conserve energy, reduce the costs as well as save on the environmental side of the equation, help there. So there are good reasons, economic reasons certainly, environmental conservation reasons, and perhaps safety reasons to move forward with this change.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to express the support of this member, of the caucus he represents here tonight for Bill 4. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to close debate.

Mr. Stevens: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

Bill 5 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate February 28: Mr. Stevens]

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 5, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2006. The bill deals with minor amendments to three pieces of legislation: Civil Enforcement Act, Judicature Act, Mechanical Recording of Evidence Act. These amendments came mainly from practical recommendations from legal institutions, the first having to do largely with allowing an enforcement creditor to give notice of his or her claim to the civil enforcement agency that has seized property on behalf of a distressed creditor. The second deals with clarification of the court's discretion to order periodic payments of damages and is presumed to be in the interests of the plaintiff. The third appears to have to do with more modernized recording devices in relation to oral testimony.

On behalf of the party I think it all seems very cogent and valid, and I don't think there'll be any resistance from this side. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, did you want to speak?

Dr. Pannu: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak on Bill 5, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2006. Most of the amendments that this bill is bringing forward make sense. I was looking through the minister's comments that he made while introducing the bill for second reading on February 28, I think, when he spoke on this, and they are very helpful in providing

the reasons why these various changes in the existing statutes are needed. I think that some of the changes are required by changes taking place in other pieces of legislation and for some other interesting reasons.

If I'm not mistaken, one of the four amendments dealing with the Mechanical Recording of Evidence Act, for example, reflects really the changes that have taken place in technology, the information technology and the storage and retrieval processes, more or less, I guess, the obsolescence of the position of stenographer, which, I think, according to the existing legislation that's being amended, was an appointee of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Given that the recording technology has changed and practices have changed, the legislation must be changed to bring up to date the statutory definitions of various roles and the manner in which the data dealing with evidence, court proceedings can be best handled. It makes good sense both at the intuitive level but certainly in terms of daily practice and the technical aspects of it, and the arguments related to the technical changes that have taken place I think give a good reason for making the changes that the minister in this act is proposing.

Similarly, the Judicature Act changes. Again, the amendments are minor, as the minister says, and I agree. They have to do with the monetary awards to be paid in installments. I think that to make this provision and make this clarification in the existing legislation would help, certainly, the people who are awarded these monetary awards. It safeguards their interests. One of the amendments provides clarification of the court's discretion to order structured settlements, and I was quite intrigued by what that means and how the modification that's being made will change that process. The guidelines that the new amendments will provide the court to make these structured judgments I think are a very helpful clarification. Since these structured settlements are supposed to be tax free, I think that it does provide the court with some guidance as to how to deal with these structured judgments in the interest of the recipient, or the beneficiary, of these judgments in a way that it certainly saves the monetary value of these assessments.

Mr. Speaker, I read through the minister's own observations carefully and found disagreement with very little there. In light of that, I would say that we are in support of the changes being proposed, and I happily support the bill.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to close debate.

Mr. Stevens: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

9:30 Bill 6 Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate March 9: Ms Blakeman]

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important act. It's not about parents; it's about children. It's about making sure that money that's necessary for the children gets to them. The Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006, is intended to make the situation better for many families.

Maintenance enforcement is a very effective program and helps out a lot of families in Mill Woods that would otherwise go without because their dads choose not to pay their share. Maintenance enforcement works quickly and effectively to ensure that both moms

and kids get the maintenance due them. In some cases the penalties maintenance enforcement have in place act as a deterrent to the dads that might think they can get away with not paying. For example, they cannot renew a driver's licence, cannot renew a passport, cannot receive an income tax cheque or a GST cheque or any monies that come from a government level. All levels of government work together on this issue.

We've had a number of successful cases in Mill Woods, and I want to congratulate the program and all the staff that work on it and the minister for continuing to improve this program.

As I look at this bill, the first amendment deals with how payments are applied and helps to ensure that money reaches creditors before maintenance enforcement keeps any funds for penalties and fees. As we consider the Income Tax Act, we know that the first thing you can deduct is related to dependants as dependants are a tax credit. Therefore, if it comes off first from net income, then it should be the first responsibility for real income.

