

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, March 22, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/03/22

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life which has been given to us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and of our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture.

Mr. Goudreau: Merci, M. le Président. Aujourd'hui j'ai le privilège de présenter en votre nom, à vous et aux membres de l'Assemblée, des invités spéciaux venant de ma circonscription, 17 élèves du secondaire accompagnés de leurs deux enseignants. Ils sont assis dans la galerie et sont à Edmonton pour célébrer les Rendez-vous de la francophonie, une quinzaine de jours où l'on célèbre l'histoire et la culture française.

Alors, c'est un grand plaisir de vous présenter les élèves de l'école Georges P. Vanier, accompagnés de leur enseignant M. Roger Doucet, et les élèves de l'école Héritage, accompagnés de leur enseignante Mme Anita Johnson. J'aimerais aussi vous présenter un membre de mon équipe, Mme Cindie LeBlanc, directrice-adjointe au Secrétariat francophone, une finissante de l'école Héritage.

Je leur demanderais de se lever et recevoir une bienvenue chaleureuse de cette Assemblée.

Merci, M. le Président.

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the privilege of introducing to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a number of very special guests from my constituency: 17 high school students and their two teachers. They are seated in the gallery and are in Edmonton to commemorate Les Rendez-vous de la francophonie, a national two-week celebration of French culture and history. It is with great pleasure that I introduce the students from l'école Georges P. Vanier, accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Roger Doucet, and the students from l'école Héritage, accompanied by their teacher, Ms Anita Johnson. I would also like to introduce a member of my staff, Ms Cindie LeBlanc, assistant director of the Francophone Secretariat, who is a graduate of l'école Héritage. I would ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [As submitted]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly on behalf of the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry a class from New Horizons school, 38 in number. With them are their teachers, Ms Camie Hamilton, Mme Suzanne Le Gars, and Mr. Shaun Wilde. Also, it has been brought to my attention that there is a relative of yours in this group named Paul Matichuk. I would ask the guests to please stand and for this Assembly to give them the appropriate recognition.

Thank you so much.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'd like to introduce to you and through you 17 students from the Neerlandia school. They're accompanied this afternoon by teacher Jim Bosma and parent helpers Rhonda Tischer, Mike Waggoner, Evelien Koekkoek, and Johanne Leonard. They are seated in the public and members' galleries this afternoon. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 42 visitors from the Gibbons elementary school in Gibbons. Along with them are teachers Mr. Don McIntyre and Ms Colleen Lowe and parents and helpers Robin Kathan, Gary Haynes, and Lorna Simpson. I believe they are seated in both the members' and the public galleries. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly today a fine example of the many hard-working and dedicated members of the public service. As chair of the Regulatory Review Secretariat under Service Alberta I am working with Angela Prokopetz, who is a secretariat director. In this fiscal year the busy secretariat will process about 275 requests from departments and regulatory authorities. Of course, all of these require an analysis by the secretariat. Angela is seated in the public gallery, and I would ask her now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed it's a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all the colleagues of our Assembly a lovely lady that is an acquaintance of many of us. She has a very distinguished job, and that is to maintain our minister of culture. I would ask that Angie Goudreau stand up and that our members join me in wishing her a good day and a warm welcome.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure today to have the opportunity to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House 16 individuals who are here visiting the Legislature as part of the Fushimi exchange. It's a junior high school exchange that's operated by D.S. MacKenzie junior high in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford.

I would like to introduce all of them if I could. The teacher that has co-ordinated the program is Ms Christine Cao. The volunteer parents today: Glen Burley, Ann-Marie Cote, and Cyndy Lang. There are six D.S. MacKenzie students, four of whom will actually be going to Japan in July – Ashley Lang, Cleah Takahashi, Cassie Carroll, Corbin MacKenzie, Chris Burley, and Sawyer Marsden – and the most important guests, of course, the six exchange students from Japan. Please bear with me as I try to work my way through their names: Nami Miyazawa, Hirono Takano, Saori Komata, Mei Sasao, Hidetaro Matsuno, and Chieri Namba. I would ask them to

all please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me today to welcome to this Assembly 15 travelers from the Northwest Territories, including four members of government from both the territorial and the municipal governments. They're here to present to the Legislature a resolution, passed on March 5, named the Right to Water, and I have a laminated copy here which they have asked me to pass on to the Premier.

Let me introduce them: the MLA for Yellowknife Centre, Robert Hawkins; the MLA for Fort Smith, Michael Miltenberger; city councillor for Yellowknife, Paul Falvo; city councillor for Yellowknife again, Kevin Kennedy, with his wife, Roberta; Martin Kennedy; Christa Domchek; Juniper Falvo; Daron Letts; Doug Ritchie with Ecology North; Raymond Beaver from Fort Smith; Gilly McNaughton; Steve Whittaker; Martin Dubeau; Archie Smith from Fort Smith; Alex Beaudin; Tom Unka from Fort Resolution; Phillip Bealieu, Fort Resolution; Lindsay Telfer; Leila Darwish; and Meredith James. I'd ask them all now to stand and have the recognition of the Legislature.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Mr. Perri Garvin. Perri has been involved in the labour movement for the past 30 years as a board member, a delegate, a shop steward, and a health and safety activist. Perri became a delegate to the Edmonton and District Labour Council in 1987 and was just recently re-elected as their recording secretary for his 10th term. He has been with the Alberta capital region's United Way for the past seven years as the labour co-ordinator and has worked with over 200 locals in the Edmonton region. Perri's work brings unions in the community and the United Way together in helping to make the Edmonton region a better place for all of us. Every year union members contribute a substantial portion of the United Way's fundraising goal. I would now ask that Perri rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a number of environmental activists and citizens concerned about the uncontrolled growth of the Alberta tar sands. They're here today to recognize International Water Day and to call for a moratorium on oil sands development, something that we in the NDP have long been calling for too. I was present today at their rally and commend them on their hard work and dedication to environmental issues. I will call each of their names, and please reserve applause till the end: Lindsay Telfer, executive director of the Sierra coalition; Leila Darwish, associate director of the Sierra coalition; Meredith James, Mackenzie Wild co-ordinator; along with Meghan Newman, Alli Conroy, and Mike Neuman. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:10

A second introduction is Robert Hawkins. Robert serves as the MLA for Yellowknife Centre in the Northwest Territories Assembly.

Robert was elected to the 15th Legislative Assembly in 2003. He was educated at SAIT and graduated as a mechanical engineer. He's here today as well to add his voice to the growing concern about the environment and the effects of industry. I'm very honoured to introduce him to our Legislature, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask him now to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have two guests to introduce to you and to the House today. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Paul Pomerleau. Paul is a proud member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers local 424. He divides his time between working in Fort McMurray and at home in Beaumont. Paul is here today to show his concern around the employment of temporary foreign workers despite some of his colleagues being unable to get work here in Alberta. Paul has lived in Alberta all his life. He and his wife spend much of their free time driving their two sons around to hockey practices and tournaments across the province. I would now ask that Paul rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction today is for Linda Duncan. Linda has been a tireless advocate on environmental issues not just in Alberta but globally. She is currently the vice-president of Sierra Legal Defence Fund, a national nonprofit organization litigating precedent-setting environmental cases for Canadian communities. She is also the vice-president of the Lake Wabamun Enhancement and Protection Association, a grassroots organization of residents and lake users concerned about industrial impacts on one of Alberta's recreational treasures. She is an active member of the Alberta Environmental Network's energy caucus as a board member. Most importantly, she's the NDP candidate in the next election in the federal riding of Edmonton-Strathcona. I would now ask that Linda rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have two guests today, and I'd like to introduce them to you and members of the Assembly, two very active women in the city of Edmonton. First of all, Docia Lysne is a tireless advocate and constituent of mine in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. She is a home provider with the Elizabeth Fry Society and vice-president of Planned Parenthood in Edmonton. She is very active in the Unitarian church and works with the Kara Family Resource Centre in Edmonton, who provide safe environments and programming to enhance the self-esteem and independence of low-income families.

Also with her today is Marion DeShield. She is the former leader of the national black women's coalition and is a senior citizen volunteer with a seniors' centre here in Edmonton. By the way, Mr. Speaker, Marion will be celebrating her 87th birthday in June.

I would now ask that both of them rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

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

Mr. Neil McCrank, QC

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 1998 the Alberta Utilities and Energy Board has regulated the safe, responsible, and efficient development of Alberta's energy resources under the

watchful eye of its chairman, Mr. Neil McCrank. On February 21 of this year Mr. McCrank announced his retirement. His significant role in increasing the public's awareness of energy and utility issues will be greatly missed.

A native of Val d'Or, Quebec, Mr. McCrank graduated with a bachelor of law degree from Queen's University and was admitted to the bar in 1971. After coming to Alberta from Ontario in 1979 to work with the Alberta Attorney General, he served as a special prosecutor, assistant deputy minister for the criminal justice division, Deputy Attorney General, and deputy minister of the Alberta Department of Justice until his appointment as chairman of the EUB. During his tenure with the EUB Mr. McCrank has served on numerous national commissions, steering committees, task forces, and review panels related to emerging legal issues.

Mr. McCrank embodies the finest values of service to the public. He is an active community volunteer and currently serves as a board member at a number of educational institutions and professional organizations.

On behalf of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta I would like to thank Neil for his service to Albertans as chairman of the board during this period of unprecedented growth in our energy sector. His leadership of the EUB will be missed, and on behalf of my colleagues and this Assembly I wish him all the best in his retirement.

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

Wetaskiwin Sports Hall of Fame Inductees

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday I will be attending the Wetaskiwin and County Sports Hall of Fame banquet. This event celebrates Wetaskiwin's impressive history of athletic competition. This year five individual and one team are being recognized for their excellence in sports and for their outstanding contributions to the community.

Valerie Greenwall-Weldon will be inducted as an athlete for her distinguished play in softball. She represented Alberta at a number of national competitions, including the western Canadian championships in 1974, the Canada Summer Games in 1977, and the Canadian junior Olympic team in 1978.

The late Tom Dorchester will also be inducted as an athlete. He was considered the Gordie Howe of chuckwagon races as he consistently won races from 1937 to 1981. Mr. Dorchester was inducted into the Canadian Cowboy Hall of Fame in 1982.

Willie Littlechild is being inducted as an athlete builder. He participated in numerous sporting events, especially hockey, as an athlete and coach. He represented Alberta at the world aboriginal games and the 2006 Canada Senior Games. As well, Mr. Littlechild has been inducted into the Alberta and Saskatchewan hockey halls of fame.

The late Ralph Pocock is being inducted as a builder for his work in building the Wetaskiwin curling rink and tennis courts. Mr. Pocock played a pivotal role in developing minor hockey in Wetaskiwin.

The Brightview Huskies hockey team is being inducted for accomplishments as a team. The Huskies were Wetaskiwin district champions from 1946 to 1952 and from 1943 to 1952 lost only three games while winning over 100.

The final inductee and special award recipient is the late Vern Henry. Mr. Henry was involved in numerous sports, including midget fastball, girls bantam soccer, and minor hockey. He also was chairman of seniors curling in Wetaskiwin.

I want to congratulate all of the inductees for the distinguished contributions to the sport history of Wetaskiwin.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Water Management

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every living system has limits to growth, and this has seldom been recognized by this government on development issues. Overallocation of the Oldman and Bow rivers systems, groundwater contamination from oil and gas activity without adequate groundwater monitoring, and threats to the quality and quantity of the Athabasca River from oil sands development have shocked and mobilized not only Albertans but citizens from the Northwest Territories, as we've seen today. Albertans are looking for enlightened leadership on our finite water resources, only 2 per cent of Canada's freshwater supply.

An independent water study commissioned by this government, the Rosenberg report, highlighted the lack of planning, investment, science, and action on Water for Life at a critical time when these are most needed. Population growth and climate change have increased the demand for wise and integrated water management. Another example is the need for collaborative planning on the eastern slopes, the source of all of our water in the province.

Integration is also clearly needed between government bodies such as Energy, Environment, and Sustainable Resource Development, that continue to compromise both land and water resource through lack of full consultation. But full integration also requires good science. We don't have the information we need on groundwater, even in the upper Bow River, our primary population water source. We know that water withdrawals affect both surface and groundwater. They're connected but in unpredictable ways that must be defined in each region. All major development must have cumulative impact assessments before approvals, as the minister has admitted in the House yesterday, but this government continues to make development decisions without that framework and without cumulative impact assessment.

1:20

Meanwhile the government has denied and delayed action on climate change, the most profound and unpredictable threat to human security on the planet, with added impacts on our water. Water is our lifeblood. It must guide development decisions above economic considerations. Alberta's future will not be defined by oil but by how we manage our water and place limits on growth. They will not accept any compromise on the future.

Thank you.

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

Joffre Carbon Capture and Storage Project

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to speak about a carbon capture and storage project near Joffre and Prentiss, in my constituency. This project, led by Glencoe Resources, captures carbon dioxide from the MEGlobal and NOVA Chemicals petrochemical complexes southeast of Lacombe. Once captured, the carbon dioxide is converted into a purified and liquefied form. This liquid CO₂ is then sent through an 80-kilometre pipeline grid into oil fields in the Ponoka area. It is projected that this particular project will capture about 365,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year, or about 1,000 tonnes a day. This is the equivalent of taking 80,000 cars off the road. This will reduce the emissions for the two petrochemical companies by at least 25 per cent.

CO₂, when injected into certain types of partially depleted oil fields, has the ability to enhance the recovery of oil that would not be recoverable without the CO₂ stimulation. This is good news for

our province as it can represent a large increase in oil recovery from these depleted oil fields. As a result, Alberta will gain the full potential of these valuable resources.

Capturing carbon dioxide also represents a positive for the environment. Instead of releasing CO₂ into the atmosphere, this project will turn it into a valuable asset. There has been much discussion recently about managing the effects of carbon dioxide emissions. Two weeks ago Prime Minister Harper and our hon. Premier announced the creation of the carbon capture and storage task force. This task force will find solutions to implement carbon capture technology on a large scale. I hope that the task force will take the opportunity to come to my constituency to look at the Joffre/Prentiss carbon capture project. This is an innovative project that is a perfect example of what we are doing here in Alberta to solve greenhouse gas challenges, and I look forward to the adoption of this concept throughout our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Millwoods Cultural and Recreational Facility Association

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I attended a celebration of a significant group in my constituency. Inscribed at the bottom of the cover of a classy black-and-gold program was: building the community's dreams. If you heard those words in another context, you'd probably think that was an advertising slogan or the target for a fundraising drive. In this case they were not hype but a description of achievement.

The Millwoods Cultural and Recreational Facility Association is not simply one organization that has grown up on the coattails of a growing community. In many respects MCARFA has grown Mill Woods into a dynamic community, a community that if incorporated would be Alberta's third-largest city. Thirty years ago "Mill Woods cultural association" would have been an oxymoron. A friend of mine, writing a field trip manual for Edmonton public schools, was encouraging teachers to look at the resources on their doorsteps, in their own communities. "That's all very well for the rest of you," a teacher in Mill Woods complained. "Here all we have are strip malls."

The fact that this is no longer true is due largely to MCARFA. An arena complex; the Mill Woods golf course; the Jackie Parker park of picnic sites, trails, and an all-season pavilion; a 440 track adjacent to two high schools; and a rollerblade, skateboard, and bike park are projects that MCARFA has brokered among 10 community leagues, city, and provincial funding when no one group or level of government could have done this work on its own. A spray park and adventure playground are set to open this summer.

These achievements are more than fundraising and organization. They represent an impressive mobilization of volunteers across local neighbourhoods and cultures in a larger spirit. MCARFA brings together resources and contacts in an effective way that is a model for other communities.

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

Temporary Moratorium on Oil Sands Development

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our political environment reached a tipping point sometime last year. Research and scientific consensus and numerous public opinion polls combined to push some other political parties past the point of no return

on their emissions policy. Suddenly it's considered good politics to talk about emission reductions. But Albertans have good reason to be skeptical about Conservative and Liberal plans for emission reductions. The Liberals say that they would cap emissions only years into the future, while the government says that we don't need absolute reductions at all.

What neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals are willing to admit is that unless you are willing to manage growth, particularly in the development of the tar sands, then you can't manage emissions. The NDP has called for a short-term moratorium on approvals of new tar sands projects and expansions of existing ones. We understand the connection between pace of development and attempts to control greenhouse gas emissions.

By contrast, the Premier is on record saying that the government won't press the brake and has warned of dire consequences should Albertans attempt to manage the development of our tar sands. Similarly, the leader of the Liberals said that a temporary moratorium would be like locking the brakes on a speeding car. The moratorium we propose is only a short-term measure but an important one. Alberta needs a plan to deal with the serious economic, social, environmental, and infrastructure impacts of tar sands development.

A temporary moratorium on new approvals will allow Alberta to catch its breath and to get caught up. The management of our nonrenewable resources must be done in a way that lays the groundwork for a post oil energy world. It is time to talk seriously about using our present tremendous wealth to invest in a truly sustainable economic environment.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Bill 205

Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 205, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007.

This is an act that will help forestry and oil and gas industry to meet some of the targets that our Environment minister is looking at under Bill 3.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a first time]

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

Bill 207

Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce private member's Bill 207, the Child Care Accountability and Accessibility Act.

The purpose of Bill 207 is to increase the number of high-quality, affordable child care spaces available in our province. This will ensure that parents are better able to find the care that they need for their children. The bill will also improve accountability and transparency surrounding child care in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 207 read a first time]

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

Bill 208
School (Restrictions on Fees and Fund-raising)
Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce private member's Bill 208, the School (Restrictions on Fees and Fund-raising) Amendment Act.

The purpose of Bill 208 is to eliminate school fees and fundraising in Alberta's public school system. All Albertans have the right to schooling from K to 12, and the ultimate responsibility for education funding rests with the government. This bill will provide relief to parents struggling with costs of school fees and ensure that students have equal access to education in our province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a first time]

head: 1:30 **Oral Question Period**

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

St. Joseph's General Hospital

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past hour we have spoken to a woman whose father died from the MRSA superbug after contracting it at the hospital in Vegreville. This woman's father contracted the infection at the Vegreville hospital in 2003. He was moved to a facility in Viking, then to the University of Alberta hospital, where his infection was treated very seriously. He was eventually transferred to a long-term care facility, where he died of MRSA. In the fall of 2003, this same woman has told us, she contacted her MLA, who is now the Premier, to raise her concerns about safety and treatment issues at the Vegreville hospital. To the Premier: did he take any action based on the concerns that were brought to him about the hospital at Vegreville?

Mr. Stelmach: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is suggesting that I had some contact with an individual. I don't know who he's referring to. Usually in this House documents are tabled with respect to information when they're pointing special attention to either the Premier or any member of this House. So, first of all, there's protocol.

Secondly, this is a serious matter, and I find it very upsetting that it has to come up in the House.

With respect to an individual patient, we are very concerned about the health not only of the patients in St. Joe's but in every facility in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a very serious issue. Again to the Premier: can the Premier tell this Assembly and all Albertans if any other persons have died as a result of the breakdown of infection control at the Vegreville hospital?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, this Leader of the Opposition is making an assumption, nonprofessional. I'd like to see the report that has confirmed that as a result of some health care service in St. Joe's hospital it was proven that that individual has passed away. I haven't seen that, so I'd ask him to table it.