The second amendment addresses financial examinations by maintenance enforcement. This is an amendment to allow the director of the maintenance enforcement program to apply to the Court of Queen's Bench for an order of alternative arrangements for the examination of a debtor. The purpose here is to allow for alternative payment arrangements to be made relating to the debtor's ability to pay. This amendment can also result in reduced court times. Some say that accounting is not a science; it's an art. What do we want included in the picture? We must make sure we are not giving artistic licence for those who should be responsible to avoid their responsibilities in the name of bona fide accounting. This amendment is intended to give public accountants on behalf of clients the opportunity to penetrate a bleak picture which is really a smokescreen for apparent losses in obligations, which become an excuse for evading maintenance enforcement payments.

The third amendment deals with maintenance agreements between parties. It allows for the maintenance enforcement program to administer these arrangements and is consistent with similar arrangements in the Family Law Act. This province has created considerable incentives to business. This bill is an opportunity to balance that. The government has given exemptions to encourage people to go ahead with business plans because of the benefits they create for the community. We need equivalent incentives to invest in families. The well-being of families, either together or separated, needs to hold an even greater place in our values. The encouragement to invest in families should be as great as to sink one's assets in a business venture or economic activity. Investment in families is investment in our humanity.

The fourth amendment deals with current rules relating to access to locked-in retirement accounts. The new rules allow for more support for children and address deficiencies in the existing act that do not allow for access to these funds until the debtor is of the age of 50 and chooses to withdraw the funds. The new rules address the problems from the 2004 act to allow for access to these types of locked-in funds. This is a measure to counter the Bermuda or Bahamas syndrome: putting one's investments offshore, where they cannot be touched. In the Bermuda syndrome the party who is trying to evade responsibility uses distance and miles and political boundaries. In the support evasion system the evader used distance and years and regulations to put assets out of reach.

I'd like to congratulate the minister and the individuals who have worked on this Bill 6, the Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006. I support it as a wonderful step in looking at things that are really important for families.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 6, the Maintenance Enforcement Amendment Act, 2006. Let me at the very outset thank the minister – I forgot to do it when I rose the last time and before – for briefing us early on, three or four weeks ago, I think, quite extensively on the amendments to the existing legislation by way of these bills that he is bringing forward. We had a good meeting, where we had the opportunity to be briefed on the nature of the amendments and the reasons for those. The minister was very, very helpful, and the meeting was most productive from our point of view.

Again, I think the amendments that Bill 6 is seeking to make will make the existing arrangements much better. These amendments are intended, as the minister has indicated, to clarify and refine existing sections of the Maintenance Enforcement Act to allow for better client service and access to justice. The four amendments relate to the application of payments, financial examinations, maintenance agreements, and access to certain locked-in retirement savings. These amendments will certainly benefit children and families by getting more money into their hands, the creditors that is. The amendments give families and children access to more money sooner, and these locked-in retirement funds are one good example, that those will be accessible now. Lump-sum payments for medical or child care purposes before arrears or fees are paid is another good element, I think, that these amendments embody. The amendments give the director of the maintenance enforcement program more powers to address default payments and debtors who are in arrears.

It's a very good set of amendments, which improve the already very good maintenance enforcement program, MEP, as the minister uses that acronym in his remarks. This maintenance enforcement program provides a vitally important service to parents around the province, helping to enforce support orders and thus ensure that our children are having their basic needs met. The program offers parents a neutral third party through which to work, which can be so important in the strains of separation or divorce.

Contrary to popular belief many, if not most, of the agreements registered with the program are carried out without any major problems. It's good to know that not all dads are deadbeat dads, and certainly not all late payments are indicative of ill will. However, experience has shown that there are cases where, for whatever reason, support payments are not forthcoming, and it is children who suffer the most. Study after study has shown that a happy childhood consists of much more than having basic needs met. But in the absence of the state being able to guarantee happy memories, the least it can do is ensure that children and their parents, be they single moms or single dads, have recourse to a program that guarantees the money owed them for their needs. This program, MEP, the maintenance enforcement program, does this for over 60,000 children and nearly 100,000 clients. A very large number of Alberta families and children are impacted by this program, most of them in a very positive way.