With respect to the further protocol followed with respect to St. Joe's hospital, the minister of health can answer.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier on what we all agree is a very serious issue. These are questions that Albertans want answered. Can the Premier tell this Assembly if any other local health professionals, such as dentists, were using the sterilization facilities at the Vegreville hospital?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is an interesting question. I don't know the answer to that question. I will make inquiries. We do have the Health Quality Council on site now looking and talking with the people who operate the hospital and the region to find the scope of the investigation that they're going to undertake. Certainly, that will be one of the things we'll want to know: to what extent was the CSR in the hospital used and for what purposes? But let's be very clear. This is not a situation where it is prudent for the opposition or anyone else to alarm Albertans. The look back that we're doing is being done because there were found to be inappropriate procedures followed, and it bears us to investigate and to let people know.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The public health issues emerging in Vegreville are just the thin edge of the wedge. What about next week, next month, next town? Albertans are worried about whether this government is capable of anticipating future problems and producing a strategy to protect public safety. My questions are to the Premier. We are already aware of one patient who died in Viking after contracting MRSA at St. Joseph's hospital in Vegreville. This patient was transferred several times between hospitals. How many other potentially infected patients were transferred from St. Joe's to other sites?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is not a prudent thing to do – this is a very serious situation, and we have the Health Quality Council looking at it. We've made sure that no further incidents happen. We've made sure that the CSR there is shut down until the investigation is done and appropriate protocols are put in place. We don't know that anyone died of the thing. The hon. member has raised one individual situation and is taking that reference. We'll be happy to take that reference if you provide us with the details and investigate it and any others that people might bring forward. But it's not prudent to do this in an alarmist fashion. It's prudent to do it in a serious manner with an appropriate, responsible review, alerting people to have blood tests done, and following up appropriately.

Ms Blakeman: Again to the Premier. The East Central health region has lost 17 full-time registered nurses over the last year alone. It is common practice for staff to transfer between hospitals for shifts, especially when facilities are short-staffed. What steps are taken to reduce the risk of spreading MRSA if staff from St. Joseph's hospital rotate between facilities?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it is known and understood that the MRSA virus is one which is transmitted hand to hand, or by touch, and that the most prudent way of stopping the spread of the infection

is by properly washing hands and properly disinfecting surfaces. That is something that every health professional knows and understands, and that's something that's being reinforced for them through this incident.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. A final question to the Premier. In Vegreville there hasn't been any sort of government response, public information session, or town hall held to reassure the Vegreville residents. Why has the Premier waited so long to make himself or government staff available for an information session to inform and reassure the people of Vegreville?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we immediately sent professionals to assess the situation. They posted a public health order. The Health Quality Council is there today interviewing people in the hospital and making sure that steps are being taken immediately to deal with this situation. Once further information is made available, we will of course communicate with not only the town council, the chamber, but all of those that may be interested with respect to what we're doing in their hospital, at St. Joe's.

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

Health Care Standards

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government, which has included the Premier for 13 years, has spent that amount of time dismantling Alberta's public health care system. It has politicized the regional health boards. It's accelerated the privatization of health care to the detriment of our quality public system. Vegreville is only one symptom of the problems that have ensued. We have an opportunity here to fix the system before other problems arise. To the Premier: given that the Premier along with the member from Brooks and other members of the so-called Deep Six was part of the group leading the charge to cut essential health services, does the Premier accept responsibility for the inevitable outcomes of these decisions?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the Vegreville hospital, St. Joe's, is not a private facility. Again, innuendo, misleading, giving information that is totally incorrect. Secondly, in 1993 the budget was about \$3.2 billion or so, \$3.3 billion. I believe that over a period of time in that first year about \$200 million was reduced, most of that on the administrative side. The budget today is, of course, the largest per capita anywhere in the country of Canada. I believe our health professionals are doing extremely well in this province. In fact, we have people coming from other provinces to access services here.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, this isn't an isolated case. The decision of his own government has resulted in patient safety problems at the Holy Cross, in the Calgary health region, and in long-term care centres across the province by dismantling the system's capacity to set and enforce standards. Will the Premier admit that the department of health needs the very capacity to set and enforce standards that this government pressed so hard to eliminate?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the department of health has been doing a very good job. We've attracted some of the world's best in terms of cardiologists, oncologists. I mean, this is where people want to practise. We have, of course, the Alberta medical research trust fund, that again is attracting Nobel prize material not only in research, but now we are benefiting from that research in terms of new medical treatments and pharmaceuticals, new drugs, right here in the province of Alberta. I think we've come a very long way.

1:40

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has sidestepped the issue absolutely completely. Will the Premier commit to reassembling the centralized monitoring and enforcement standards in the department of hospitals that were dismantled by this very government in the 1990s?

Mr. Stelmach: What I will commit to is to ensure that we get to the very bottom of the situation at St. Joe's so that we put at ease, of course, other Albertans that may be accessing services in hospitals in this province, find out what the issue was, what the problem was, and make sure that it never happens again. That is what I'm committed to.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

St. Joseph's General Hospital

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. While the Premier may say that he wants to get to the bottom of this, this government's response so far is very similar to the response of the Harris government in Ontario to the Walkerton situation. The Vegreville hospital scandal has threatened the health of Albertans. Today I wrote to the Premier and asked him to appoint a public inquiry to get to the bottom of this matter. Will the Premier accept that recommendation from me and, I'm sure, supported by many thousands of Albertans and appoint a public inquiry?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I've asked in this House a number of times in answering questions that we not make this alarmist. What has happened in Vegreville at St. Joseph's hospital is that there was a breakdown in the protocols with respect to the sterilization of certain equipment, so the sterilization room was closed. The infectious disease specialist who was asked to examine this indicated that because of the breakdown – we're not aware that any blood-borne pathogens actually were transferred, but there may be a low possibility that that happened, and therefore it's prudent and in the best interests of the people there that we do a look back and we ask them to have blood tests done. This is not a Walkerton, and to put it into that context is alarmist. There's no sense making the people of Vegreville area alarmed about this. We're dealing with it.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister says that we shouldn't be alarmed about it, but I think that Albertans would be a lot more confident if this government was seen to be taking clear action instead of giving it off to this toothless tiger, this Health Quality Council. This is for the Premier. Why won't the Premier appoint a public inquiry to make sure not just that the Vegreville hospital is safe but that all Alberta hospitals are safe?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, by having the Health Quality Council there, these are professionals in their field of practice that will assess the situation, find out where the breakdown has occurred. They will report to the minister, and of course the minister will follow the recommendations of that committee to ensure that we even further – further – improve practices in facilities across this province.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Health Quality Council has been in place apparently to take care of these things for a number of years. Where was it? Why didn't it do its job? And why won't the Premier admit that the Health Quality Council was never set up to do this kind of thing and that a full public inquiry, as was eventually forced on the Conservative government in Ontario over Walkerton, is the way that we have to get to the bottom of this?

Mr. Hancock: Walkerton involved a large number of people who were infected by bad water. In this situation the experts tell us that there's low risk. But it's prudent to look. It's prudent to go back and do the tests. This is a far different situation from Walkerton. The Health Quality Council was not the council which was supposed to make sure that protocols were followed, but they have expertise in – guess what? – health quality. That's why we're asking them to investigate why there was a breakdown, bring them in as outside people to determine why there was a breakdown, what should be done to fix that breakdown, and what we can learn from it. They will have all the authority they need to do that. They will report to this minister, and this minister will act on that report.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Water Storage

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As has been mentioned, today is World Water Day, and we here in Alberta are truly blessed with this critical resource. We must continue to use and develop this resource wisely. Our water flow agreements allow us to utilize 50 per cent of the flow of our rivers. We are unable to utilize approximately 50 per cent of our allocation, though, due to lack of storage. It took approximately 30 years to build the Oldman River dam. Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: will this government release its plans for immediate action for capturing and storing Alberta's water or admit that they don't have one?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Water for Life strategy is a good one. It's quite complex. It's got many components to it, and I'll allow the Minister of Environment to respond.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, we store and divert hundreds of thousands of acre-feet of water here in the province, and we now have thousands of kilometres of canals and pipelines. Our 1906 Water Act needs to be amended as it segregates our water into industry, irrigation, and municipal use and prohibits the use of even irrigation spill water when it passes by an industrial location. To the Premier: does this government have any plans to amend this divisive water policy and stop the segregation of water between irrigation, industry, and municipal communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in answer to a question from another hon. member I indicated that the Water for Life strategy is an ongoing process. With respect to storage I

indicated that we now have identified a number of promising locations to do off-stream storage, and we are in the process of prioritizing those opportunities. We're beginning to consult on a more intense basis with Albertans on other aspects of the Water for Life strategy as time progresses.

Mr. Hinman: We're about 20 years too late, Mr. Speaker.

This government's policy on water does not allow for efficient use and wise use and storage of our water. To the Premier: will this government be open and honest, as it claims to be, and release the latest MPE study for on- and off-stream storage that Alberta Environment commissioned them to do?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I actually answered most of the question in the answer to the previous question. We do have at this point an inventory of possible locations for off-stream storage. Work is being done to have a qualitative analysis of those sites so that we can prioritize them, and we do intend to consult with Albertans and discuss the output of that report in due course.

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

Water Management

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The pace and scope of development in this province, especially the oil sands, may be good for business in the short term but is not responsible and will not sustain our water into the future. The recent Rosenberg report, commissioned by this government, was very critical of the lack of knowledge and action on responsible water management in Alberta and identified real risks for the future, yet the Premier has said that he will not slow economic growth. To the Premier: how does the Premier explain to fellow farmers this uncontrolled growth in management?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as one that has grown various crops in this province of Alberta, we do depend on the good Lord to give us a sprinkle from time to time to grow our crops. I mean, without rain we don't have any crops.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you. The Environment minister admitted yesterday in meetings with municipalities that approving one project at a time without doing a total cumulative impact assessment of all activities on our watershed does not serve Albertans. That's also the message of our neighbours to the north, who travelled here for 24 hours to talk to this government about management. Despite the lack of a proper cumulative impact assessment many projects each month are approved in Alberta. To the Minister of Environment: having admitted that the approval process is not adequate to guarantee responsible development, is it not reasonable to slow down development until we have appropriate science?

Mr. Renner: Well, it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, how someone can interpret words in different ways. What, in fact, I indicated to AAMD and C when I was talking with them yesterday was that we are going to be developing cumulative impact processes so that we can improve the way we deal with our environmental approval process. I never indicated at any point in the conversation that the process that we have in place now is not adequate. I just indicated that there is room for improvement, and we intend to move in that direction.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With a fraction of the resources that the Alberta Environment department needs, at .5 per cent of our provincial budget, a fraction of what they used to have, and a massive increase in development and water impacts, Albertans are wondering if the government has received the message that the environment is their number one concern. The Rosenberg report reinforced concerns about gross underinvestment in Alberta Environment. To the minister: when will we see proper investment in Alberta Environment?

1:50

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I happen to be an individual who measures success by things other than the amount of dollars that are spent on me.

As for the specifics on Environment's budget, I encourage the member to await introduction of the provincial budget, which will be coming in due course.

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

Community Treatment Orders

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes after incidents involving persons with mental illness, there are calls for the government to pass legislation regarding community treatment orders. I'd like to ask the Minister of Health and Wellness to explain to the members of the Legislature and to the members of the public viewing QP today what community treatment orders are.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A community treatment order, or CTO, is a tool to encourage compliance with mental health treatments in the community. It's a part of a broader strategy, and my primary concern is finding ways to improve the scope and effectiveness of community-based mental health services. Our goal is to help prevent the deterioration of individuals living with mental illness and to position them to lead a full and productive life to the extent possible. These are individuals with severe and persistent mental illness who are admitted to hospital as formal involuntary patients. They're released when they're stabilized. When treatment lapses in the community, their condition deteriorates, and they are readmitted. With CTOs we can help to prevent this deterioration. A CTO provides a patient with a plan . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, in light of that information I'd like to ask the minister if he's considering legislation regarding community treatment orders.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we are intending to bring in legislation which will involve community treatment orders, but more importantly that will be part of a broader strategy to involve enhanced services in the community to give community-based mental health treatment and to help work with what's called assertive treatment. CTOs should be considered as a last resort when the community health system cannot provide the support necessary to prevent deterioration of someone suffering mental illness.

So yes to the legislation being brought forward this spring but yes also to working with the community to enhance the services that are

available in the community so that we can prevent the deterioration and the necessity for readmission.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister is committed to enhancing the services and working with the community in that regard. I'd ask the minister if he will be working with the community to discuss with them bringing forward this legislation because many groups are in favour of community treatment orders, but others oppose community treatment orders.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we will be bringing forward the CTOs. I want to emphasize that this was recommended by a fatality inquiry last year, that this tool should be available to us. I also have received numerous calls and letters from parents in the community who want to have this tool to help assist with their adult children.

We do want to work with the community groups, associations that have been dealing with mental health issues over the years on what is necessary to provide a full scope of service in the community for persons with mental illness. We will continue to do that not only before the bill is brought forward but right through the process until it's effectively implemented and onward.

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

Farm Worker Exemptions from Labour Legislation

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday a High River man was seriously injured while working with cattle, and like thousands of other farm workers he is not covered by employment standards, occupational health and safety, or the labour code. He is now suing the farm owner for \$1.2 million. The Premier recently made statements in the House that all Albertans are equal, yet this government continues to deny farm workers the same basic rights that others take for granted. To the Premier: does the Premier agree that all workers in Alberta regardless of sector should be protected equally, or are some Albertans more equal than others?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this matter has come up in the House a number of times with respect to protection that farm workers have. There are, of course, those working on family farms and those working on corporate farms. These are the questions that as a caucus we have chatted about. I know that the minister of agriculture and also the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry are looking into the matter and will bring forward to our caucus, in turn, some recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I hope we get past the review/recommendation stage and get to action.

Mr. Speaker, this lawsuit could possibly have been prevented had basic workplace regulations been in place. This would have benefited the worker by helping him to avoid injury and also the employer, who might now not be on the hook for over a million dollars. To the Premier: acknowledging that the costs associated with meeting basic safety requirements and coverage may be

difficult for some agricultural operations to bear, will this government fund these costs and finally move Alberta into the 21st or even 20th century?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in many cases why should we be funding common sense? I mean, if it's a dangerous situation in any respect, just because we have regulations does not mean that somebody is going to follow them. We have many regulations. We have many laws. We have laws that say that people should stop at a stop sign, and they don't. So what is he saying? That we put a policeman at every intersection in this province to prevent people from not following the rules?

Mr. Chase: During the 1990s this government cut back on safety inspectors in all circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that some small farms may deserve special consideration in Alberta's regulation and laws, but current legislation also shields large-scale and factory farms from any responsibility for farm workers' rights and safety. Will the Premier finally agree to put protection for farm workers in place on these large-scale operations?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the large-scale farm operations that I'm aware of have good, quality programs in place in terms of safety because they know that the health of their workers is critical. Secondly, it's also a liability issue for them, and they go a long way in terms of training on a regular basis. So a lot of work is being done by not only small operators but large corporate operators as well.

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

Wood Debris from Timber Harvesting

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What steps are you taking to ensure greater utilization of wood debris left over from timber harvesting in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] Thank you for the cheering gallery here too.

Mr. Speaker, the debris fibre, the slash, that remains in the forest after harvesting belongs to the forest management agreement holder. That FMA holder, that company, is also responsible for removing or disposing of the debris and the cost of that removal in order to reduce fire hazard. There is some fibre intentionally left in the forest to decompose and provide nutrient. As for the remainder, the forest sector, the FMA holder, has the opportunity to process that wood debris for its own uses or to direct it to any other user.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is his department working with industry and others to explore options for wood debris?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The short answer to that question is yes, absolutely. We start, of course, by knowing what we're dealing with, and my department is now reviewing the

potential of the biomass resources in our forests. Three different ministries – Sustainable Resource Development, Energy, and Advanced Education – are looking into opportunities to direct this wood by-product, wood debris, into bioenergy initiatives. I'm happy to report that next week my department is cosponsoring a symposium here in Edmonton looking at bioproducts and bioenergy.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What action is your ministry taking to examine bioeconomy opportunities related to wood debris?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Developing new uses for wood debris offers significant opportunities for sustainable economic growth in communities across Alberta to help us build a stronger Alberta. Both the Alberta Forestry Research Institute and the Alberta Research Council are supporting scientists working to develop value-added products with this debris fibre or biorefining technologies. They're looking at technologies to convert wood debris into transportation fuels, into chemicals, into power, into other materials. In fact, even opportunities for value-added products may soon exist in the plastics, pharmaceuticals, and chemical industries. One energy company, Expander Energy, has plans to convert wood fibre debris into hydrogen for heavy upgrading.

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

2:00

Holy Cross Care Centre

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Apropos of nothing yesterday in question period the Premier brought up my career in radio. Perhaps like many other Albertans he misses me on the radio because now he can't get both sides of the story like he used to. I had one basic rule on my talk show, and it was this: answer my questions, and I'll leave you alone. I'm looking for the answer the Premier promised me yesterday. Can he explain why there was no clause in the contract requiring the owners of the Holy Cross centre to pay the province back with interest the affordable housing grant they were given if that project fails?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I will say that the hon. member sent me a message asking me to stay here for his question, so thank you for the message.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you for staying.

Mr. Stelmach: You're welcome. What I was going to say is, of course, that this is a responsibility of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and he'll answer the question.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, there is a clause in the affordable housing program grant funding. The agreement is between the government of Canada, government of Alberta, and Enterprise Universal, such as you stated yesterday. Under the terms of the agreement . . .

The Speaker: We'll get to it, I'm sure, in the next one.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I guess we'll have to get the hon. minister to table that so we can read it. I've got constituents left, right, and centre calling my office, and they want answers to all kinds of questions they've got about the Holy Cross, going back years. So I'll try again with another question, and I don't want to hear about the affordable housing task force. Its report, which the government continues not to release to the public, is irrelevant to this question. Will the Premier direct all government departments to include a repayment with interest clause in all government contracts?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can't say that now. I'll have to investigate further and see what it applies to in all departments, what it means. Most certainly, we'll investigate and get back to the hon. member.

The Speaker: You want to supplement, hon. minister?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I do want to say that the recipient must return the grant or the unused portion of grant including interest.

The Speaker: Okay. The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been looking for that answer for a few days now. Again to the Premier, and I promise that if he doesn't make fun of my old career, I won't make fun of his although, I suppose, both can involve shovelling some manure. Will the Premier please make clear to this House, the taxpayers of Alberta, and the constituents of Calgary-Currie how much money his government is going to lose on the Holy Cross gambit if the Grey Nuns affordable housing project fails to go through and get built?

Mr. Stelmach: Very tempted to – no, I won't go that way although I am very proud of my heritage, Mr. Speaker.

But specific to that, if the minister can answer in 15 seconds, fine. If not we'll get it to you.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, very clearly: none.