The program has been around since 1986, and its collection rates are getting better every year. Every year we find better ways to ensure fairness and justice for all parties involved. As the minister said when introducing this bill for second reading, financial examinations alone have led to an additional \$900,000 being collected for creditors, and overall collection levels have risen 10 per cent in the past three years alone. These amendments, therefore, are in keeping with these ongoing efforts, which deliver the necessary means and benefits to families and children affected by family breakdowns.

9:40

There is perhaps just a small issue of clarification here with two of the amendments. I think the first one has to do with the amendment contained in section 4(11), which was described a few weeks ago by the minister in his introductory remarks. This concerned the director's powers to obtain substitutional service orders allowing for alternate arrangements regarding financial examinations. The minister had described this as allowing "the program to bring debtors who are constantly evading service in for financial examinations." Now, I'm just curious how these substitutional service orders would allow for this to happen. What exactly is the process? What's the substance of this process? The minister, I'm sure, would help clarify this.

Alternate arrangements for examination. You know, I'm reading through what the minister had to say on this issue when he was introducing this bill, that the court can adjourn, I guess, the examination, and then this amendment will dispense with the need to serve notice for the parties examined to return to the court again, so the serving will not have to be done again. The persons can be asked to be in the court more than one day after adjournment. That's probably what it means, but it just needs a little bit more information for me to fully understand what it means and what's involved in this.

Also, I think there's some sort of a reference to how this will improve collection from debtors who consistently avoid meeting with the director. Would the change, in fact, make meeting with the director mandatory, or would it compel the party to meet with the director? How does that work?

In the interests of fairness and assuming that the director will use his discretionary power in the best interests of all involved, this appears to be a well-intentioned amendment, and the program may find it to be of considerable use, but I'm curious to see a review of this in a year or two just to make sure we know how effective this change is in resolving cases of arrears and how stakeholders, creditors and debtors alike, feel about the director's discretionary powers.

One other point perhaps, Mr. Speaker, and then I'll sit down. It again deals with asking for more clarification. I think it would be helpful, certainly for me, to have an explanation of how the registering of agreements both with the MEP and with the courts will proceed if the third amendment proposed here is passed. This concerns section 2 of the amendment, which gives the director of MEP the power to file maintenance order payment agreements with the court on either party's behalf. Again, as the minister argued, it's intended, I presume, to reduce delays and to facilitate or make it easier for both parties to get the agreements filed with the court until someone else on their behalf can do it. Is it not presently the case, and are there any legal implications here in terms of either or both parties finding it not so much inconvenient but unacceptable for some reasons for a third party to be doing this work on their behalf? It's a question of control, really. Would parties involved, parents in particular, feel that they're losing control completely by this amendment if we put this thing out of their hands?

Mr. Speaker, I think I have made a few observations. I was reading through the bill, the minister's comments, and some research that our own staff has done and was quite impressed with the enormity of the activity on this front: how many families are involved, how much money changes hands, and how many times the MEP steps in to resolve matters to the benefit of all parties involved in the matter of maintenance payments when families break down and separate or proceed to seek divorce. With those remarks, I would take my seat.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister for Justice and Attorney General to close debate.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start by thanking the members for Edmonton-Mill Woods and Edmonton-Strathcona for their words of support tonight and the Member for Edmonton-Centre for her words of support last week relative to the Alberta maintenance enforcement program.

As was noted, the program itself celebrated its 20th anniversary last month. Over that 20 years some \$1.8 billion has been collected and distributed to the creditors, largely children, of this province, which is a very good thing. The program itself today is seen as a leader in the area of maintenance enforcement in Canada. This bill will make it a better program.

I very much do appreciate the support and kind words for the people who do yeoman service in this department on a daily basis. It is a highly emotional area, needless to say, for people who are having difficulty collecting the money that is due to them. The volume of communication with the department on a monthly basis is truly enormous, and they do an incredible job addressing that communication. Some people are not happy; that is just the nature of the business. But when you consider the magnitude of their job, it's quite fantastic.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona outlined some questions. I'm happy to respond to those. I will do that in committee. I'll go back to the people who work in this area on a daily basis and perhaps get some more detail so that I can be more thorough in responding to the hon. member at that time.

I would now call the question, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

9:50

Bill 7

Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate February 28: Mr. Stevens]

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again tonight to speak this time to Bill 7, the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, 2006, in second reading. In the way of a background I think this amendment was sort of inevitable given certain changes which occurred back in 2002, as the hon. Minister of Justice indicated when he introduced the bill. In 2002 the then Justice minister approved the raising of the limit for small claims in small claims court from \$7,500 to \$25,000. This, in turn, encouraged or allowed people to pursue legal action in Provincial Court instead of the Court of Queen's Bench, where the process may be more onerous and complicated.

Provincial courts don't require a claimant to have legal representation; that is to say, one does not need a lawyer. One can represent him or herself if they so desire. Also, filing fees or the cost of litigation may be less this way. What this did was allow greater access to the courts and, as such, was really a positive move.

Similarly here for situations involving motor vehicle accidents we are allowing victims to sue in Provincial Court, not just the Court of Queen's Bench. This takes a big load off the Court of Queen's Bench, and it frees up some of its valuable time to deal with more serious cases. We are improving access to justice, and for that I find myself in support of this bill.

Almost all drivers in this province carry liability insurance, but a very few don't. If one of these rogue drivers gets into an accident, and some of them actually get into an accident and then flee the

accident scene or are involved in a hit and run, for example, they will not be able to afford the resulting damages. The Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Act protects the victims of uninsured and unknown drivers, where they can take their claim against the administrator of the motor vehicle accident claim fund, who would then be the nominal defendant. If the claim is successful, funds are distributed from the general revenue fund.

So again I emphasize my support for this bill, but I actually have one simple question. I was reviewing the motor vehicle accident claims program website under the Ministry of Justice, and it really currently states that the person may begin his or her own action without a lawyer. So I was just trying to clarify: does this exist now as it is, or is this happening only after we pass this amendment?

As such, I look forward to seeing it come back in committee and receiving more debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Pannu: I'll be very brief, Mr. Speaker, speaking on Bill 7, the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Amendment Act, 2006. At this point in second reading I would like to simply indicate that in principle we agree with the changes that the minister is bringing forward to the existing legislation by way of this bill. In part it's a response to changes that took place in 2002 with respect to the amount of the claims for which one could go to Provincial Court, under the small claims court that is.

I think the minister is perhaps right in focusing on the fact that the changes that they are suggesting, opening the possibility that people could go either to the Provincial Court or to the Queen's court if they so choose, will perhaps lead to reduction in the costs of litigation related to matters related to motor vehicle accident claims in the province. I think the accessibility to the court system and to the system of justice in the province has emerged as a major issue because the costs of going to court have been growing very, very fast. We've been hearing from an increasing number of Albertans about their concerns about how costly it is to pursue redress to matters that concern them when they go to the courts.

So anything that can be done to curtail and contain costs to people who have to go to the court system I think is something that needs to be supported. In fact, we need to redouble our efforts to find ways of reducing costs of litigation and costs of going to court in this province. The transcripts and access to them alone are extremely expensive, and I've heard through my constituency office people complaining about how expensive it is for them to have access to the transcripts of the courts. That's just one small aspect of the overall picture of the costs of going to the courts.

The bill, certainly, is in part intended to reduce the costs or limit those costs by increasing access and encouraging, I suppose, people with claims related to personal injury sustained through motor vehicle accidents to be able to go to provincial courts and represent in that court themselves, their own cases, thereby reducing costs related to legal representation.