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

Affordable Housing Task Force Report

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll come back to the housing task force. Those of us that were on that task force heard numerous and often heart-wrenching personal accounts of people struggling to deal with our housing crisis. I said the other day that it is a crisis affecting thousands of people in this province. This task force: there were big expectations. The government set it up with a lot of fanfare. I'm now asking the Premier: in retrospect would the government now reconsider and release this publicly as soon as possible rather than waiting to put a political spin on it?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we recognize, of course, as a government that critical shortage of housing is a real issue for Albertans. It's a quality of life issue, and we're going to work very quickly. We've got the report. We have to build the recommendations. The minister has to bring those to government caucus, to our cabinet policy committee, and in the end to cabinet. We're working very quickly. The minister said May. We'll try and do it even earlier than that.

But, you know, let's not lose sight of the fact that it's the first time that we have members from both sides of the House working on a committee. [interjections] Saying there's something secretive: there wasn't. They were there. The Liberals were there. We were there. Let's work co-operatively together toward one common goal.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, that's all well and dandy that the opposition was on. We appreciate that. But we have calls coming into our office: a 71-year-old woman having to go to work to pay her rent. Rents are going up \$500 in some cases. It's happening all over the province. My question to the Premier is: what do I say to these people? Just hang on; we've had a task force, and we're going to review it; don't worry about anything: is that the statement that the government is giving us?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member can say is that this is the first time that this House got together on a very important issue. We're collectively working toward the response to the report. Some of these solutions will not be overnight. There's a critical shortage; I agree. But we're going to have numerous recommendations to determine how it will be approached: working with the private sector, the public sector, trying to find the most efficient, cost-effective way of delivering more housing in the province.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the simple truth of the matter is that this is not operating in an open and transparent manner. This report is there, ready to go. The government can respond to it when they want. People want to know what's in that particular report, Mr. Premier. My question to him is simply this: is this the new idea of government transparency, that we wait to put a political spin on a report that should be out to the people of Alberta? Is this what he means?

Mr. Stelmach: One of the things about having an all-party committee is that he'll know if there's a political spin because he was on that committee, unless you can't remember what's in that report. What a stupid question.

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

Funding for the Calgary Health Region

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary, with a population of over 1 million people and over 30,000 people moving to it in the last year alone, is facing tremendous pressures in health care. Yet for every resident Calgary health region receives \$1,064 while Capital health receives \$1,174, over 10 per cent more. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. How can the minister justify this significant disparity in funding between Calgary and Edmonton?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very important to keep in mind that funding for health is not as simple as counting up the number of people and allocating the dollars on that basis. It's much more complex than that, and it's important that it is much more complex than that. Population growth rates of course are factored into the funding formulas, but attention is also paid to demographics and health services provided. Calgary has a relatively young population, a well-educated population, and we know that health status tracks education. But regions that have a greater number of seniors, for example, get relatively more resources

because medical care for seniors costs more than medical care for young people.

The Calgary health region was allocated in excess of \$2 billion in the 2006-07 budget, which is an 8.2 per cent increase over the '05-06 budget. Calgary and surrounding communities . . .

Dr. Brown: My supplemental question is for the same minister. Mental health care services have a tremendous impact on quality of life in our communities. The Calgary health region receives about 20 per cent of mental health funding in the province but is expected to serve the needs of over 35 per cent of its population. How can the minister justify that disparity?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, funding is done not just on a question of counting up people; funding is done on a basis of allocation for the services provided and based on the demographic modelling that is done with respect to the area.

For the details with respect to mental health funding I'll talk with the Mental Health Board and determine, again, whether that's being done on an appropriate basis. But it's not as simple and it's intellectually dishonest to take a look at funding strictly on a basis of numbers divided into dollars. You need to look at the people you're serving, the services you're providing, and what is absolutely necessary to be done.

Dr. Brown: My second supplemental is for the minister of advanced education. Over the past 10 years the Calgary health region has predicted and is continuing to predict that over the next 10 years we will need approximately 3,300 physicians. With the government in its present program what is it doing to ensure that adequate resources are put in place at the University of Calgary to train these physicians that'll be needed in southern Alberta?

2:10

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said many times in this House, we're working with all of the postsecondaries to get an approach that is a Campus Alberta type of approach to the health workforce plan, the workforce plan in the province. We're working with the three ministries that are involved in providing regional health authorities with the trained staff that they need. As it relates to the University of Calgary, we are in discussions with the University of Calgary for other health care professionals, just as we were with Mount Royal College.

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

Foster Care

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Providing care for children is an essential and noble task, and foster families provide an exceptional example of this. However, current circumstances are putting children and foster families at risk. Following the death of a child in foster care in January, social workers have spoken out, telling Albertans that there are too few foster families to care for the number of children in need and too few front-line staff to provide the support and monitoring essential to protect children's safety. To the Minister of Children's Services: can the minister please tell us if this labour shortage has affected the amount of monitoring and support available to ensure the safety of children in foster care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd start out by saying that we have thousands of foster parents that are doing a terrific job in this province. Our number one priority will always be the safety and the well-being of our children in care. So what I can tell you is that that's one of the reasons why we have a rigorous screening process that continues today, including home studies, reference checks, criminal record checks, medical references, first aid training. We also know that every child is unique. Every family situation is unique. We do continue with stringent guidelines on the number of children within each foster home.

Mrs. Mather: We have heard that overloading, the practice of asking foster parents to take in more children than they should be eligible to take, is increasing due to the shortage of available foster homes. To the Minister of Children's Services: do foster families have the right to refuse to take in additional children if they believe that they will not be able to provide the necessary care for those children?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is that they do have the right. Just to give you a little bit of information on the guidelines that we do have: new foster parents can have a maximum of two foster children in their home; experienced foster parents can have a maximum of four foster children in their home. Sometimes we have exceptions if we are trying to keep siblings together. In those cases both the foster parents and the caseworkers would agree on that placement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been reported that because of Alberta's current shortage of foster families children in need of care are sometimes housed in hotel rooms to wait until a family is available. Can the minister tell us how often this is happening and how long these hotel stays usually last?

Ms Tarchuk: I'll get the information for the member. I do know that several weeks ago I had looked into that. It's very, very small. I think that in very unusual circumstances, with the proper individuals to stay with the children, we looked at 12 cases for very short periods of time last year. But I'll follow up with that information to you.

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

Affordable Housing Grant Program

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are hearing daily from Albertans about the lack of affordable housing in Alberta. In Red Deer-North we are very fortunate to have a beautiful apartment complex that has 26 affordable housing units and 20 transitional housing units along with some market rental rate units. This building is now being sold, and it has come to my attention that as long as the affordable housing grant money is paid back to the government, a new owner is able to remove all affordable and transitional housing rental rates and charge full market rental rates. This leaves many of the present tenants with anxiety and fear about where they're going to live. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: does an owner of an affordable housing property who has received government funding have the ability to sell the property provided he does not intend . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very aware of the concern throughout the province and housing being very much a priority. Yes, the owners do have the right to sell. If the property is sold, if that individual who buys that property maintains the same purpose for the property, the conditions will continue. If the property is sold to someone who wants to change its intent, then it's pro-rated over 20 years. If that individual sells the property in a shorter time period, then it's pro-rated, and the money has to be paid back.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: is there any way that we can make adjustments to these agreements, where the new owner would agree to honour the existing terms and conditions that would keep these facilities as affordable housing units?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, what happens is that we have to abide by the same rules that an individual who is the proponent does in the terms and conditions, so if the building is sold, then we have to assume the agreement as well. If we put too many restrictions on an agreement, that will also reduce the level of participation.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I hope that we can find a way to fill that gap. Can the minister of municipal housing advise what this government is doing to increase the number of affordable housing units that are available?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you are aware and have heard many times, we have brought forward a task force. The hon. member from the third party mentioned his valuable input. I want to say that the work that the task force did is very critical to the direction that this government goes. The integrity of the work is important, and we want to make sure that we have the right responses and the right directions because the work was very valuable.

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

School Closures

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier suggested that he would listen to any Albertan that came forward with advice about how to improve the province's school closure policies, and I'm happy to provide that advice. To the Minister of Education. Yesterday I tabled a petition signed by a thousand people that suggests that it would be a great move to amend the School Act to allow the school closure process to be 18 months instead of the short timeline it is now. Would the minister like to take that advice?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, closing schools is a tough decision. I know it's foreign to our friends across the road, but some of us are elected to make tough decisions. The public school board is elected to make tough decisions, and they are making those decisions. There is a process in place, and I believe that it is serving well. Decisions have to be made, and they are making them.

Dr. B. Miller: Well, Mr. Speaker, other jurisdictions in other provinces provide an appeal process on school closures, for example, so that school board decisions can be reviewed impartially if it seems that the correct procedures are not followed. This appeals process can give parents, educators, and students a voice when they

feel that the system lets them down. Will the Minister of Education accept my advice and implement an appeal process for school closures?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, what is the right time? Is it 12 months? Is it 18 months? Is it five years? Sooner or later decisions, tough decisions, have to be made, and that's exactly what the Edmonton public school board is doing: making tough decisions.

Dr. B. Miller: And the whole community is in an uproar.

The Edmonton school board is meeting tonight and will be making a decision on the closure of High Park school and other schools. If the minister refuses to call for a moratorium on school closures, as the Alberta Liberals urged the Premier to do yesterday, will he at least commit to an open and public review – you like task forces – of the closure process to make it more human and in the interests of community vitality?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, under the School Act the decision whether to close schools or not is in the hands of the public school boards. If we start meddling in what the school boards are elected to do, these would be the first people who would be telling us that we should be staying out of the decisions of the local school boards. So you can't have it both ways.

The Speaker: There were 90 questions and answers today.

head: 2:20 **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter I sent to the Premier requesting a public inquiry into the recent events at St. Joseph's hospital in Vegreville.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table several documents from Mr. Paul Pomerleau, a union member with IBEW. Mr. Pomerleau is very concerned about the use of temporary foreign workers, particularly when there are numerous people in the building trades who are looking for work.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is from a constituent of mine, Robert Murphy. He's concerned about the lack of spaces for apprentices at NAIT – his son has been trying to enrol for his fourth year for over two years without success – and that there is a great shortage of tradespeople at this time, and a large number of students would like to finish their apprenticeship programs.

My second letter is from another constituent, Neil Evans, calling on the government to take action to deal with global warming and carbon dioxide emissions: "If as a province, country and society we fail to act, and the experts prove to be right, what will we say to our grandchildren?"

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to table a number of individual letters with the appropriate numbers of copies that call on this Assembly to support that the accused killer of Joshua John Hunt be sentenced and tried as an adult due to the nature of his crime, his past criminal history, and that he is close to the age of 18 years.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Goudreau, Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture, responses to written questions 20, 21, 22, 23 asked for by Ms Blakeman on behalf of Mr. Tougas on May 15, 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, responses to written questions 24 and 25 asked for by Dr. Miller on behalf of Mr. Taylor on May 15, 2006.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader?

Well, there being no question, perhaps the Government House Leader would like to respond to the phantom question that we all know what would be.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would anticipate that the opposition and all members of the House would like to know what the projected government business might be when we return after the first of our constituency weeks, in which members will be able to return to their constituencies and touch base with constituents.

On April 3, anticipating the adjournment motion later this afternoon, under Orders of the Day the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, day 10, which of course will then result in the motion to engross the Speech from the Throne. Following that, Government Motion 14, which for members that may not have looked at the Order Paper yet, is a motion to continue Alberta Treasury Branches. It's a motion which needs to come forward every five years. Then under government bills for second reading Bill 6, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2007; Bill 7, the Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007.

On Wednesday, April 4, under government bills for second reading Bill 8, the Vital Statistics Act; Bill 9, the Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007; Bill 10, the Horned Cattle Purchases Act Repeal Act; and Bill 12, the Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2007.

On Thursday, April 5, under Government Bills and Orders for second reading Bill 13, Access to the Future Amendment Act, 2007; Bill 14, Pandemic Response Statutes Amendment Act, 2007; Bill 15, Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Amendment Act, 2007; Bill 16, the Police Amendment Act, 2007; Bill 17, the Limitation Statutes Amendment Act, 2007; and Bill 18, the Judicature Amendment Act, 2007.

The Speaker: Government House Leader, there is a question from the chair for information with respect to the schedule. As the hon. members will not be sitting next week and the hon. members will not return for a number of days, is the Government House Leader in a position to speculate as to when the subsequent motions might be presented to the Assembly about changes in the procedure of the Assembly? It was silent in terms of that first week.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are in discussion with the House leaders and with the table with respect to drafting those motions. I would hope that they would be available during the week

that we return. I had hoped that we'd be at a place where we could put them on notice now and deal with them when we return, but it will take a few more days to get that done, and hopefully we'll have that done by the time we return. We'll put it on notice for that week.

The Speaker: Okay. As a subsequent follow-up to that from the chairman of the Members' Services Committee to the members in the House who are members of the Members' Services Committee, normally there are 10 days' notice given by the chair for a meeting. I would like to put all members of the Members' Services Committee on notice that when these motions are in the House, when these motions are approved, there will have to be a Members' Services meeting essentially the next day, so if you would anticipate some time towards the end of two weeks from now for these motions and block some time out in your schedules. The discussion may be early in the morning as a result of all your schedules.

head: **Orders of the Day**

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

Bill 20

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to move third reading of Bill 20, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, should I call the question, or would you like to participate?

Mrs. Mather: I want to participate.

The Speaker: Absolutely. Proceed.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. It's a good opportunity now to take a look at the estimates that we have and what the intent is. One of the things that I wanted to make sure is emphasized is that Albertans have the environment on their minds these days. Everywhere I go, people are talking about it, and I would really like this government in its upcoming budget to seriously look at doubling the funding for Alberta Environment. I don't see any indication that there's going to be an increase there.

We need a doubling so that it can truly reflect this high priority for Albertans, indeed all Canadians, because all the people that I am aware of are placing a very high priority on this in terms of protecting and enhancing the environment and thinking about our future generations. I know that right now the Environment department has a shortage of staff. I think that we're looking at concerns with climate change and the tremendous and somewhat unpredictable devastation that is coming as a result of that climate change: extreme weather events, new infectious diseases, droughts. Clearly, we have to show significant vision and leadership in this area.

Continuing, I'd like to go on with my concerns about Children's Services, and I'm hoping that the effect of this bill will be that we will actually take a look at some of the serious concerns I raised in the last few days. One of these concerns is about the not-for-profit agencies losing staff to government positions or other businesses because they can't compete with the salaries. They can't increase the salaries to offer any kind of competition to these other agencies. They're barely getting enough money for salaries and benefits.

There's no consideration for heat, food, clothing costs, and maintenance costs. So I'm hoping the effect of this bill will be to take a look at these things more seriously in the upcoming budget.

I also want to talk about the serious problem that we have with addictions. We have more and more young people who are in group homes and various agencies who have severe behaviour concerns and often have addictions, yet we don't have enough beds for detox. We don't have enough beds for treatment. There are agencies other than AADAC who could provide help with addictions. They have the training. They also know how to handle severe acting-out problems, serious mental illness, and violent behaviours, which should be considered along with addictions treatment.

I'm wondering why it seems that AADAC is often pulling agency staff from these other areas because they are trained, yet these other agencies that could well provide the kind of treatment and services that is needed are not getting contracts. We need to look at this problem. We need to get more beds so that we can help individuals so that when they finally decide that they will go to detox and treatment, they don't have to wait weeks to get a bed, weeks that may lead them to change their minds and get involved again with negative behaviours that don't help them move forward.

2:30

Another area in terms of Children's Services is that, you know, we have another case model coming out now. It seems that the old Alberta response model, ARM, is becoming obsolete. That was implemented a few years ago, when you had two divisions of staff: family enhancement workers and core protection workers. That's becoming obsolete. I think that we're finding that there are many more high-risk court-bound families, and social workers are having to deal with far too many files, so these files then are being brokered off and then contracted out.

The model for the youth enhancement and family act was eight to 10 families per worker, where the reality is 22 to 25 on average. So front-line staff's ability to protect children continually goes down because of constant changes within the department. It's no wonder many of them are quitting after very few years of service. The new model even requires mandatory training, so again social workers will be in training for three days at a time and not working on files.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

So we're implementing a new service delivery model at the front end through this new casework model. It's going to give assessors who were formerly investigators more time, actually 45 in total, to do full safety assessments, more complicated than previous investments, and detailed assessments on guardians, caregivers, and all children that might be involved, and then mandatory case conferencing before these files are transferred to a caseworker. But they have no more resources, yet they have the same number of cases or intakes coming through. So families often have to wait for family support workers to come to help them when they're feeling desperate with difficult situations. Children with addictions, often with traumatized parents, have to wait for detox because there are no beds available.

A shortage of foster parents is a growing concern. Children are apprehended and placed in hotels with one-to-one workers because of a shortage of foster homes. These children need safe places to stay. They need the very best possible because of the trauma and stress caused by an inadequate home situation in the first place. Then they're removed from those parents, which further traumatizes them, and they're sometimes left sitting for hours in offices waiting for placement. How are we addressing the foster parent shortage?

I am hoping that this reading will open up some thought toward increasing support for front-line workers and foster parents. What are we doing to recruit, and what are we doing to improve support to these parents? I'm wondering: are you going to increase funding for the implementation of this new model? Are we going to hear that in this budget that's coming up?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

You know, there are apparently champions' sites, which are pilot sites, that have received 15 additional workers across the province. So once this new casework model is implemented, what resources will be added to cope with the work that is at least double that which was required previously?

I'm also very concerned about social worker safety. Social workers can't double up as often as they used to be able to when they make home visits. Stress is higher, hours are longer, and we're putting them at risk at times. For example, they're expected to go into homes, sometimes alone, and have limited access to information that sometimes turns out to be that the parents have assaulted police before or, worse yet, have firearms offences.

I've recently talked to a social worker who told me he has been called at home and told not to show up to court the next day because someone with the means was planning to kill him when he would be trying to serve apprehension papers. Social workers should not be expected to serve legal documents. This should be contracted to process servers.

There was a case in the United States in October of 2006 where a 15-year veteran of the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services was killed while facilitating a visit between a Henderson resident and the woman's 10-month-old son. The state had legal custody of that baby. It's a terrible shock, and it's interesting that the reaction of that state was to increase the number of social workers by a very large number.

I think that we need to be looking at the situation here. I know that social workers now have cellphones and may have bulletproof vests if they are on the CART teams – that's the child at-risk response teams – but what else are we doing to protect these front-line workers? What are the safety procedures? Are they realistic? You know, we can't expect them to be teaming up when the workload won't allow it. I'm asking that we look seriously, hopefully in this upcoming budget, at providing resources so that we can have more front-line workers to improve the safety but also to improve the resources available to our foster families.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly in appropriation bills there's a wide degree of latitude in speaking, but the bill before the House today is supplementary supply Bill 20. Supplementary supply Bill 20 has votes in it for Advanced Education and Technology, Agriculture and Food, Finance, Health and Wellness, Municipal Affairs and Housing, not Children's Services. So under *Beauchesne's* 459, relevance, I would ask that you ask the hon. member – important as it is to talk about the budget, there will be time to talk about the budget. The hon. member has referred to the budget several times in her speaking. This discussion is about Bill 20, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, and whether or not the funds that were outlined in that act ought to be voted. While one normally would ask and allow a wide degree of debate when

voting money and supply, this debate that has been happening is clearly, as the member has referenced herself, about budget.