As I said, we are in principle in agreement with the intent of the bill, the principle underlying it, and as we move through the debate in the committee, I assume that we will have an opportunity to take a closer look at some of the clauses of the bill. If there's a need for change, there'll be an opportunity then to speak to those.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to close debate.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Once again I appreciate the supportive comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

There was a question with respect to what is currently permitted by way of self-represented litigants in our courts today. The fact is that one may represent themselves in front of every court in this province, whether it be Provincial Court, Queen's Bench, or the Court of Appeal. The point that is made in general is that the Provincial Court is the one that has a more streamlined, less costly, less rule-bound process and, therefore, is the one that is most accessible to self-represented litigants, or people who represent themselves. Queen's Bench and the Court of Appeal really have been designed, in terms of process and rules, for people who are represented by people trained in the law, namely lawyers, and really the matter that we have before us is to ensure that this piece of legislation reflects the fact that self-represented parties may bring their action. They do today, but we'd like the law to read so that it reflects the reality, and that's really in large measure what we're talking about here.

I'd call the question, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

Bill 8

Trustee Amendment Act, 2006

[Adjourned debate February 28: Mr. Stevens]

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening on behalf of the Official Opposition and speak to Bill 8, the Trustee Amendment Act, 2006. This bill, I believe, can be appropriately described as a housekeeping bill. It addresses some of the flaws that have been discovered since Bill 26, the Trustee Amendment Act, 2001, was passed by this House. In doing my research today, I was able to discover that that amendment act actually had the support of the Official Opposition, as will this act today.

It would appear to me that the Trustee Amendment Act, 2001, pretty much accomplished what it set out to do in terms of allowing trustees a little more flexibility by removing restrictions that they were facing in terms of how they could invest and allowing the prudent investor rule to take place. Unfortunately, the trustees in many cases were still constrained by the limitations that were not noticed at that time and are now being addressed by the proposed amendment that we're dealing with tonight. So, as I say, it will certainly have the support of the Official Opposition caucus, or at least that's what I'm recommending to my colleagues.

10:00

I'm pleased to see that the hon. minister has consulted with the Alberta Law Reform Institute. My understanding is that back in 2001 they were not only supportive of the amending act at that time but actually had been calling for that change for some time. In our consultation with the Alberta Law Reform Institute they're certainly not expressing any concern whatsoever about this amending act and, in fact, are pleased to see it coming forward. So I applaud the minister for having made those efforts in consultation because, unfortunately, that does not always happen. We've had several instances that I'm aware of in the last year and a half since I've been a member of this Assembly where that sort of consultation did not take place, and it's always good to see when it does.

I would briefly like to point out my frustration at times with the cross-ministry co-operation, or lack thereof, that sometimes seems to take place. I'm not sure why that is. It's been described sometimes as turf protecting or empire building or whatever. I'm not sure

what happens exactly, but clearly in this case the minister has made an effort to consult with every other ministry where the Trustee Act is mentioned and involved, and for the most part it looks to me as if we're going to make some progress in terms of addressing the inadequacies of Bill 26 from the year 2001.

However, having said that, there are still a number of ministries that are not necessarily coming onside fully, and it leads me to another frustration which I've expressed many times in this House, and that is where we move things from legislation into regulation. There are a number of examples of that, in particular the Cemeteries Act, the Condominium Property Act, and the Funeral Services Act, all falling under the Ministry of Government Services, where they've chosen, at this time at least, not to adopt these changes but rather to consult. That's a good thing: consult with stakeholders before they move away from the legal list.

But then when they do make the changes, the plan is to allow the rules for trustees to be governed in accordance with regulations as opposed to this piece of legislation or another piece of legislation. That always causes concern for me because, as you've heard me express in the past, Mr. Speaker, often regulations are dealt with behind closed doors and out of the eye of the public in terms of debate in this Legislature, and I don't believe that that is a good thing.

Another example of where that's happening is the Dependent Adults Act, again where the decision is being made to stay with the legal list for the time being. We're not sure at this time, once they've decided which way to go with that, whether or not those changes will be enacted in regulation or perhaps brought back to the House in legislation. So that's certainly a concern that I have, and I'm sure we'll have an opportunity to address it a little further when we get to the committee stage.

Overall though, as I said, I do believe that it's a good move to incorporate the prudent investor rule universally across all legislation. This does move us towards that, so I'm pleased to see that.

I'm a little surprised that we've waited five years to address some of the inadequacies that were discovered as a result of the amendments that were made in 2001. Perhaps the minister may address that tonight or at some further stage of debate, but I would have expected that maybe we would have dealt with some of those questions sooner than now. However, as I say, in general I think the idea to adopt these changes across most provincial legislation will give the trustee more options for investment, Mr. Speaker, and allowing that I think is a good thing. The legal list approach was very restrictive and perhaps too conservative, if I can say that without being called on a point of order. I think I just did.

I think ultimately that with these changes that are being proposed in this amendment, all individuals and societies that are affected by the Trustee Act will be better served. With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to offer my support and recommend that of my colleagues to Bill 8 in second reading.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very brief comments on Bill 8, the Trustee Amendment Act, 2006. The changes made in 2001 to give more flexibility to trustees led to, I guess, introducing the notion of the prudent investor rule to replace restriction on the trustee to invest only in the securities listed in the legal list. My question is about the prudent investor rule and how it works. It certainly provides more flexibility, but how is the practice associated with the investor act? How is it monitored? What happens when prudence is not, in fact, demonstrated by a decision made by the trustee? Is there any monitoring? Are there any penalties? Is there any control when the trustees fail to act prudently?

Reference was made by the minister to "in keeping with modern theories of investment." Yes, I guess that the notion of the prudent investor rule is part of those modern theories of investment, but the legal implementation of those I think are questions that come to mind which need addressing. The minister either today or perhaps in the debate in the committee can return to these questions and address them for my clarification. I just want to know how it works and what happens when it fails to work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to close debate?

Mr. Stevens: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a second time]

Bill 22

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2006

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance to move second reading of Bill 22, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2006.

Just to again indicate that interim supply acts, the appropriation act such as we see here, are not an uncommon practice in the parliamentary system. Today we're celebrating Commonwealth Day, I believe, so I thought I would just reference that. I'm hoping that members here will see the wisdom in supporting this so that government can in fact continue providing necessary funds to hospitals, schools, seniors, and so on come the end of March.

Thank you.

10:10

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will try to make my comments brief as well.

The hon. minister has referenced that this is not an uncommon procedure in the parliamentary system, and he's correct. It's certainly not an uncommon occurrence in Alberta although I would certainly argue that it's not a necessary occurrence either. I've indicated in the past that I'm more than willing to come down here in late January or early February, and were we to do that as a House, we could have a budget passed in advance of the end of the business year, so it's not that it's necessary or required that we do things in this manner. Nevertheless, this is the way that the government chooses to proceed, and so it goes.

I would like to reiterate my concerns as well that as an opposition, when we're charged with providing constructive criticism to the government, it is difficult to approve what is essentially a blank cheque. I understand and empathize with the various ministers who spoke to this bill when we were in Committee of Supply that the government has to continue to run and that there is a lot of good work that needs to be done and employees that need to be paid and programs that need to be funded, and often they're funded in a front-end-loaded sort of way. I would have no intention of interfering with that funding.

It is difficult to approve a blank cheque which in this case totals nearly 6 and a half billion dollars, Mr. Speaker, with only a one-line or perhaps two-line explanation as to how much money is going to the department and no real explanation whatsoever as to how that money is going to be spent. It requires a bit of a leap of faith not

only on the part of opposition parties but on the part of all Albertans that that money is going to be used wisely because we really have no way of knowing until a budget is introduced how that money may be used.

Certainly, I'm hopeful and I know that many Albertans are hopeful that, for example, there would be further funding for long-term care. We know that that's an issue that is close to the hearts of many Albertans. It's been in the media a lot over the last year, and the government took small steps towards funding the recommendations of the long-term care review committee, but clearly there is a lot more funding required and a lot left to be done to make that right. We're hopeful that some of the money that has been requested in interim supply is going to go to those issues early and not make them wait.