Mrs. Mather: Can I respond?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. I appreciate that advice. My point is that this has not been included in supplementary supply, and I am wondering why? I know I said a number of times that I'm hoping that it will be in the upcoming budget, but I wanted to stress the importance of these issues. I mentioned environment. I mentioned foster parents. I mentioned addictions. I mentioned safety of social workers. Why aren't they being looked at?

The Deputy Speaker: Well, 459 is speaking of relevance, and as it points out, the minister is right. It's difficult to define, but I would ask the member to focus her comments on the task at hand, which is the supplementary supply bill before the House. Could you please carry on?

Mrs. Mather: I'm finished anyway.

Debate Continued

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I just advise you that you're not the first and certainly not the last to confuse me with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. In fact, it happens on almost a daily basis. I get his phone calls; he gets mine. I get his appointments; he gets mine. If I might just say, there was an occasion when my phone rang, and it indicated that it was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora calling. When I answered the phone, he said, "Yeah. Bruce, is that you?" I started to laugh, and he said: "Did I just call you Bruce?" So, please, do not feel bad. Yes. I will get to the point.

2:40

The Deputy Speaker: We were just speaking about relevance, so if you would focus.

Mr. R. Miller: I will get to the point of the matter, which is third reading of Bill 20, the supplementary supply, No. 2, and we always must be cognizant of the fact that this is the second time this year that the government has asked for supplementary supply.

Mr. Speaker, I have mentioned in earlier phases of debate on this supplementary supply bill my particular concern over the two line items that are being requested by the Department of Finance, and I have yet to hear anybody from the government side offer any explanation as to those two items. I'm hopeful that, perhaps, the President of the Treasury Board may enlighten us today with a little bit of information on those two. It would certainly be helpful in terms of my knowing whether or not to support this bill at third reading.

So for a reminder, we have in excess of \$7 million that is being requested to address losses by pension funds, some endowment funds, and a number of other smaller funds. My question previously has been and remains: how could these funds lose money in an economic environment where most funds are generating tremendous returns? We know that the heritage savings trust fund annually returns somewhere between 6 and 8 per cent. Other funds are up

around 11 or 12, and there are examples of funds that are doing even better than that.

Here we have, apparently, a number of funds that lost a total of \$7 million last year, and I'm wondering which funds those were. I'd like to know if any action has been taken against either the fund managers or the overseers of the investment. I think, also, a relevant question, in light of the fact that the government has now introduced Bill 22, is whether or not the losses suffered by those funds have any correlation to the introduction of Bill 22 and the establishment of the Alberta Investment Management Corporation.

The second item that Finance is requesting – as I've mentioned before and everybody knows by now, I believe – is \$40 million in a lump-sum payment to address the unfunded portion of the management employees' pension plan. This is an awful lot of money being dropped against one unfunded liability when the government has several other pension plans that they're involved in to which they owe a portion of the unfunded liability, not the least significant of which, in fact obviously the most significant of which, is the unfunded teachers' pension liability. There are others, as well, that total altogether in excess of – I shouldn't say in excess because I can't remember exactly what the entire number is, but it's somewhere in the order of \$7 billion for the teachers' pension plan and approximately another billion dollars for all of the others combined, approximately \$8 billion altogether in unfunded pension liabilities.

So here we have a situation where the Department of Finance is asking for \$40 million which, as near as I can determine and, in fact, was confirmed for me by a board member of the MEPP yesterday, virtually wipes out the government's share of that unfunded liability. When I spoke to this board member yesterday, he told me that he didn't really understand why they were being chosen to have their government's share of that particular plan addressed. He wasn't going to complain, of course. They were quite thrilled when the call came that the government was going to address their unfunded liability to the tune of \$40 million. He flat out told me that he really didn't understand why their plan was chosen, not the others. He acknowledged that there would probably be a number of people looking at the teachers' pension plan, as an example, wondering why there was no redress for that unfunded liability.

So my questions to the President of the Treasury Board simply are: why this particular plan, and why this amount? We've yet to hear any mention from anybody on the government side in answer to that question. I think it's only fair that all members of this House have that information in front of them before we support an expenditure of \$40 million.

My last comment, Mr. Speaker. I know that I said this before, and I risk repeating myself. But since we are in third reading, it is my last opportunity to say that this is just a reminder that the government, particularly the new Premier early on in his mandate, has indicated that supplementary supply would be a thing that would be used only in emergencies from now on. As I have suggested the other day when we were debating in committee, the President of the Treasury Board seems to have backed away from that position a little bit. I'm going to be a hound on his trail, and I'm going to make sure that we do our very best to keep them to their word.

Hopefully, supplementary supply will be used for what it was originally intended to be used for, and that is emergency situations only. We've discussed them before, whether it be flood relief or firefighting purposes or, you know, another outbreak similar to BSE. There are legitimate emergencies where a government could justify moving away from their planned budget. But some of the items in this particular supplementary supply certainly do not appear to qualify as a genuine emergency, in my mind, and several others have made that statement as well.

So we're going to be watching them carefully, holding them to their word that supplementary supply will only be used in the future for genuine emergencies. Beyond that the government will be held to account to the very best of my ability to stick within a budget that this House passes sometime later this year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thanks. The hon. member kind of posed a question: that they would like to know more about the \$47 million.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you closing debate?

Mr. Snelgrove: I'd love to.

The Deputy Speaker: This is third reading.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the minister is anxious to get this over with, but I just want to make a couple of comments following through with some of the same concerns. I've talked about it, and I think that the minister is aware of it, that supplementary estimates have become a way of really abusing the budget process. You know, we talked about the fact that we're going to move earlier and that there shouldn't be the same demand. But when I look at these supplementary estimates, maybe the minister might comment about them. We are in – and we've talked about this – a very overheated economy. It's somewhat of a guess to know, if we keep the same pace of development, what sort of money we need for social and physical infrastructure.

For instance, Health and Wellness, Mr. Speaker. We know that there's \$147 million. We know what that's for. It's for the recent settlement with the doctors. But we also know that coming down the stream there are – and the minister of health is here – a lot of other negotiations going on.

I look at the housing. Well, it's a big increase in supports for the homeless. We talked about this task force. The needs are immense out there, Mr. Speaker.

So I guess my question is to the minister. I want to know how serious we are in terms of anticipating some of these expenditures coming up. If we're sort of lowballing it going into this budget, then we're going to be back, faced with the same situation again, with supplementary estimates. I think we all agree that this is not particularly the greatest procedure. I talked about it before: bring a budget in in March, pass it in June, and then come back in July with, you know, millions of dollars. I take it that's one of the reasons with the House leader, that we are attempting to stop that abuse somewhat by having, well, certainly, interim supplies but having the budget and the set days.

I guess that I'm not asking what's in the budget, but I'm saying that knowing something about housing, knowing something about the health care, you know, the crisis that's out there, how serious are we in terms of this budget and really focusing on these problems with the economy that we have? I've called it an economy on steroids. Or are we going to be back in the fall saying, "Well, these problems have increased," with another half a million dollars in supplementary estimates? Then we're defeating the purpose of it.

Supplementary estimates – I think the minister would agree – are not really supposed to be part of the budgeting process. They are there for emergencies. That's what they were there for in the past. Forest fires were often one that we'd have to come back and deal with before. I suppose that if there was a pandemic or something like that, you can't anticipate those things, so there's a necessity to

have them. But I'm worried – I'm worried, Mr. Speaker – that we're not going to be realistic enough in terms of this budget, and we'll be faced with the same thing come the fall. I'd like the minister, if he has time, just to comment about that.

Thank you.

2:50

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is again available if anyone wishes to rise under that. Anyone else wish to participate in the debate?

The hon. President of the Treasury Board, to close debate.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to all the hon. members who have participated not just in third reading but in the other readings. I take very seriously their suggestions that we should not be back here middle of the year redoing funding, and I think this government will commit to that unless there are extreme emergencies or situations that are far beyond any government's ability to project, that we will try to stay out of here.

To the hon. member before: there is no connection to the supplementary supply estimates around Finance in Bill 22. I think Alberta has matured as a province to the level that we need to ensure that we have some of the brightest minds available to look after our – I say collectively "our," all Albertans' – investments to ensure that they are prudently looked after yet returning a good return and that our pension funds and all of our investments are getting the best return. So I think it's a positive step forward.

The hon. member asked about the \$40 million and, obviously, already knows probably more about the investment in MEPP than many other members, but I think it was prudent to take funds that were available at that time in the budget and address a need. Yes, it wasn't enough to address the teachers' pension fund, but it was enough . . . [interjection] Well, you know, every now and then you have surplus or you have to reallocate from within a department.

The Auditor General and the government's rules are strict enough that even the amount we simply move from Infrastructure and Transportation to Service Alberta to pay for the exact same thing – nothing changed in the world. The plane was bought. It didn't get paid for in the time that a new department was created with different responsibilities, and we had to come back here and show you that. So it's no new money, no different money. Yet to satisfy, I think, your concerns and Albertans' concerns and the Auditor's concerns, it's back here.

A lot of what is done is simply to ensure that if there is a reallocation from operations to capital or vice versa, that's addressed here because you voted on it or we voted on it as capital or operational dollars. These changes happen in the course of a year, and that, I think, is appropriate to come back and bring forward into the House.

I'm glad to hear that they don't want to speculate on the budget, but I am terribly afraid – and I've made our Government House Leader very aware – that I didn't really want to still be here debating it in July, but we may well be. If we have to be, so be it.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to close debate on Bill 20.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a third time]

Bill 25

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is again my pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 25, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is so that the different departments of government can continue to operate uninterrupted until the budget

is expected to be passed. This covers the time from April 1 to July 1, 2007. I can appreciate that it's difficult to answer some questions about supplementary supply without delving into the actual budget and what they will do. I will take under advisement the questions that the hon. members pose, but obviously I think that they and we both agree that the government must go on. We will have ample time to debate the budget when it's presented on April 19.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'm not going to belabour the point because I think that as the President of the Treasury Board has indicated, we all recognize that the government must go on. However, I think that it is important that I reiterate my comments from earlier phases of this debate, and they are twofold.

One in particular that I really look forward to is the adoption of new House rules that will give us firm sitting dates, a firm date for the introduction of a budget, which is certainly not a guarantee that the budget would be passed by the end of the fiscal year. But I think that having seen that agreement and knowing the amount of time that it would normally take to have a budget move through this Assembly, there is a pretty darn good chance that in the future, if that agreement is to be adopted, we will not find ourselves here debating interim supply. That is my sincere hope. I know it's the sincere hope of the House leaders, and I think and I pray that it's the sincere hope of all members of this Legislature.

The second point, which I made earlier and, I think, bears repeating, is a reminder to all members that the government is in complete control of the agenda. The fact that we're not seeing a budget until the 19th of April and won't have it passed until sometime in late June or, as the President of the Treasury Board said, perhaps not even until sometime in July is certainly something that was within the government's control and the control of their political party. Had there been some prudent planning on the other side, we would likely have seen a leadership race in advance of December 2 and the House coming back at its normal meeting time, sometime in mid-February, and we would likely have had the budget passed in time for the fiscal year end and would not have had to have the introduction of an interim supply bill at all.

So that is my hope: that we won't be back here again next year having this same debate. I would implore all members of the Legislature to support that House leaders' agreement when those amendments do come forward so that, in fact, that will become a reality.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

The hon. President of the Treasury Board to close debate.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. members for their understanding today. It being Thursday, I'm very happy to close debate on Bill 25.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a third time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading
Bill 1
Lobbyists Act

[Adjourned debate March 21: Mr. Chase]

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and speak to Bill 1, Lobbyists Act. First of all, I want to commend the Premier for introducing this bill, which was long-awaited. I know something is better than nothing, but I think there needs to be a little bit more amendment to this. But as I said, this bill is in the right direction. That's why I commend his efforts. He dared to introduce this bill after maybe 20 years' struggle from different parties, including this present government.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, the first thing that stuck in my mind when I saw this bill was: why now? I mean, when you see the history of this legislation, even the federal government passed legislation a long time ago, in '86, '89. Ontario had their own registration act in '98, Nova Scotia in 2001, British Columbia in 2001, Newfoundland in 2005, and Quebec in 2002, very similar acts. In Alberta a lobbyists registry was one of the key recommendations of the '96 Tupper report's review of Alberta's conflict-of-interest rules. He recommended the inclusion of a registry in an integrity in government and politics act. The Alberta Liberal caucus supported this report.

Then the Alberta Liberal Party campaigned on the lobbyists registry in 2004. In 1996 another Liberal MLA introduced Bill 223, the Lobbyists Registration Act. Even at that time this government knocked down this bill. Again in '97 one of their own MLAs introduced Bill 212, the Lobbyists Registration Act. I mean, the question that comes to my mind suddenly is: why does this government introduce this now after a long, long time? In a democratic country like this one, especially in Alberta, why has this government failed to introduce this bill for a long, long time? I think this government is trying to give Albertans the impression that they are different than the last government, but in reality it is the old wine in a new bottle. They are one and the same.

Mr. Speaker, lobbying is not a bad thing. It's an important part of democracy. In a democracy people should have the right to meet and discuss their issues and concerns with their elected representatives, like MLAs and MPs, and most people do. That's why we get some input from our constituents, and we raise their voice here in this House. This is a good thing. But the problem is that sometimes, you know, when the government is in power for a long, long time, they make some really good friends and then they take advantage of their friendship and try to play the foul game. Lobbying, as I said, is legitimate, but it should be and must be public.

I didn't go through this bill, you know, from page 1 to page 20, but I'm still confused on the definition of lobbyist. It's not clear yet, especially in this bill. I have a few questions to ask after reading this bill. First of all, what if the lobbyist fails to disclose intentionally? Suppose that we have a lobbyist and he or she or the organization – it may be public; it may be private – says: “No. We don't want to disclose something”? Where do we stand? I know that there's a mechanism in this bill that will impose some penalties. How are they going to judge whether this person is a registered lobbyist and disclose? I don't understand this mechanism like the one that we have in the federal government.

Another thing comes to mind, a question I ask myself: if we pass this bill, will the public office holder tell us that they were lobbied, what the subject was, and what decision was made? I mean, it's between the two, between the government and the lobbyist. How would we find out what subject they talked about? This is a serious thing that we should discuss before we pass this bill.

A question about the public lobbyist is that sometimes we have nonprofit, nonpolitical organizations. Most associations need to convince the elected official on certain concerns, certain issues in their area, but what if they are a paid director in an association? I

know that some nonpolitical, nonreligious associations are working for the betterment of their people, but sometimes their directors are paid. They get paid. So where do we stand? I mean, how would we deal with those people?

There's another scenario. If the lobbyist meets this Premier, well, they can say: yeah, we are registered. That's okay according to this bill, but what happens if the Premier called the lobbyist? How will we get the record that the Premier called that lobbyist and solicited information or advice on any subject. It's not clear in this bill. You know, after discussion or after all other members speak on this bill, maybe we'll find the solutions. I want to see this bill be really the best bill in Canada, even better than the federal government's. We should work really hard to find and not leave any loopholes in this bill and make sure that we amend certain things and discuss this again and again and make sure that we prepare such a document that we can lead Canada on this lobbyist registry act.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to remember that it's taken years, as I said before, of lobbying by the Alberta Liberals to finally get through to this Tory government on the need for this. Alberta Liberal MLAs pushed very hard in the past. I discussed the lobbyist registry as part of the review of the Conflicts of Interest Act last year. This is something the Alberta Liberals have been pushing for years. I mean, when we've introduced any motion or any private member's bill since I've been here, I've never seen any motion or bill passed that has been introduced by the opposition members. I don't know what's happening in this House. We are all elected members.

3:10

I mean, it's the same thing. The Alberta Liberal Party introduced this bill a few times, and some of the members from the PC Party introduced this bill. They think it's not a good idea. But suddenly now they think that, yes, we should go ahead. That's why in the beginning I appreciated the Premier. At least, he dared to introduce this bill. This is something really good that I'm pleased the government decided on even though they stole one or two pages out of the Alberta Liberals' ideas. We don't mind. I mean, there are still some loopholes in this bill that have to be filled. Those problems have to be solved before we pass this bill.

This bill brings Alberta to where it should have been 11 years ago if they had really thought about the people who elected them. We are all here working for Albertans. The Liberal Party introduced a few bills with different numbers, and they didn't go through. Now this bill will go through because it's introduced by the Premier. They have the majority. This government always talks about openness, transparency. I don't understand. Why not then? Why now? I would really be happy if somebody from the other party answered my questions. What's the problem if any motion or any private member's bill comes from the opposition party? Why don't they co-operate? Maybe they can add some amendment and pass the motion, pass the bill. Maybe they are allergic to this. I don't know.

I'm struck by the fact that this government rejected the need for a lobbyist registry because the existing one was weak, or sometimes they said that the existing one was bad. Now, after 11 years, 12 years, it's the same bill. They changed the subject a little bit on this one. I still think this bill is not exactly what we even have in the federal government. I want to see this bill better than what we have federally, to ensure that all the members sitting in this House make sure that we work hard and add some new ideas if we really want to be open and transparent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a) does anyone wish to provide a comment or question?

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me first of all say that this is certainly a step in the right direction. I want to give credit where credit is due, to the committee that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora and I served on, in terms of the final recommendation coming for a lobbyist registry along with some other things that are coming forward about cooling-off periods. In fairness to that committee I think there was a fair amount of scepticism on the side of the government MLAs. Again, this is where I think the committee worked well. We got information from other parts of the province, and eventually it was brought forward that a lobbyist registry did make some sense. So I was pleased when the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill told me that Bill 1 would be the particular bill that the Premier was going to bring forward. I think, though, that we do have to take a look at the bill and make sure that we do it right.

I compare it to Ontario and some other bills, and I would make some suggestions at this particular time if it's going to be a flagship bill. I remember that the flagship bill last year was the smoking bill, and we had to bring in an amendment, that the government accepted, about not investing in tobacco companies. So, hopefully, in that spirit we can even make this particular bill stronger, Mr. Speaker.

Some things, I think, need to be looked at – and I think they're fairly serious – to make this a better bill. Contrary to the previous speakers, it wasn't Alberta Liberals that discovered lobbyist registries. They have been in parts of Canada for many, many years, and all of us have advocated for it for many, many years, Mr. Speaker. But I notice that there are two categories in Alberta under the lobbyist definition: a consultant and an organization lobby. In Ontario they have three. The only one that's different, I think, is probably worth looking at. There's a fair proliferation of nonprofits, too, and I think we should be fair, as they are in Ontario. They probably should be included if we're having a lobbyist registry for people. That's a minor point, but I think it's one worth looking at.

We can go into the fines. I notice that Ontario has much stricter, heavier fines than Alberta. That's something we could probably look at.

The big thing, though, is exemptions, Mr. Speaker. It seems from research we've done that they do not allow government request exemptions in Ontario. But we know very clearly that this bill at this stage – we will wait and see if the government does – does allow some exemptions, and I think they're serious exemptions, that really would water down the intent of a lobbyist registry.

The one that we look at that seems to be the one that's really a big potential for abuse has to do with government request exemptions. That is not the case in most other lobbyist registries. You could drive a truck through that loophole. What that means is that people do not need to register as a lobbyist if they've been approached by the government for information or consultations.

Well, Mr. Speaker, let's say that I'm a lobbyist, but I'm a good friend of the government. If I don't want to be registered, I'll just get them to make a call. Then I don't have to register. The government doesn't have to tell us who they're talking to. Now, that is a very, very serious shortfall in this particular legislation, and I'd hope that the government would take that back – we're going to go through Committee of the Whole – and really take a look at that because I think it has the potential to really make this particular registry meaningless. The potential for abuse is immense in that particular case.

I don't know about the monitoring, if that's going to be serious. I think we have to look at that.

The other thing in this business: we've had a one-party state here for many years. The government has been in power for a lot of time,

so there are a lot of what I would call unpaid lobbyists who held public office. It seems to me that they have access to a lot of people in government, especially if it's people that have recently retired, and I think they could fly under the radar of the lobbyist registry. They might be the most effective lobbyists you could find because they know the people opposite.

3:20

Now, I'm going to go on the assumption at this particular time that the government does want this, in fact, to be the Premier's bill, that he can be very, very proud of. So in second reading I'd like to put them on notice that these specific things – there are other things in there that we could perhaps look at and refer – are serious, serious omissions in this particular bill.

Certainly, when we were in the committee, an all-party committee, we made the general principle that we think a lobbyist registry should be there and that we could probably learn from it. We don't have to reinvent the wheel but look at other places. I'm not sure where this came from, this idea of the government getting on the phone and saying, "Come on in. I've contacted you; therefore, you're not a lobbyist." That's a serious flaw, and I would think that the Premier, Mr. Speaker, would want to see, in the nature of transparency and openness – we have plaques and his news conference now – that that is a major, major flaw and at least would do that and the other loopholes that I've talked about.

So, Mr. Speaker, we'll look forward to this going through to committee, and we'll see generally how serious the government is in terms of closing some of these major loopholes I'm talking about.

Thank you very much.

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

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to comment on Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act. Of course, this is something that is overdue, and it's appropriate now for the government to bring it. I'm supporting the intention of this act as an example of a number of kinds of legislation that Legislatures are putting into place throughout Canada, North America, and other countries because it's time to deal with the issue of ethics in the public order. Now, lots of other jurisdictions have dealt with this before this Legislature, so before we clap ourselves on the back, we should acknowledge that there has been a momentum in the direction of dealing with these kinds of issues for some time. In fact, our federal government has already had a lobbyist registry in place for a while, and so have other provinces. Nevertheless, I think this is still a good move.

For a long time I think many people who have been students of ethics have lamented the fact that there seems to be a bifurcation between public ethics and personal ethics. In fact, when I was a student many years ago, we used to talk in those terms, that there are personal ethics, that have to do with family, marriage on the one hand, and then there are social ethics on the other hand, that refer to wider issues of justice within the institutions of society, like political institutions. So I think there was a tendency many years ago to make a distinction and separate the two spheres as if our ethics in our personal life are qualitatively different from the ethics of public life.

I remember that back in the 1970s and '80s, when I was involved with churches and making criticisms of corporate life, there were a number of interfaith coalitions that were very critical of multinational corporations and the actions of corporations in regard to the Third World and so on. The response you often got from people,

even CEOs who were running these companies, was a kind of righteous indignation – you're attacking my integrity as a person – in order for them to kind of: well, I'm a good person. Well, I think we've come to realize that, you know, good persons can become part of systems that are questionable and that it's not enough to make that distinction.

The book and the movie about the Watergate incident are a good example. I remember an incident in the movie where the two *Washington Post* reporters come to the home of one of the Watergate individuals who was involved in the break-in – I think it was Jeb Magruder – and they knock on the door of the home. Magruder's wife comes to the door, and in a very defensive way she says: this is a moral home. But that movie and that whole incident illustrated the fact that people who thought they were good persons, having personal ethics, were going to work in the public sphere, and it was dirty tricks as usual. There was lots of corruption. That has led, Mr. Speaker, to a lot of cynicism about politics.

So I think that through the '70s, '80s, and '90s we've come to accept the fact that you can't make a distinction between personal ethics and social ethics, or you can't distinguish your personal life from public life. We are all human beings, and whatever we do, we are moral beings, and we are acting out, making decisions, and we should be held accountable morally for our actions. So when we talk about attributes like honesty and integrity and mutual respect, those are not just personal virtues; those comprise, really, an ethical code for public life.

We should have such an ethics code for us as legislators, as MLAs. I mean, businesses, corporations, educators, all kinds of professional organizations have developed ethical codes for their professions. It's time that we took a stand and said: "Look, we are going to abide by a high ethical code. We're going to raise the bar high." In fact, that's what the federal government did in its Accountability Act, its first legislative act presented in the present Parliament. So it's time that we attended to this issue of ethics. I mean, we've been given a trust by the people who elected us, a fiduciary trust, so we must care for that trust. We must be good trustees of the trust that they have placed in us.

Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of cynicism in politics. As the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview pointed out, he was a member of the Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee, and I, too, was a member of that committee. When we began our deliberations to look at the Conflicts of Interest Act, we had a discussion of that very issue of cynicism, that so many people in the general public have a cynical attitude about politicians. On any list of people that you trust, politicians are way down the list. So we have a lot of work to do to raise the awareness of people, to reinstall the confidence of people in us as politicians. Having this kind of bill is a step in that direction, to have a lobbyist registry.

If you ask the ordinary person on the street what they think about politicians, they will say something along the lines of: well, isn't it true that all politicians are corrupt or at least are forced to be in a system that is corrupt? Isn't it a truism that many people think that power by its very nature corrupts? That's a widespread opinion in the public. So we have to do whatever we can to counter that cynicism, to pass legislation that embodies the very best ethics that we have. I think there is evidence that democratic governments that do act and base their decisions on the best ethics available – respect and integrity and honesty – are actually the most satisfactory governments in the world. So it's time that we melded together politics and ethics.

3:30

That brings me to the specifics of this bill. One of the things that really bothers ordinary people when they are thinking about the

actions in politics and expressing their cynicism is that they see too often that there is undue influence on politicians. Now, whether they see limousines pulling up to the front of the Legislature to take people away, or whether they read about helicopter trips up to the tar sands, ordinary people ask the questions: "Well, who is influencing politicians? Are decisions being unduly influenced by people who have privileges, have power, have money?" So, for the ordinary person the field is not equal. There's inequality because people who have privileges, have advantages, have more influence on government than ordinary people.

I think the lobbyist registry is a step in the direction of trying to establish an equal playing field for everybody so that people know who is trying to influence government decisions. Mr. Speaker, I think that's the main basis for supporting this kind of legislation: the principle of equality, that it creates a situation in which people can be aware of what kind of influence is being imposed or is trying to persuade politicians in terms of their decisions.

Now, lobbying, of course, is not to be dismissed as something bad as the lobbying is trying to influence politicians to make a decision based on information that a lobbyist can provide. That in itself is not wrong. It's important, then, that such people who want to lobby the government and influence government should be included on a list, a lobbyist registry.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview raising the issue of paid and unpaid lobbyists. The distinction in this bill is basically that there is a "consultant lobbyist," who is "a person who, for payment, undertakes to lobby on behalf of a client." There's also an "organization lobbyist," who is "an employee, officer or director of an organization who receives a payment for the performance of his or her functions."

It's clear that those who have to register in a lobbyist registry are those who in their job are being actually paid by a company to be a lobbyist, or they're representing a client and being paid for their services. That excludes unpaid lobbyists. I'm not sure that I agree with the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I think that we need to discuss this more, perhaps.

I am glad that this excludes people from volunteer organizations and from the not-for-profit sectors of society. For many years before I was elected to this House, I helped organize church people to lobby government. I was part of an organization called the Quality of Life Commission, and none of us were paid for anything; we had no budget, actually. We managed to organize people like Lois Hole and Douglas Roche and so on to be commissioners of our Quality of Life Commission and actually write a report on poverty and then present it to the government. We met with ministers of the government to present the findings of our report.

That's a kind of lobbying. We were trying to influence government opinion, trying to get their attention, and trying to say: look, people who are poor in this province need some help, need more attention than they're getting. This was in the early '90s. Well, we were unpaid lobbyists. So I don't think that people from volunteer organizations, the volunteer sector of society, should have to sign up in a lobbyist registry. I think I support the idea of just focusing on paid lobbyists.

When I met with the Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee, I saw right from the very beginning that there was great support for a lobbyist registry, so we didn't have a lot of arguments, discussion about it. We did meet with representatives from Ontario to see the model of a lobbyist registry that Ontario had already in place, and I think that was very helpful. I realized that members on the government side were very much in favour of a lobbyist registry, so we had some good discussions, but we all agreed that their lobbyist registry was a good idea and that it's time to adopt it.

The exceptions under 3(2)(c) have been raised by other members. I don't recall any discussion of those exceptions, especially the one that has already been noted, 3(2)(c). We'll have a chance in committee to discuss this further and to even, perhaps, entertain amendments. It is an exception to the whole lobbyist registry; namely, that if I as a politician, as an elected official, approach somebody who is a paid lobbyist, then whatever we discuss is somehow exempt. That person doesn't have to register as a lobbyist because I approached them rather than they approached me. I mean, that's a huge loophole, and I'm not sure why that is here. I look forward to the debate in committee to find out why this is here. This kind of undermines the intention of the whole bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) are there any comments or questions? Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to rise and participate in second reading on Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act. This is a flagship bill for this government, and I believe the intent that's being discussed is both timely and important.

Lobbying is important because people need to be able to have access to their elected officials. Lobbying is basically an integral part of democracy because elected officials were elected to be conveyors of ideas, to represent the ideas that they hear from their constituencies to this Assembly.

However, there are challenges to democracy with respect to lobbying. One deals with openness and transparency. Governments are and should be held accountable to their citizens, and their accountability dictates that we have a certain degree of transparency. So I'm wondering if this bill will allow citizens to evaluate the performance of their representatives and their government and to know who has the government's ear at any one point. Who is talking to whom in any particular or given department or agency? They also have to know if taxpayers' money is being spent properly, who is gaining or winning government contracts and why, how much they're paid, why they're being paid that amount of money and for what work. What are the outcomes of these decisions?

I was looking at preamble 5, and I'd like to read it. "Whereas it is desirable that the public and public office holders be able to know who is contracting with the Government of Alberta and Provincial entities": you know, that is just one small part of what we need. We need to know who is a lobbyist, certainly, and we need to define that, but we need to know who they're talking to. So we need to know who is talking to the government, but who in the government is being approached? Who are they actually talking with? That's missing here. Again, this doesn't get into the kind of transparency that we're looking for. Having the name of the person who approached the government without knowing the details of what was being discussed doesn't provide the openness or accountability that we're hoping for in this government.

I'd like to think that the information that was discussed with the minister or deputy minister or some bureaucrat within the infrastructure would be available, that the actual discussion would be in notes, and that people could actually find out what was being said and what was being suggested.

3:40

I also have a concern with respect to keeping things in regulation and allowing the minister or the Ethics Commissioner or whoever is going to be in charge of this piece of legislation to put things in regulation. This could be restrictions on the application of the act.

To which areas does this act not apply? We added members of the House of Commons. We added employees of municipalities. We've added members of Métis settlement councils, diplomatic agents, and others. After this very extensive list we also say, "any other individuals or categories of individuals prescribed in the regulations." I know that the idea of regulations is that it helps keep flexibility, and I think that, yes, we probably do need a certain degree of flexibility but not if it's going to limit the strength of any piece of legislation itself. I'd like to see this legislation strengthened, and I'm looking forward to amendments.

I commend the government for taking this initial step, but I think that simply having a lobbyist registry that indicates who approached government is not enough. I look forward to the strengthening of this legislation because it is absolutely necessary to take things out of regulation and put them into legislation. I think the assumption that we need to trust in the benevolence of a minister and that that is sufficient to make decisions behind closed doors is archaic. It's not acceptable these days, and it's not being transparent.

I'm going to conclude by saying that I look forward to further amendments. I'm also looking forward to working with this government on standing policy committees because I understand that the minutes of those meetings will be available for public viewing and will demonstrate the kind of transparency and openness that we have been asking for.

Thank you.

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

Seeing none, are there others who wish to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will keep my comments brief because I think both the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie and now my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods have made some very good points in terms of the goodwill that the Official Opposition has for parts of Bill 1 and, certainly, the need for some legislation that would see lobbyists registered.

My colleague from Edmonton-Glenora raised the most valid concern that I've heard expressed anywhere yet, and that is regarding section 3(2)(c), which, I think I mentioned in here the other day, is leaving such a big hole in this legislation that you could literally drive a truck through it. I know for certain that I cannot support this bill as it sits right now. I'm hoping that the government will share our concerns over that particular section and, when we get to committee stage and have amendments brought forward, that we can either have that section entirely eliminated or at least dramatically amended so that it would be much tighter than it is right now.

The other comment that I would like to make – and I think my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods touched on it – is that this is a very good first step, a very good baby step, but so much more is needed. Mr. Speaker, I think members of this House are aware of the fact that Bill 2 has sat on the Order Paper now for – I think we're in day 9 of this Legislature sitting, and it has not yet been introduced in this House. I can assure you that I am eagerly awaiting the introduction of Bill 2 because, clearly, there's a need for complementary legislation to Bill 1, and I'm hoping beyond hope that Bill 2 might provide some of that. I do find it curious that we're into the ninth day of the spring sitting and that bill has not yet been introduced. We haven't seen any explanation as to why, although presumably there's still some work being done on it. I hope that that work will go a long ways towards addressing the concerns that members of the Official Opposition have expressed in the past regarding the need for tougher conflict of interest legislation.

As I say, a good start in Bill 1 with the one notable exception. It's certainly something that is long overdue and that, in fact, pretty much puts us light years behind other jurisdictions, not having had any sort of a lobbyist registry. I'm looking forward to supporting it with the appropriate changes that would address the concerns that we have. Hopefully, that takes place in committee stage.

Hopefully, shortly after our return in 10 days' time we'll see the introduction of Bill 2, and we'll have a better sense as to whether or not the government is addressing not just this one particular concern that we've had regarding openness and transparency and integrity of government but, in fact, several of the other concerns that we've raised in the past as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Again on Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two good friends of mine. They are sitting in the public gallery. They are Mr. Wade Izzard – he's involved in the Edmonton-Riverview constituency – and Mr. Rory Koopmans. I request them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Bill 1
Lobbyists Act
(*continued*)

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased that I get an opportunity to speak in second reading to the principles that are put forward in Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act. I am pleased to see that the government has acted upon years and years of requests from members of the Alberta Liberal opposition, the public, and in fact their own commissioned reports. I remember that just before I got elected, there was the Tupper report, in which exactly what is being considered, although not as completely, was in fact suggested, and that report had been commissioned by the government.

In fact, I find it interesting that all the reasons that over the years the government has had for not bringing in a lobbyist registry, many of those things I now find inside the legislation here because I think it's mostly modelled on the Ontario version. That was the version they were most vehemently opposed to. So it's interesting how things come around, Mr. Speaker.

I was very fortunate to attend a COGEL conference. Now, what does that stand for? Something about government ethics and law. Council on Governmental Ethics Laws, I think. It encapsulates conflict of interest, Ethics Commissioner duties, lobbyist registry, and also financial disclosures, which, of course, is a big deal in the States as they have no laws against financial disclosure, and there's

no top limit amount on it, but, boy, everybody's got to fess up to it. They spend a lot of time trying to ferret out the people that are not fessing up to having made what amounts to a political donation.

When I attended that conference, I was really struck by how much time and effort other provinces and various states spend on monitoring and enforcement of the various acts that are being talked about here, and that would include something like a lobbyist registry. So a big part of what's being anticipated here is the monitoring to make sure that it happens and the enforcement, very vigorous enforcement if it doesn't. They had lawyers on staff that chased people down and took them to court and whupped them, and those companies ended up paying a heck of a lot of money for their indiscretions. That's a really important part of what we're doing here. And a mistake that I see this government often making is that they come out with the legislation, but it is very weak on monitoring and enforcement embedded in the legislation, and then they also don't fund it. As a result, we end up with problems in a number of areas, that I could go into at length, but I won't. For the purposes of today's debate I'll stick to talking about the principle of what's in the bill.

So the idea that we the public, the people, the citizens, and in fact the members of the opposition and interested parties, stakeholder groups, would be able to see who is talking to the government, particularly if they are paid. I think that in this case only if they're paid do they actually have to register as a lobbyist. But who's talking to the government? Who in government are they talking to? Is it a particular minister? Is it a senior bureaucrat? Who are they talking to?

3:50

To me, I want to know what they're talking about. That's one of the areas that I have an issue with because when it talks about the communication, it seems to be restricted to legislative proposals, regulations, or orders in council, policies, directives, guidelines, grants, Crown financial transfers, outsourcing, and for the consultant lobbyist the awarding of contracts and setting up of meetings. Well, those are sort of very broad categories which don't tell me much. If a lobbyist, you know, A. Guy, is speaking to the deputy minister of health about a legislative proposal, and that's the only information I get, it's not telling me much. I probably could have figured that out by hanging out in the rotunda and watching who was going by and going into whose office.

I think it's important that this be spelled out enough and it be clear enough that a citizen or any interested party can find out exactly what's being discussed because it makes a lot of difference. If A. Guy, the lobbyist, is talking to the deputy minister of health about, you know, changing the strategy for the blood-borne pathogens, that tells me something much more in depth than saying that they're talking about a legislative proposal. I think that's the level of detail that we need to be seeing come forward out of this lobbyist registry, or really it will have been a lot of puffery about nothing. Frankly, I'm sick of seeing that. I want the real goods delivered here. I want to see the action actually delivered and not a bunch of communication spin that never resolves itself into any action that you can take home or take to the bank. Just to crowd my speech with clichés and euphemisms here. I think that's what really important about that. So, that's one area that I have as a concern around what's being contemplated with this bill.

I think there are also some loopholes here, and from 10 years I can tell you that this government is famous for loopholes. Just off the top of my head, we've got the FOIP legislation. The two biggest loopholes are third party and government policy. Well, you can make almost anything disappear by using one of those two in that, you know, there's a third party mentioned in the documents, and

they won't give their permission to release the documents, so that's the end of that. Well, I think you'd be hard pressed to find a document that didn't mention somebody else, but that's often used as an excuse for shutting things down for us completely.

The other example is government policy. Well, just about anything we talk to the government about could be government policy. Policy advice, I think, is the way it's actually put. So there's another example of legislation that was meant to open up things for the public and, in fact, has been used by this government to close it down and make it more restrictive and more difficult and, frankly, more costly to get information from the government. So when we're talking about a lobbyist registry, I want to make sure from the get-go that this is about supplying real, substantive information, easily accessible without a high cost or a high red tape factor to the citizens.