I'm hopeful, as an example, that there will be some money in the budget of the Education minister or perhaps the budget of the infrastructure minister to provide running water at Ellerslie school, which is an issue that the Official Opposition has been bringing forward with some fervour, Mr. Speaker. I have no way of knowing whether or not there's going to be a little bit of the \$637 million from the interim supply for Education that might address that dire situation, but I'm hopeful that that would be the case.

I'm hopeful that the Finance minister or the Education minister would find it in their hearts and in their minds to take some of the money that has been appropriated in interim supply and begin to address the unfunded teachers' liability, which is a debt that is already at billions of dollars and will cost Alberta taxpayers, all of us in this Assembly and all of us across the province, tens of billions of dollars over the course of the current agreement if we don't choose to address it during a time of unprecedented wealth, when it would be argued that it would be fiscally prudent to do so.

Again, I'm hopeful that some of these things are going to be addressed by the approval of the interim supply, but we have no way of knowing that, and that does cause me concern in that we're asked continually, year after year, to supply 60 days' worth of funding in the order of \$6 billion without any real information being provided as to exactly how that money is going to be spent. I suppose we have to put an awful lot of faith, as I said, in the government and the ministers involved that this money is going to be used in a prudent fashion, that Albertans will receive value for the dollars that they entrust to us.

I look forward to the budget next Wednesday, Mr. Speaker, when we'll have some of those questions answered. Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my opportunity to speak briefly to interim supply. I would echo some of the comments of my colleague but really need to take a different tack on interim supply in relation specifically to the ministry that I'm most concerned about, that of Environment. I argue that given that this ministry has around 0.5 per cent of the provincial budget yet is dealing with the third most important issue to Albertans, we need to take a serious look at what this means for the future of Alberta and for true planning and implementation of some kind of sustainability in relation to this province.

It's only after 13 years that we are now beginning to get a reasonable approach to a land-use plan. This is the third attempt, and we're all extremely hopeful that this will be an effective framework from which a plan can be made which would guide development, especially resource extraction in this province, in balance with other values that Albertans hold. The present budget

and the interim supply identify an extremely limited capacity to do this, Mr. Speaker, so I'm actually arguing the reverse of what in some cases people will be arguing today, that government in this case needs to make a huge injection of funding and make the environment a priority in this province.

We have not the capacity as yet to monitor our groundwater, to do the adequate baseline testing, to even have a database of all the water wells in this province. We're still waiting for groundwater inventory and testing. The recent experiences in the south and east of the province, where landowners are increasingly concerned about dramatic changes in their wells in volume and in quality, suggest that we are catching up, to say the least, with an inadequate staff and inadequate technology to do the job of actually assessing where we are, looking at the possibility of new technologies that could be used both by industry and by Alberta Environment to help us to get a handle on what it is we're doing both on the surface and under the surface and how we're going to ensure a high quality of life for our children.

There are hundreds, perhaps thousands of contaminated sites; if one includes all of the potential oil and gas installations, several hundred thousand now in the province. Each of these poses its own liability: the downstream oil and gas sector, the mom-and-pop gas stations that have become defunct and need to be cleaned up, the refinery sites. There is no existing orphan fund for these. If they're defaulted, they will fall to the public purse. Clearly, Alberta Environment with more resources – and indeed some of this could well come from industry – for a kind of an orphan fund for downstream oil and gas and refinery sites is a really urgent priority in this province.

In relation to climate change, again, we're looking for leadership. A department with such limited funding can do a very limited amount in terms of incentives for energy efficiency, incentives for renewables, and an attempt to create a more level playing field with the dominant fossil fuel dependency that we've developed in this province for our economy. It's very clear that we need leadership on this. In the context of climate change we need a government that would set clear limits for industry and also help them to know clearly what it is that they're expected to achieve in terms of their emissions, now standing first in the country in terms of air emissions.

Those are the main comments I wanted to make in relation to interim supply, Mr. Speaker, and I'll take my seat.

10:20

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will indeed take pleasure in closing debate and thank the members for their comments. I look forward to the House's support.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a second time]

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A good amount of progress tonight and a lot of good comments were made and so on. On that note, I will move that we adjourn for the evening and reconvene tomorrow at 1:30.

[Motion carried; at 10:21 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