Now, I've often raised in this House and with the media about the Wednesday night soirees, I used to be successful about once a year in getting the media interested in it. Sure enough, there would be, you know, film at 6 of a bunch of MLAs getting into a little van and being driven off to the Royal Glenora for a wine and dine by some group. As far as I can tell, that kind of activity would not be captured inside of what is in this lobbyists registry act. I think that's an omission, Mr. Speaker, because when I actually did inquire from the whip of the day a listing of who was organized to be the sponsors of the wine and dine evenings, and I compared that with legislation or changes that had come through over a number of years, there was a definite correlation between who had been on that list and actions that were taken by the government. That is very clearly to me a form of lobbying. You know, there was money expended there. A group of people were brought into a room. They were given very specific information, and, lo and behold, that resulted in a change in government policy. I think that kind of activity needs to be covered under what we're anticipating here as a lobbyist registry.

That's around the definition of the lobbyist, but there's an activity that's ongoing that has been identified by many members of the public as something they consider a lobbying activity that, in fact, is not being picked up under what's proposed under Bill 1. So already there's an omission there, or a loophole, if you prefer. And I've identified a couple of loopholes.

Now, I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that I am supportive of a lobbyist registry. I want to see this work, but I want it to be meaningful. I'll be interested to see if the government brings forward any amendments to address the issues that have already been identified or if this is the government's final offer on the table. I think there's an opportunity here. If this government really means it when they talk about openness and transparency, then they will be bringing forward amendments that would seal off some of the loopholes or omissions that are apparent in this bill already. If not, then I'm sure we will be happy and are probably already prepared from the official Liberal opposition to do that. I mean, let's face it. I'm up here without any notes at all, and I have just managed to identify some fairly serious loopholes in this bill already. If I can do that with very little preparation, it's not going to be hard to find a number of other omissions in this bill that should be addressed to make it as strong as it could be.

I don't understand why Alberta, with all of its opportunity, with all of its riches and its resources and its intellectual power from its people, can't be out front on some of these democratic renewals, why we are always behind, why we have gone backwards from the status that we held that made us, you know, in second or third position, and we fall back.

A number of the things that we've just done to strengthen the Assembly: excellent, excellent things. I'm glad to see the support of

people in some of the changes we've brought forward already, but, you know, that brought us into the early 1990s. If we want to come up to 2007, there's a lot more work to do.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I'm seeing the same tendencies with what's in this Lobbyists Act. It's really going back and starting where everybody else was as they brought their acts in. You know, Ontario, I think, came in in '95, and then we've got some of the other ones coming in in '99, in '98, in 2001. So we're way behind the pack, for starters, and we're starting back where they did. We haven't even learned the lessons, or we're not willing to pick up the lessons of what they had learned in the meantime. I think that Ontario's has now been in place for, probably, 10 years, if not more than that, and they have already revised their bill.

There are lessons that we could be learning from what's already rolling. I know that the federal legislation has been in place for quite a while, and they have amended it a number of times. Again, we could be learning those lessons and incorporating them. What do I see us doing? Going back to where they all started. So it's not picking up on those lessons. It's repeating the same problems, and I'm disappointed in the government for doing that.

There are some other issues that I'm sure my colleagues have raised, particularly around the cooling-off time with contractors and lobbyists. Interesting that the bill prohibits people from lobbying the government and contracting with them at the same time. I'm glad to see that in here. I would accept that as a given and would have expected to see it in here, but I think there's no cooling-off period that actually is anticipated in here for these paid advisors. I think that's an area of caution that we need to look to. Perhaps it's appropriate to preclude registered lobbyists from contracting with the government altogether to make sure that the idea of being a contractor and being a lobbyist stays separate.

4:00

There's also an opportunity for unpaid lobbyists because the defining line is about whether or not you're paid. I'm guessing here that they were trying to protect the smaller charitable sector, the NGO sector, from having to take on an onerous task of registering as a lobbyist. On the other hand, what's coming through that would be retired senior officials from any number of sectors who are unpaid but come in to see their old chums on the government side and are in fact performing the same services and tasks that any lobbyist would be doing. But because they're unpaid, they're not going to be registered. I see that as another large loophole and, I think, a lesson that's clearly been learned in some of the other jurisdictions that, again, we're not taking advantage of.

I thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to rise and bring my observations to second reading on Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act. I look forward to continued rigorous debate on this bill, and I do look forward to seeing if the government is going to be bringing forward amendments to close these loopholes.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if there are questions to be directed to the last speaker.

There being none, who should I recognize next? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act, which is the flagship piece of legislation of the new government of Alberta. As such, it

indicates that it is a high priority for the government and a piece of legislation that they want to have associated with the government in order to show that they are at last beginning to close the democracy gap that exists in our province or, as it's often known, the democratic deficit in our province.

There are many aspects to the democratic deficit in this province, Mr. Speaker, which the New Democratic Party and opposition has long been critical of and long offered constructive solutions towards. The particular piece with respect to this piece of legislation has to do with lobbyists, of course, and people who are attempting to influence the government. So in that sense the government is to be commended for at last addressing this issue after many years of pressure from Albertans, from the New Democrat opposition, and from other opposition parties as well.

I think the act is pretty clearly based upon a piece of legislation in Ontario. That would be the Lobbyists Registration Act of 1998 in the province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, as far as the legislation goes, it's fine. It does require lobbyists, both paid and unpaid, both working in private practice and working for different organizations, including corporations, nonprofit organizations, and so on, to be registered. In that respect it is a step forward for the government.

There are some significant loopholes in that aspect of the bill that I want to call attention to. Paragraph 3(2)(c) is a very large loophole that would allow lobbyists to escape disclosure on the registry as long as they have been invited to lobby by the government. Mr. Speaker, the provincial Tory government is not original on this loophole. This loophole has actually been copied from the federal Liberals, who introduced this loophole into the federal law in 1995. When it was finally deleted 10 years later, registrations of lobbyists increased by eight times. It's clear to me that this loophole is very significant and may well be deliberate since it is based upon something that the federal Liberals did in the year 1995.

It's not the first time that we've seen the provincial Tories mimicking the federal Liberals, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, they only mimic the federal Liberals when it comes to the bad things that the federal Liberals do and not some of the occasional good things that they do. One example of a good thing the federal Liberals have done is bring in legislation to eliminate the big money from politics; in other words, to eliminate corporate and union donations from funding political parties. That was a good thing that the federal Liberals did in the closing days of the Chretien government. It was based on something that was done by the Manitoba NDP government of Mr. Doer, and I think that it is rather fundamental to the entire democratic issue in this province.

Unless you get the big money out of politics, politics is not and cannot be entirely in the interests of the people themselves. It is in the interests of powerful organizations who have financial means to pursue their political goals, and it sets the individual citizen at a significant disadvantage.

To come back to the bill, Mr. Speaker, paragraph 3(2)(b) is a large loophole as well, which will allow lobbyists to escape disclosure on the registry when they are lobbying to be let off the hook by enforcement agencies. Sections 6(2) and 6(3) should be changed to prohibit registered lobbyists from working for the government or any politician in any capacity or from having a business relationship of any kind other than as their lobbyist with anyone or any organization that's working for the government. For example, if a lobbyist is working for the Premier, then it would be unethical for the lobbyist to work for any other cabinet minister's department because the Premier chooses and controls all the cabinet ministers. So it would be a conflict of interest. If a lobbyist is working for a cabinet minister and lobbying the Premier or another cabinet minister, the same conflicts of interest would be created.

We believe that a new section should be added prohibiting lobbyists from working in senior positions on the campaigns of any candidates for office, and I would hasten to add that that should include working on provincial leadership campaigns. Such work creates clear conflicts of interest as lobbyists do favours for candidates, and the candidate may feel obliged to return them if they win. I think that we need a section that would require lobbyists to disclose approximately how much in total they're spending on each campaign.

Mr. Speaker, the conflict-of-interest law must also be broadened so that it covers the staff of ministers and politicians and senior government officials and bans them from becoming lobbyists for a period of a number of years, perhaps a sliding scale, one to five years, depending on the importance of the position that's involved. Certainly, our recent former Premier's involvement in the private sector would be covered by such an amendment to this bill.

4:10

The lack of a cooling-off period is perhaps the largest single flaw in this bill, Mr. Speaker. When you have a situation such as the case with the former Premier, who has intimate knowledge of the intentions of government, the strategies of government, and the thinking of government and then takes a position in the private sector, it always raises the question as to whether or not the information that that person has acquired in the public service is then being put to the benefit of his employer for commercial reasons. That's why a cooling-off period is fundamental.

Mr. Speaker, those are my comments, primarily, with respect to this bill. It's an example of the government getting it half right. We've seen this with respect to the task force on housing, where the government gets it right by involving people in the housing business and the nonprofit community and putting members of the opposition on the task force but doesn't get it the rest of the way in terms of disclosing the report publicly so that there can be public debate before the government makes up its mind.

This government has taken a half-step forward. They get part of this, but they don't get the whole thing. This bill, in my view, is another example of that imperfect understanding on the part of the new government of dealing with the democratic issues in this province, and it is a seriously flawed bill as a result. I think it could have gone much farther and actually become a significant contribution to improving the state of democracy in our province, but in doing that, it has failed.

Mr. Speaker. Those are my remarks. I thank all members for their kind patience, and I'll take my seat.

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

That being the case, who shall I recognize next?

The hon. Government House Leader to conclude the debate, or shall we call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

**Bill 3
Climate Change and Emissions Management
Amendment Act, 2007**

[Adjourned debate March 20: Mr. R. Miller]

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My comments will be very brief this afternoon, and it's nice to know that members opposite appreciate that. You would almost think it was Thursday afternoon and that people wanted to go home.

Mr. Speaker, the one thing that I want to get on the record is that about two and a half years ago, shortly after the November 22 election, when I found myself elected as a member of this Legislature, my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View told us at a meeting – perhaps it was the first meeting of the Official Opposition caucus – that climate change in particular and issues around the environment in general would be the issue of the next election. I have to confess that I wasn't so sure that he was right, but when you look back now nearly two and a half years later, it is quite clear that issues around the environment have risen pretty much to the top of public consciousness.

Whether you talk about water and the diversion of water from one basin to another, whether you talk about the Water for Life strategy and the fact that the government hasn't funded it, whether you talk about the transboundary issues facing Albertans in relationship to our neighbours to the north, as we saw with members of the public in the gallery today, or transboundary issues involving Albertans and the people of the state of Montana as was referenced by the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, or whether you talk about issues of transboundary water with our neighbours to the east in Saskatchewan, this is a common theme almost wherever you go in Alberta.

Certainly, issues around carbon emissions have risen to the fore. In fact, surprisingly, this government is now introducing the first carbon tax law in the country. I hear members opposite applauding the fact that they're introducing a carbon tax law. Let us be mindful that this is the same government that only a matter of months ago would have scoffed at the idea of instituting a bill dealing with carbon tax. In fact, undoubtedly – undoubtedly – we on this side of the House would have had all sorts of taunts thrown at us about our federal Liberal cousins if we had suggested that they should do so. So how times change; how times change. It really is in some ways refreshing to see the foresight and the intuition that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View had when he made those comments two and a half years ago. I think he might well prove to have been entirely bang on with his comments when the next election does come around.

I know that there are many members wanting to speak to this today. If you were to review the comments that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View gave during his remarks in second reading of Bill 3, I think he probably said everything that there is to say with the exception of one thing that I will indicate I have to learn more about. But on the surface it certainly looks to me as if the idea of keeping the offsets within Alberta is something that I can support. I'm not a big fan of the offset program, as a general rule. It's not something that I like the idea of. I know that isn't necessarily in agreement with all of my colleagues, but I have to learn more about it before anybody could convince me that that really is going to be effective. But in my own mind I will say, Mr. Speaker, that if there are going to be offsets and trading, if we can keep that in Alberta and benefit industries in Alberta and benefit the people of Alberta first, on the surface that looks to me as if it would be the way to go.

So we'll continue to have that conversation in our caucus. I'll continue to read and attempt to learn more about the offset program and how it might work here as opposed to some of the ideas that others have espoused, whether it be trading on a national level or, of course, on an international level. But that is one thing in this bill that certainly has attracted my attention.

As was said earlier when we were discussing the lobbyist registry, there is no question that this is a good first step. It may not be

everything that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View would have hoped to see in this bill, and it may not address all of the concerns that any number of people that are concerned about our environment have, but certainly it is a step in the right direction, a step that's long overdue, and ultimately, I'm going to guess, a step that will likely have the support of the Official Opposition in this House. Even though it may not go near far enough, it certainly is a step in the right direction, and I'm going to suspect that in the end we will support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

There being no one, then I shall recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased to rise and speak to Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. The government's plan for climate change has a distinct clause that makes it less effective in reducing emissions in an absolute sense. Their reliance on emissions intensity as their measure to reduction instead of focusing on moving aggressively to absolute reductions makes this bill and the accompanying regulations ineffective.

Mr. Speaker, "absolute emissions" is the term used to describe the total volume of emissions from a particular source, whether it is an exhaust system of a vehicle or a stack from an industrial facility. Emissions intensity is the amount of greenhouse gases released measured against another factor such as GDP or a barrel of oil. A more fuel-efficient car will have lower emissions intensity than a less efficient model, but the two cars may still have the same absolute emissions if the more efficient one is driven farther.

4:20

If the current rate of economic growth in Alberta continues, the province's emissions could rise to 72 per cent above 1990 levels by 2020, so our absolute emissions would rise dramatically even if the government's target of achieving a 50 per cent reduction in emissions intensity by 2020 is achieved.

What is the outcome of these new regulations? They will jeopardize our ability and Canada's ability to meet the Kyoto commitment, jeopardize Canada's commitments to achieve much deeper emissions reduction targets for post-2012 commitment periods, that will become more necessary given the ultimate objectives of the UN framework convention on climate change, and will create a burden for the rest of Canada by transferring responsibility for emissions to the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, the outcome is that industry will be faced with the prospect of trying to achieve two different sets of regulations: one provincial and one federal. If the federal government regulations are more aggressive, the provincial government will not negotiate a new position unless it is for the federal government to match Alberta's plan. This is not in the spirit of co-operation and could jeopardize industry because they will have two different sets of standards and could possibly face two different sets of carbon taxes or penalties paid if they exceed an emission target. This is certainly not in the best interests of industry.

There is also an issue with Bill 3 in that it's not consistent with federal legislation in the form of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. In certain areas such as limitation period or confidentiality of information there are differences.

Mr. Speaker, we should not be supporting this bill for the simple reason that it will continue to rely on emissions intensity rather than moving toward absolute hard caps on emissions. An Alberta Liberal

government would establish an absolute emissions limit by 2012. This is absolutely necessary to achieve any real reduction and to have any impact on climate change in the near future. It seems that while the rest of the world is moving quickly to tackle climate change through aggressive measures, the Alberta government refuses to move away from allowing pollution to increase without firm action. Alberta could be at 70 per cent above 1990 levels by 2020 with no end to an increase in absolute emissions in sight.

Mr. Speaker, some of these measures have merit in principle. At least some action is being taken, but it's nowhere near enough. For instance, allowing the purchase of offsets to encourage industry to become more efficient is a good step, but limiting this system to within Alberta borders is not necessarily the best way for industry to purchase offsets.

The world is moving toward a global system. In fact, it's up and running, but Alberta will be left behind due to these regulations. A problem with a carbon trading system only within Alberta is that it is very limited in size, which could limit how many players enter the market. The price could become distorted, and companies could end up paying a very hefty price for credits to offset their emissions. There's no need to rely on an Alberta-based carbon trading system when there are other established markets to buy credits from Alberta. We'll still see an economic gain as we become more efficient and have more buyers of our credits.

As well, it seems that allowing new companies coming online to be excused from the emissions intensity reduction of 12 per cent immediately is not necessary. New facilities that come online after 2000 have no requirement to reduce their GHG emissions intensity until their fourth year of operation, at which point they will be required to reduce their GHG emissions intensity by 2 per cent and increase that level yearly, up to 12 per cent in the ninth year of operation. There should not be different standards depending on the year an operation began. All emitters should be – should be – on the same level playing field in the interest of fairness. There is no substantive reason why new emitters should be exempt from the regulations for four years.

Mr. Speaker, the government's decision to implement the 12 per cent reduction starting July 1, 2007, and forcing compliance at the end of 2007 is something that industry is unhappy with. There is absolutely no way that the large emitters can make the changes necessary to avoid paying into the technology fund, and the reaction of industry is not something we can easily ignore. The government needs to plan better and allow industry time to get prepared to comply with the new rules when technological change is required.

A more balanced approach would be to set out a time frame for industry to comply realistically with new targets and then move them toward absolute reductions. If it's the government's job to provide regulations that can foster lower carbon dioxide emissions, industry needs to know that regulations are in place to reduce the negative environmental effects of production and use. Unless government and industry work closer together to move faster on carbon capture and storage, for instance, implementation of such proven technology will crawl along, and future generations will pay the price.

Mr. Speaker, we are very disappointed that at this critical time in the future of Alberta, of Canada, and indeed the entire world our government has failed to take the necessary steps to really fight climate change. There was an opportunity here for this government to talk to industry and to our federal government and come up with a real plan for real reductions in absolute emissions. This is what Albertans and Canadians want, but what we have received is a bill that will do nothing to stop our GHG emissions from increasing. While everyone else is prepared to make real changes and govern-

ments show real leadership, we are stuck with the same old, tired government that hasn't really changed its position from the year 2003. Fifty per cent reduction in emission intensity in 2020, the same goal as in 2003, will do absolutely nothing to stop the effect of climate change. This government refuses to listen to the science, to the people, even to the industry, who are prepared to move on climate change, and have stubbornly refused to deviate from their old and tired plan.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, this bill represents exactly the same old Tory government, stuck in the past and refusing to do what needs to be done for the future of Alberta and the world. At a time when government leadership is vital, especially in Alberta, our government does not know whether to lead or be cheerleaders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should there be participants.

There being none, then might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

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

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me to be able to introduce three guests today. They decided to stop by and see how we work here in the Legislature. It's those three up there. First of all, I'd like to introduce to you my niece Rebekah Oudman from DeMotte, Indiana – she's studying education at Dordt College, Iowa – and her friend Joanna Esselink from Emo, Ontario. She's studying fine arts, also at Dordt College. Now, most kids in college on a spring break go to Cancun or Miami or some nice place, but these kids have actually come to Alberta to see how we do things here. We're glad to have them here. The third one is my son Lorne. He is attending NAIT at the Souch campus. He is an apprentice welder at Syncrude in Fort McMurray, and he's taking some time out to upgrade his skills at the Souch campus, which is the NAIT campus on the south side of the city, and enjoying himself there with about 200 or 300 other welding apprentices. I ask them all to stand up and receive the warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, we're indeed honoured. Such an invigorating afternoon we're having here this afternoon that it should just inspire the members to even be that much more articulate.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading
Bill 3
Climate Change and Emissions Management
Amendment Act, 2007
(*continued*)

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to rise and make some comments on Bill 3, the climate change

act, and I'm very pleased to have this opportunity to lay out some of our views on the bill and on the broader issues dealt with by the bill.

We will not be supporting the bill, primarily because it's indicative of some very fundamental misunderstandings the government seems to have about climate change, greenhouse gas emissions, and how efforts to fight global climate change have to be integrated with other economic measures. We need to make sure that our province participates in what has rapidly emerged as a global effort to reduce global climate change, and this is an effort in which this government has not taken part in a meaningful way up until this point.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Last week the Minister of Environment launched another round of consultations on climate change, which tells me the government isn't too sure about the issue. It was interesting to note that they used the same logo, the same news release, more or less, and the same shtick generally as the previous Environment minister used five years before, and that tells me, Mr. Speaker, that the only thing this government is interested in recycling is environmental policy.

We know that Canada is the eighth-worst contributor to greenhouse gases in the world. Alberta was responsible for nearly 40 per cent of those emissions. In fact, seven of the top 10 industrial emitters of greenhouse gases are located in Alberta, so we have a problem. Canada produces about 2 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions but only represents .5 per cent of the entire world's population. Greenhouse gas emissions rose 40 per cent from 1990 to 2005, and that was very significant.

Mr. Speaker, according to the Pembina Institute the newly approved Kearl oil sands mine project – they say that Imperial Oil failed to develop a plan outlining how they would reduce greenhouse gas pollution from the Kearl oil sands project. This is very troubling, considering that this project would emit about 30 per cent more greenhouse gas pollution per barrel of oil compared to a similar project. Oil sands operations are the fastest growing source of new greenhouse gas emissions in Canada, and new oil sands projects could account for up to half of Canada's projected growth in business-as-usual emissions between '03 and 2010.

Mr. Speaker, we need tough regulations in place to force the major emitters to change their ways. These megacorporations have no incentive to go green without a strong push from the government. The AEUB has consistently failed to consider the cumulative environmental impact of tar sands projects and expansions. Examples that I have used already: the Kearl oil sands project, the Voyageur project, and so on.

Mr. Speaker, electricity is Alberta's second-highest emitting sector and has increased its emissions 31 per cent over 1990 levels. Our electricity comes from coal-fired plants, which are significant contributors to greenhouse gases.

The Pembina Institute estimates that at the current rate of economic growth – and this is very significant; this is really the nub of the argument here against the government's plan for emissions-based CO₂ reduction – the government's plans will allow emissions to rise 72 per cent above 1990 levels by the year 2020. Mr. Speaker, that's a 72 per cent increase in real emissions even if this bill is passed.

The dangers posed by climate change are very well documented. Alberta is particularly vulnerable to changes in water supply and the effects of severe weather on crops. Just look at the problems we're facing now with the pine beetle, Mr. Speaker. That is directly a result of climate change because it takes 40-below winters for a sustained period in order to kill back the pine beetle infestations. These are a normal part of the ecosystem in these forests, but we

haven't had those kinds of conditions in northern B.C., where this has spread, for a number of years, so the infestation has just continued to grow because the winters required to kill back the beetles no longer exist. That's why we're faced with this.

So the economic cost in another industry of doing nothing about CO₂ emissions is enormous, and these kinds of costs will spread from industry to industry to industry. If the government continues to put all its eggs in the basket of the oil and gas industry, they're going to cause some very, very serious problems.

Mr. Speaker, the root of the issue is not just about emissions. They're just one measure of the relationship between our economy and our environment. Every day this relationship is becoming increasingly clear to Albertans. Every barrel of water that is sent down a well to bring up a little more oil is a barrel of water that can never be used for drinking, for agriculture, or to support wildlife. Every megaton of pollution that's poured into the sky increases the rates of respiratory illness, cancer, and other illnesses. To put it in the starkest terms: we may live by the economy, but our children may die by the environment. The current pace of development is having enormous costs for average Albertans. Huge sums of money are flowing out of Alberta, but the pollution stays here.

The second really important point that I'd like to make is that notwithstanding the approach of the government of reducing emissions intensity, which is like telling someone that they can have as many cupcakes as they want as long as there's a little bit less sugar in each batch as they go along, you know, we're not going to make real differences. The Liberals want to wait 10 to 20 years before they put in place some hard caps. [interjections] Well, I have some clippings here quoting the Liberal leader as saying that. What neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives realize is that unless you manage the growth in the economy, particularly the tar sands development in this province, you can't affect emissions.

4:40

You have to have some plan for growth and for managing the pace of development in the tar sands, and we can do that to maintain full employment in our province, to keep the economy humming along yet prevent disastrous impacts in the environment, in the area of social changes, shortages of labour and shortages of housing, difficulties dealing with infrastructure and so on. That's the approach that we favour. This is the approach also that former Premier Peter Lougheed has talked about. He said: why should we have more than one tar sands project under construction at a time? He said: we have to start thinking like owners.

We own this resource. We don't have to dig it up as fast as the Americans want us to so that we're exporting raw bitumen and the jobs with it or that we're importing major plants from China instead of building them here or that we're only getting 1 per cent on most of the tar sands development or that we're going to be faced with enormous problems with CO₂ production, that we're going to have to pay for carbon offsets when a carbon market comes here. We have to start thinking about the people who own this resource, which is the people of Alberta, and we need to make sure that the development takes place according to a staged plan so that we can catch up on the infrastructure needs that exist in this province.

But the current government's direction, as far as I can see, is to not touch the brake on the economy. That's what the Premier has said: we're not going to touch the brake. Well, at the same time, the United States is saying that they want us to increase our production out of the tar sands by five times. So if George W. Bush is pressing his foot right down to the floor on the accelerator and the Premier is afraid to touch the brake, then you know where the province of Alberta is going to end up, and that's in the ditch.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that we need to be real about climate change. It's a real, serious issue. It will affect not just us but our children and our grandchildren. We have to get serious about it, and I'm of the view and our party is of the view that unless you address the pace of growth in this province, you will be unable to put any meaningful measures in place that will control the output of CO₂ from this province. This province has become a serious player in CO₂ emission in the world. It's a big player. We produce a lot of CO₂, and if the plans go the way the government seems to want them to go, we're going to be even bigger still.

Mr. Speaker, the whole approach of emissions intensity is a false approach. It allows massive increases in the output of CO₂ into the atmosphere, which affects the climate. The climate doesn't care whether the emissions intensity is reduced or increased or anything like that. The climate only cares about the total amount of CO₂ that's put into the atmosphere. This bill doesn't deal with that in any meaningful way, and as a result it is absolutely irrelevant to the whole question of climate change, which it claims to address. Therefore, our party and, I'm sure, hundreds of thousands of Albertans will be rejecting this bill and rejecting the approach that the government is trying to foist on Albertans.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to speak to Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. We appear to be scrambling to catch up to both the science that has been there for decades calling for action and the public, who are increasingly vocal, anxious, and angry that this government has often put industry and other interests ahead of the long-term future of Albertans and our ethical responsibility on the planet. It's interesting that we're choosing to rush ahead of the federal government and put something out that will give the impression that we are really with it and that we're concerned and that we want to take a lead. But in order to really take a lead, we must align ourselves and find some common ground and work together with others in this country and, of course, the international community, which we have already made a commitment to through the Kyoto protocol.

If we are serious about addressing climate change, we must talk about two general areas. First of all, of course, reducing emissions clearly is a priority. The second whole area though is about action and adapting and paradigm shifts, that our public are now paying for the results not only of weather events that are occurring at an increasing rate and the droughts that are increasing but also the results of health costs, which industry is imposing on all of us as a result of the decline in air quality and impacts on human health. We must look at our global commitment to the ethical action and leadership that we need. Clearly, we need to fit in with other countries and, in particular, our federal government's initiatives. I think our public is looking for leadership.

We live probably in the richest place on earth and probably the most technologically progressive country in the world and do know that we are addicted to the income from industries just as much as the public is addicted to fossil fuels for all of our activities. We have to be part of the solution. The people of Alberta want to see strong leadership on this issue. It has exceeded health care in interest and support in this country, and it's not being truly reflected in Bill 3. A 2 per cent reduction annually in intensity for these newer emitters is not going to result in real progress in this province.

If we are serious about smart growth, about sustainable growth, then we have to look at putting measures in place so that we

understand what sustainability really means in terms of preserving and protecting the social, the environmental, and the economic values. I think that industry is looking at us too for some more clarification on fixed targets. They need these in order to do their business plans and to actually make clear commitments to new developments. There's a lack of clarity with this bill, and many businesses and industrial developments are unsure of what to do with this bill.

This bill needs to be integrated with other aspects of our land-use planning, agriculture, forests, and, in particular, water use, and urban development. It is disappointing that this bill deals with intensity targets rather than caps on emissions. Many members on this side of the House have spoken with knowledge and passion about the need for fixed targets.

Will there be changes now as a result of the federal plan? Was it because we want to be seen as a leader in addressing the issues on climate change that there is a rush to put forward this bill that is flawed? Will we be a leader by harmonizing and working with the entire country?

We have a global and ethical responsibility for our planet, we are interconnected, we must be trustees of our planet, and we have the potential to be world leaders.

The basic principle of carbon causing greenhouse emissions has been validated by the scientific community for over two decades. Unfortunately, politicians and media have given it a spin that has caused confusion for the public. The role of government is to do the right thing. We are supposed to be stewards of our land and resources. The right thing to do is reduce incentives for fossil fuels and increase incentives for the clean, renewable energy. It is disappointing that these essential steps are not addressed in this bill.

Albertans are increasingly aware of the tremendous business opportunities in conservation as well as the value of carbon in enhancing agriculture, capturing methane, solar, wind, and geothermal power for our world. It's time to give these options, along with distributed electrical generation, the same incentives that fossil fuels have received for decades in this province.

Thank you.

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available again.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on the debate.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to talk for a little while on Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. As other speakers have indicated, this is probably the most serious issue that humanity has ever faced. We've known about it for a long time, so this kind of bill, even if it is considered by some to be a step in the right direction, is overdue. We should have been dealing with this kind of issue decades ago.

The scientists have been studying climate change for many, many, many years. Many, like James Hansen, a NASA scientist, told the U.S. Congress that human beings were dangerously heating up the planet through the use of fossil fuels. Actually, when he presented his findings to the U.S. Congress, it was in 1988, so that was a long time ago. At first he tended to be marginalized, and there were many naysayers, and there were people who were posing as pseudo-scientists wandering around North America trying to deny that there was a serious problem with climate change. But that has changed, as the accumulation of scientific data has been gathered, and the public now is, obviously, really onside, and it's convinced that there is a serious issue here to deal with.

The United Nations, for example, has set up an organization called the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the IPCC, to collect

the information from scientists to bring it all together, to collate it, and to publish their findings, their judgments about where we're at in regard to understanding climate change. In 1995 in their report they said that the balance of evidence suggests that it is human beings and their activity that is increasing the planet's temperature, and it is a really serious problem. Human beings, we're burning far too much fossil fuel. So that warning was taken seriously by lots of countries, and that led to the negotiations leading to the Kyoto treaty. That was a big step forward, and Canada was a party to that treaty. Unfortunately, the United States was not.

In 2006 the same organization, the United Nations' organization Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued its latest report, which really startled the world even though it wasn't saying anything basically new because it was based on accumulation of scientific findings up to that point. They said that they were more certain than ever that global warming, which is so far only about one degree Fahrenheit in the average global temperature, is caused by the activities of human beings.

They went on to document that by talking about the amount of carbon that is in the atmosphere. It's increasing at a far greater rate than ever before. We can expect further rises in temperature throughout the world. Almost all frozen areas on earth are melting, including the Arctic ice cap, so that will lead to the rise in the levels of the oceans, and we all know that.

As all Albertans, we go on a regular basis to the mountains, and we see how the Athabasca glacier has receded through the years, and it's quite startling. Even in the 30 years that I've been in Alberta, it has receded to quite an extent, and a lot of people are worried. You know, glaciers are the origin of most of our rivers as they flow across the prairies. To what extent will that be a problem in the future? When you listen to authorities like Dr. Schindler at the University of Alberta, we should be alarmed. We should be alarmed about the future.

The same report, the IPCC United Nations report, talked about changing weather patterns, hurricanes, tornadoes, heavy rainfalls, heat waves around the world, and that all the strange weather patterns will get more extreme in the future as climate change has that kind of impact on the world.

The most disturbing comment in that report though – and this brings us to this bill – is that even if we cease the increase in coal and oil and gas burning that is going on now, cease to have it rise, the temperature of the world will continue to rise. There are a lot of scientists who are now saying, very pessimistically, that it may be too late to stop the climate change that has been going on for some time, so just holding things at today's levels will not really turn things around. What we should have done – and this is decades ago – is we should have been more aggressive about cutting back greenhouse gas emissions.

What we need is to talk about a reduction in emissions, and we need to be aggressive about that and do something drastic now. The Democrats in the U.S. Congress are bringing a bill to Congress calling for an 80 per cent cut in emissions by 2050. That kind of move is to look at an actual goal, setting a goal of reductions, not an emissions intensity approach, which is the emphasis of this bill.

I have real problems with this bill. It doesn't really do what we need to have done. The emissions intensity with a staged-in approach and the ability of companies to buy offsets from other industries and so on: it seems to me that that's not aggressive enough. I like a quote from the Pembina Institute, which is the government's favourite institute on the environment. Their response to this bill is that, really, it's a joke. There's nothing here that is going to lead to a reduction in emissions, so what is the point? I'm glad we're considering this issue, but this bill doesn't seem to go far enough at all.

We need to set out a time frame for industry. We need to set out definite goals and targets, and industry has to know what our goals are. Of course, they have the technology; they have the know-how. They are moving fast to put the appropriate technology in place, such as carbon capture and storage. What they need to know is: what are the actual goals of Alberta? When the playing field is levelled and all the companies know what the goals are, then they can be busy trying to deal with the issue because everybody recognizes that it's a huge, huge problem.

The problem is that in Alberta there's not enough political will to deal with this issue. Companies are ready to deal with the issue, and industry is, but the political will is not there to take the leadership. And that's been a problem in the whole of the modern western world.

Mr. Speaker, I've been dealing with the issues in a broader way in terms of ethics and ideological positions on understanding nature and the created world and how human beings have dealt with it, and it's been especially in the west, not in the east because in eastern countries they've had long traditions of caring with compassion for the earth. You only have to think of religions like Taoism. The ancient Chinese had a long tradition of being able to deal with the harmony of human beings with the world around them. That's basically what Taoism was all about.

But it was especially in the west – and I'm ashamed to say this, but it came out of Christian teaching – that we felt that we were mandated as creatures under God to control the world, to dominate the world even, to subject the world, to subdue the world, and we have become really successful at that. In fact, the traditions in the west, the mythologies of the west have led to a kind of ideology of domination of the world. Now we look back and say: "How did we get to the position that we are so powerful that we can destroy the planet that we live on? How can we now turn that back and recover other values, like the idea of stewardship of the earth, caring with compassion for the earth?" In order to do that, Mr. Speaker, we have to have a more aggressive approach to dealing with climate change than we have in this bill.

5:00

Alberta has to take the leadership because Alberta among all the provinces is producing the most greenhouse gas emissions in Canada. So surely it's here in Alberta that we have to take the most creative and aggressive position to deal with greenhouse gas emissions. Alberta's greenhouse gas emissions have continued to increase to 40 per cent above 1990 levels even as early as 2004. Our energy sector, electricity sector, new coal plants, the mining sector, especially the tar sands, are contributing to greenhouse gas emissions as never before, and we have to take some leadership.

Most of us, Mr. Speaker, have seen Al Gore's movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*. It was very well received. I hope that members on the government side have all seen it. If they haven't seen it, then they have to update their knowledge of the current science. It even received an Academy Award, I believe. I think that the public is going to put more and more pressure on governments to deal with climate change and deal with it in a much more aggressive way than this government is doing.

Those are my remarks. They're fairly general remarks now, and I hope that when we deal with the bill, we can look at a lot of the specifics.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 3.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 5

Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, [some applause] and thank you, hon. member. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 5, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

I'd like to begin by requesting the support of all members of this Assembly. Mr. Speaker, Bill 5 is an omnibus bill. It amends five health statutes.

Amendments to the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act will improve access to practitioner records so the department can confidently verify medical claims and will strengthen the committees used by the Minister of Health and Wellness to review health care claims.

Currently the department's ability to review practitioner records is limited and requires practitioner consent. Amendments will enhance the department's authority to fully audit practitioner records to ensure that services have been provided as they've been billed. This is a response to the Auditor General's recommendations and the public's expectation that government be accountable on how public funding is being spent.

At present the minister may utilize reports and recommendations of a committee established in the act when reassessing health care claims. The current committee structure is inflexible. Membership from some professional associations and colleges is mandated. Other professional associations, as well as members of the public, are excluded. We're addressing these structural problems by providing for the establishment of a roster of health professionals as well as public representatives. From this roster committees will be established as required. Committee composition will vary. Members will be selected based on the requirements and complexity of the review.

Proposed amendments to the Health Insurance Premiums Act will reduce the administrative burden for the small number of Albertans who choose to opt out of the provincial health care insurance plan. Residents will be able to exempt themselves every three years. Currently residents are required to file a declaration every year and can only opt back in at the beginning of the next year. Changes will enable residents to opt out at any time and opt back in following a 90-day notice period. This will provide for a more customer-friendly approach to the administration of the health care insurance plan.

Other amendments are more administrative in nature. For instance, the Pharmacy and Drug Act and Public Health Act are being amended to clarify the department's legislative authority to adopt regulations, standards, and guidelines, as well as drug schedules from other resources. The amendments allow for these schedules and standards to be amended from time to time in order to ensure that regulations remain current. The definition of "guardian" in the Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act is being broadened so that it's consistent with definitions in other provincial legislation, and a typographical error which references a section number erroneously is being corrected in the Health Information Act.

In conclusion, these amendments will facilitate and strengthen the effectiveness of the day-to-day operations of the Health and Wellness department. Therefore, I ask support of the House.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, I was going to move to adjourn debate, but I was just handed a note suggesting that at least one person would like to speak to that.

So with that I will take my chair, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased that I was able to listen to the sponsoring member provide his opening remarks on Bill 5, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, and I'm pleased to be able to provide some feedback to what I see in front of us today.

I'll start with a brief historical vignette, and that is that prior to the Standing Orders being changed in 2003, I think, it used to be that when we had an omnibus bill in front of us – in fact, Bill 5 covers five different statutes – members would have 30 minutes to speak to it because it was capturing more than two pieces of legislation. But after the change in those Standing Orders that provision was taken out. That can be problematic if you've got a lot of changes that are being made in the different statutes. So there's the historical vignette for this afternoon.

Now specifically to Bill 5. I'm finding this a very interesting little bill for a couple of reasons. It appears on first reading to be, sort of, a number of minor housekeeping changes that are being brought into various health acts, but let me just go through some of what's being proposed here.

As the sponsoring member indicated, the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act is amending a couple of different things but specifically expanding ministerial powers to be able to select members of a committee that reviews claims submitted to the Alberta health care insurance plan. So I note that the reason behind this was that currently there are very rigid criteria for who is on committees like this. It mandates some professionals to appear but excludes others or, rather, is silent on others, which amounts to them being excluded.

The intention here is to make the committee more flexible. Well, I note that it actually puts more power in the hands of the government minister responsible for this department, who now has, you know, total control over who they would appoint to this committee. Although the member says, "Well, you know, we're going to pick from a roster," nonetheless, it is more restrictive than what we were operating on before, which did mandate representation from certain groups even if that list was too finite. But I find it interesting that that, in fact, is moving more power into the hands of the Health and Wellness minister. So I'm wondering what other options the minister considered for trying to make this committee more expansive and why we didn't just add to the list of groups that were included on the original review panels rather than setting up a whole other committee.

5:10

Related to that, I'm interested in what we can expect to see the minister put in place to ensure that there's more impartiality. If he's in total control of who goes on to these, well, you know, people tend to appoint people that they know, so there ends up being quite a bit of institutionalized patronage, that happens with this government. If you've been around for 35 years, you've got a lot of friends. You know a lot of people, and those people all tend to turn up on these various committees. So I'm wondering if the minister, in this new age of enlightenment that they are trying to achieve, has considered what other protocols or methods he could put in place to ensure that there is some additional impartiality that is brought into this process.

There's also a section that removes the requirement for a practitioner or physician to provide permission to the department to examine their medical records. This is part of auditing to verify that billing services had been done correctly. This is interesting because you would have thought some of this would have improved as we end up with all of these computer links between the doctors' offices and the department, and the billing on the plan would have been smoothed

out a bit. But I agree that it's always useful to go back to source documents. So I'm wondering why there was a decision. What caused this that it was felt that it was necessary to remove the requirement that physicians give permission? Because, in tandem with this, there will now also be the establishment of a penalty for any practitioner who refuses to give that permission. So this is a stick, not a carrot, that's being put in place here.

I'm aware that part of this as well is around the review of how physicians provide services, and I think it's a good thing that we're looking at the auditing of anything that requires an outlay of hard-earned taxpayer money. I think those audit systems should be in place, and I'm a big fan of that, but I'm just wondering if we could get a bit more detail on what led to this or what circumstances led to it. Did we have a number of cases where there was some concern around the computer auditing that's available, or did we have a number of physicians that were refusing to let us look at their records for this kind of an attest audit? How many: 100, 500, 50, 10? What is the proportion that we're dealing with here?

My concern when you start talking about health records, of course, is always patient confidentiality. So I'm wondering if patient confidentiality has been impacted at all by this change or if that's anticipated. Are they made aware in any way, shape, or form that their records are being released to the department to check a physician? It's still their information that is now going to be looked at, and I'm assuming that this information has not been stripped of identifying factors. It is their name, their health insurance number, their gender, their Canadian citizenship status, and various other health issues that are obviously part of this billing process. So are they aware that their information is going to be looked at by the department?

I'm pretty sure that it's in the act that they're not aware, but it's one of the things that I protested because I think they should be. You know, there's a discussion that could come about whether or not they would have the ability to stop that, but they certainly should be made aware that their information has been seen by more than just their doctor.

I'm also noticing that there's a provision that required consultation with the college or an organization representing the practitioner. The provision requiring consultation has been removed, and I'm wondering what's behind that. Does this remove a significant responsibility that the college currently maintains, or is it just a matter of changing legislation to reflect what's currently in practice?

The minor typo is fine. I understand that, and I don't have a question about it, obviously. Yeah. You've got to fix those typos, Mr. Speaker.

But I am really curious about this change to amend the Health Insurance Premiums Act to make it easier for Albertans to opt out of paying Alberta health insurance, especially when we're talking 255 people. A couple of things occur to me. Out of all the issues that are happening around health care in Alberta today, this is what needed to come forward in the fifth bill that we're debating in this spring Legislature? I would have thought there were other issues that were really pressing, top-of-mind, that need to get in front of the Legislative Assembly that would have trumped needing to facilitate 255 people's desire not to be in the health care insurance plan.

So I'm really curious about what prompted this. I appreciate that we're trying to remove red tape and make paperwork less onerous. Indeed, if it helps to streamline administration and save some money there that can be spent in other places, I think there's a good argument to be made in support of that, but we're talking paperwork for 255 people, and we now have let them off the hook for three years instead of one year, but we'll let them opt back in at any time instead of at the beginning of the year, as was held previously. This

just struck me as a very odd thing to be spending important time on at the beginning of our Legislative Assembly, so I'm looking for a bit more explanation on that one.

In particular, I would like to know what some of the reasons are for people opting out because I think that's an important piece of public information that we all need to know about. My concern around this – and I would love you to disprove them, actually – is that we end up with people who have enough personal financial resources to . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me, hon. members. We're not in committee. We have to remain in our seats.

Ms Blakeman: Ah, yes, that minor matter of parliamentary procedure. Thank you.

I would like to know if the reasons are connected to people who have enough personal financial resources to purchase health care anywhere in the world that they want and likely are doing so. Are they, then, refusing to pay into the public health care system because they just don't want to? They don't use it, and they don't want to pay into it. I'd be interested in what the reasons are behind that. In fact, does the plan or does the protocol require that somebody state why they're withdrawing or why they wish to withdraw? I think that's very useful information.

What provisions are in place to make sure that they don't opt back in just when they need coverage, that they can't go for two and a half years with no coverage and then they discover that they need some kind of treatment, so they opt back in on 90 days, and then they're in. That's an opportunity for abuse of our system and reflects on the rest of us. So what's in place there?

Amending the Mandatory Testing and Disclosure Act to capture the definition of guardian is appropriate, particularly as that should be bringing in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. I do want to make sure that we don't repeat the same mistake and put any kind of gender or familial position definition attached to that, or we'll end up with the same problems with not being Charter proof on our legislation.

The Pharmacy and Drug Act. Well, we wish that this, in fact, would be a pharmacare program, but it's not. It seems to be to clarify the authority of Alberta Health and Wellness to adopt the national drug schedules as they change over time. Strategy to come, I'm promised. Well, we're on the record now, Mr. Speaker, that there's a pharmacare strategy to come, and I'm looking forward to that.

Finally, we have the Public Health Act, which is to bring the act in line with the current policy of enabling the adoption of documents that change over time. That avoids a regulatory amendment each time a new version of standards are in place. That is a type of administrative correction that I think is exactly what we should be doing. Of course, it's always got to meet the test of public accountability and not moving more things behind closed doors.

So I'm looking forward to having those questions answered for me, but at this point I'm satisfied enough with what's being brought forward that I would be happy to support Bill 5 in second reading, and I'm happy, if there are no other speakers, to call the question on that.

5:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member to close debate.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member has outlined a number of questions. I'm very happy to respond to them. Of course, the member may expect that I'm happy to respond to

them in Committee of the Whole. I'll consult with the professionals who deal with this on a daily basis and give an even more thorough response.

I would certainly like to call the question at this point, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

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

Mr. Ducharme 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 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 20: Mr. R. Miller]

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

Mr. Cernaiko: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much. It's a pleasure to rise and respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor on March 7. The Speech from the Throne lays out a plan to adjust to growth pressures facing the province. It also addresses the need to preserve our prosperity for future generations. Albertans want their government to act on the issues that are important to them. They expect government to act in a way that is fiscally and environmentally responsible. The Speech from the Throne laid out five priorities: govern with integrity and transparency, manage growth pressures, improve Albertans' quality of life, build a stronger Alberta, and provide safe and secure communities.

As chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission it's my responsibility to ensure that Albertans, young and old, achieve freedom from the harmful effects of addiction to drugs, alcohol, and gambling. By tackling these issues head on, we will improve the quality of life of Albertans and provide safe and secure communities. These two priorities laid out in the Speech from the Throne are of great importance to me.

Mr. Speaker, under the topic of improving Alberta's quality of life, the throne speech mentioned sustained focus on wellness, injury reduction, and disease prevention; assistance to people living in the community with serious mental illness and providing their families with improved access to support services and treatment; a new pharmaceutical strategy which will capitalize on opportunities to improve the range of drugs available and reduce or avoid prohibitive costs; improving the quality of life in First Nations and Métis communities; ensuring that government policies better reflect the needs of persons with disabilities; and establishing a community spirit program for charitable giving and donations.

On the government priority for providing safe and secure communities His Honour the Lieutenant Governor discussed working with communities to make neighbourhoods stronger and safer – a community that works together has a much better chance of defeating crime and ensuring a safe environment for our children to live, learn, and grow – and working with community leaders to establish a crime reduction and safe communities task force, that will consult Albertans on how to reduce crime and improve public confidence in the justice system, building on the work being done by 13 government ministries to develop an integrated crime reduction strategy.

The government has also committed to invest in advanced education, including university, college, the trades, and occupational training.

Mr. Speaker, managing growth pressures is another key priority for this government. We will address pressures on housing, labour, infrastructure, and the environment. I'm pleased that the Premier has asked me to sit on the Calgary committee to end homelessness. As the government representative to this committee I am thrilled to be part of this initiative. Our goal on that committee is not to reduce but to eliminate homelessness from the city of Calgary within the next decade. The successful implementation of this program could set the standard and be the template for cities across Alberta, throughout Canada, and throughout the world.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to briefly speak about the objectives of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. We will provide information and develop current and accurate information on the abuse of alcohol, drugs, and gambling. Knowledge is key in tackling these monumental problems. We will work towards prevention, offering community-based programs and services designed to prevent substance abuse related problems. We will provide treatment, ensuring a broad spectrum of programs and services that assist Albertans in their recovery from substance abuse and gambling problems. AADAC has been in existence since 1970 and provides 30,000 Albertans with treatment and 90,000 Albertans with prevention services and information every year.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to make a presentation to the Affordable Housing Task Force, chaired by the hon. Member for Calgary-North West, I believe it is, to provide AADAC's response and/or submission to the Affordable Housing Task Force. Now, some of you may be wondering: what does the treatment of addictions have to do with affordable housing? In fact, the two are very closely linked, which is why I wanted to mention this in this response to the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne.

At AADAC our mission is to make a difference in people's lives by assisting Albertans to achieve freedom from the harmful effects of alcohol, other drugs, and gambling. We accomplish this by providing information, prevention and treatment programs and services in 51 communities across Alberta. While our reach is wide and our programs and services are comprehensive, we know that the treatment of addictions is complex and multifaceted, that it's not enough to treat just the addiction itself.

Our research tells us that housing shortages and homelessness have serious implications for addictions prevention, treatment, and recovery because socially and economically disadvantaged groups are particularly vulnerable to the effects of addiction. Studies show that youth living on the streets or in unsafe housing are at an increased risk to engage in substance use and abuse at an early age. The Canadian Medical Association reports that 10 to 20 per cent of shelter residents are chronically homeless and have high rates of alcohol and drug addiction.

From AADAC's perspective what can Alberta do in the areas of homelessness and affordable housing as we work towards our goals in the prevention, treatment, and recovery of addictions? Well, AADAC currently funds a number of shelters that provide detoxification and treatment as well as transitional housing for adults in early recovery from addiction. All of these facilities are operating at capacity.

In the short term AADAC recommends that the number of these shelters and transitional housing sites be expanded by allocating additional resources to contracted partners and providers. This will provide more Albertans with safe places where they can recover from their addictions. Also in the short term additional funding needs to be directed to hiring dedicated staff to provide support

services for individuals living in these shelters and transitional housing. Many of these individuals often require mental health and ongoing addiction counselling services that they may have difficulty accessing. Providing it onsite helps them become self-reliant sooner.

In the long term Alberta needs to ensure that housing solutions are partnered with what we call wrap-around services. Services like case management support, mobile health care, and partnerships in smaller communities are the types of things individuals in these shelters and transitional housing need as they recover. These wrap-around services are important parts of our addictions treatment continuum.

Mr. Speaker, also in the long term we must ensure that our housing options match the housing and support needs of the clients moving through the stages of recovery from addiction. This system should be tailored towards the needs of specialized groups, like young adults, women, and aboriginals. Without a safe place to live and other transitional supports, there is a high risk that AADAC clients will relapse. These recommendations would not only help prevent addictions but would also ensure that our clients could move from our treatment services into a safe environment and continue on the road towards recovery and a healthy lifestyle.

AADAC remains committed to continuing to work with the task force as it goes through its final steps and, as the minister has the report, towards new solutions in addressing homelessness and affordable housing in Alberta. We remain committed to continuing to work with all levels of government, community groups, health agencies, and our many other partners in prevention and treatment of addictions because all Albertans deserve a safe and affordable place to live. They deserve our help when they need it, and they deserve to receive the best quality care available.

Thank you very much.

5:30

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to respond in this tradition at a stage that marks the debut of a new Premier, a man I respect for his decency and dedication to our province. I wish him well, both as a worthy opponent and as a fellow citizen. I applaud his intentions to see a greater measure of decorum in our debate and to restore a measure of democracy to the workings of government. I support his efforts and hope to see these goals achieved in the life of this Assembly.

The Crown in our system stands for more than the person who wears it and the throne is far more than the person who sits on it. The Speech from the Throne, therefore, is more than the speech by the Lieutenant Governor who reads it, the Premier and his staff who write it, or the government for which it is guiding policy. It speaks to the values we enthrone as a society, which is why it is short on specifics as some critics complain. I would rather hear a throne speech that sets out solid principles with particulars to follow than a list of legislative specifics without any explicit principles. I appreciate knowing truly where an administration is coming from. When we know that, the citizens of this province may allow time to get there if those principles are adhered to. So it is on the question of vision and values that I intend to focus here.

First, I'm pleased to note that the environment has moved to the number one place this year from third place in the last throne speech and that economic issues that took up two-thirds of the last speech now share the stage with other issues. The words economy and ecology come from the same root, which means management of a

household. Environment and economic growth can no longer be looked on as separate or opposing concerns. One can add to a house at a rapid rate – a new room, a deck, a second storey, or basement suite – but if the roof is leaking, the foundation is crumbling, or the air inside is unhealthy, all the expansion is pointless and counterproductive.

It is my earnest hope that the showcasing of environment in this throne speech represents a foundational improvement and not simply a lean-to added to the front end of the house for political correctness. If this is a real effort at management of a household and not simply business as usual where business runs the front and family lives in the back, a further question follows. What is it that makes a house a home? What makes a society a community or our fastest growing province a good place to live?

Quality of life is one of our new Premier's stated priorities. This must be accessible to all, not only the well-heeled and competitive or even the average Albertan but the most vulnerable among us. Children are canaries in the mine of our industrial society. There is asthma and allergies. There are learning disabilities. The challenges of gangs and latchkey kids are by-products of rapid growth. It is only fair that the benefactors of growth help to ease the growing pains. A sustainable society must be a child-friendly society. This is one quality that makes a house a home.

I was surprised and disappointed that children are not mentioned in the throne speech: surprised because the government took an important step in the funding of child care a few weeks ago, a step I thought it might use as a springboard to the other needed initiatives for children; disappointed because children's well-being is second only to the environment that sustains us all. I can't help but speculate why children were not mentioned. Was it because children's issues are seen as spending ones, and funding having been pledged in advance, they must now wait till budget before we hear about it again? Was it because the crises for children and teenagers are not seen as high profile in contrast with other choices we face? It is not enough to look on children's issues as problems in need of solution when children are an ongoing and vulnerable part of our humanity.

The preamble to the throne speech lists compassion for others as one of the values of Albertans. I commend the reinclusion of compassion as one of our fundamental values, one that has often been neglected in the past decade. I urge the government to consider where past cuts have not shown compassion and to consider putting those wrongs right.

What is the type of society we choose to build in Alberta? There are many words and phrases that we use without thinking, and we need to look at them more carefully. Self-reliant, for instance; we usually take it to mean independent or paying your own way. We've used that value in the past decade to bus welfare recipients out of the province, to prosecute panhandlers, to deny support for farmers' co-operatives, and to roll back collective bargaining rights of unionized working men and women. We supposed that depending on a co-op or collective was of less value than every man for himself. We don't do this with our families. We recognize that they deserve our love and support simply for being here. As children grow up, they want to become involved in the world and self-supporting, and we encourage them in this. But it's a rare parent that needs to kick their kids out of the house.

What about the spouse who chooses to work at a manual job to support the other through university or trade school and who ends up earning much less than the one she worked to support? What about the stay-at-home parent whose cash flow is limited? Is the other partner who works outside justified to claim self-reliance and to walk out on family support when he finds an alternative more interesting and attractive?

This is the market mentality: maximize your income and cut your losses. What about those who for reason of infirmity, accident, or other reason depend on public support? What about the businesses that make their profit and then leave others to clean up the mess? As we look at these examples, it becomes apparent that self-reliant or independent are no longer adequate measuring tools on a planet where we are all interdependent.

Another word we use easily as a value word is market-driven. Does that mean that anything that can command a market is okay? Apparently not. Slavery, child pornography, and the drug trade have all enjoyed a thriving market. What about products that cause accidents and allergies? By the time the market catches up with scams and con artists, innocent people have suffered. Do we blame the buyer who should beware, or do we hold responsible those who produce and distribute tainted goods and services? Clearly, there is a place for regulation and monitoring, much as we may dislike the words.

Let's look at the generations before us, the pioneers that we say we admire. They regulated days and hours of business not just for religious reasons but because they believed people should not have to work seven days a week. They limited entertainment they believed was not of value to the community. They supported education not as a return on investment but because they believed it was good in itself. In the biblical creation story we read seven times, "It was good," not it was profitable or lucrative or economically viable. A civilized society is one that supports the arts and education simply because they are good.

Our families may be dysfunctional and even neurotic in doing the same things over and over and expecting a different result, yet we don't shut them down or disown them according to a balance sheet. We recognize that they need acceptance, compassion, and forgiveness. Why don't we extend the same attitude to our society? Some say that the two should be different. We look to families for love, to society for justice. You can't run a society on principles that encourage freeloaders. But what about those who have no families, whose homes are the street, or those who have spent their lives in institutions and suddenly find that they have to fend for themselves when these are shut down?

Earlier I spoke about foster parents, whose families are bigger than DNA. They are the bridge between kin and community, a step beyond a survival society and into a civilized one. We need to support them more and follow their example. We can begin by recognizing the principle of the good Samaritan that being a neighbour is about acting with compassion.

In 1936 William Aberhart came to power in Alberta using this slogan: Poverty in the Midst of Plenty. Poverty was more evident then. Today it is kept invisible. Poverty was understandable in the Great Depression. Today it is inexcusable in an economic boom. Premier Aberhart and his followers believed in self-reliance and tempered this with a belief in the biblical command to plead for the fatherless, tend the widow, and share the harvest with the poor.

5:40

Let us look to the dispossessed in our society as an opportunity to lead in the abolition of poverty. Let us look to the vulnerable as an opportunity to show tenderness. Let us look to strangers as an opportunity to show friendship, and let us look to the struggling as a chance to offer strength and encouragement.

With the enormous wealth that comes from great growth there also comes accountability. May we not be like the rich man in the parable who hoards his goods and to whom the Almighty says: you fool. Let us rather build the kind of society which is not an advantage of some over others but where all can say: it is good.

