

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 2, 2007**

**1:00 p.m.**

Date: 07/04/02

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

Let us pray. In our mind's eye let us see the awesome grandeur of the Rockies, the denseness of our forests, the fertility of our farmland, the splendour of our rivers, the richness of our resources, the energy of our people. Then let us rededicate ourselves as wise stewards of such bounty on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, kindly join in now in the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Please participate in the language of your choice.

### Hon. Members:

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

**The Speaker:** Thank you, sir.

Please be seated.

head:

### Introduction of Visitors

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance.

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly the ambassador from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, His Excellency Nguyen Duc Hung. With Ambassador Nguyen is the first secretary of the Vietnamese embassy in Ottawa, Mr. Nguyen Viet Dzung. I had the opportunity to have lunch with these two gentlemen today. In one of life's little coincidences I actually first met Ambassador Nguyen in Vietnam in a meeting I had with the Prime Minister of Vietnam a little over a year ago. Ambassador Nguyen is here today to explore trade opportunities with the province of Alberta, which, by the way, have doubled in the last two years, as well as to look at labour relations with Alberta for the potential of supplying labour to Alberta for our workforce needs. I would ask Ambassador Nguyen and Mr. Nguyen Viet Dzung to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

head:

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

**Ms Evans:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very proud to introduce four people from my staff who are either brand new or relatively new policy analysts. The first is Chris Tyrkalo. He is the person that does our action requests in our branch. The second, Brandon Lundy, is newly appointed to our ministry, responsible for the building and educating tomorrow's workforce strategy. The third, Sylvia Lepki, has been a policy analyst since November, and

she's also working on the 10-year labour force strategy. Finally, Sheila Harrison, from the workforce development branch, has previously worked as an adviser and worked for contract service providers in career services. She is also working on many of the areas where we complement Children's Services and Persons with Development Disabilities. I'd ask them to please stand and be acknowledged by this Assembly.

**Ms Tarchuk:** Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some employees of Children's Services who worked on a successful and award-winning campaign on the prevention of family violence. The Advertising Club of Edmonton, or ACE, is a nonprofit organization that through networking, professional development, and competition assists Edmonton's advertising community to strive for excellence. Each year ACE honours the best work by local agencies on regional, provincial, and national campaigns judged by a panel of senior advertising experts from across North America.

The prevention of family violence campaign called End the Silence, Stop the Violence won a number of ACE awards on March 3. Fight Circle won the public service broadcast ACE award, the television single award, and the people's choice award. I want to add that the people's choice award is selected based on a survey of Albertans. The one called Postcard won the public service print award of distinction. Finally, the entire campaign won the advertising campaign award of distinction.

Mr. Speaker, family violence is a dark mark on society, and we know that education is a key to bringing it to an end. This campaign is a big step towards bringing the issue of family violence out in the open, where we can optimize opportunities to help victims and break the cycle of violence.

I'd like to ask the people who helped develop this award-winning campaign to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: Sheryl Fricke, Keltie MacPherson, Desiree Magnus, Lisa Nisbet, Tom Fowler, Deborah Hurford, Jackie Katan, and Shane Gauthier.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly four esteemed members of the Alberta pharmacy community who are seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that you join me in welcoming them when they've all been introduced. All of these guests are working hard on behalf of Alberta's pharmacists to ensure that Albertans are provided with outstanding quality of care. They're here today to commemorate the enactment of the pharmacists profession regulation, which came into effect yesterday, April 1. This regulation widens the scope of practice for health care professionals and is a key component of our workforce strategy. From the Alberta College of Pharmacists we have Greg Eberhart, registrar of the college, and Mr. Jeff Whissell, president of the college. From the Pharmacists Association of Alberta we have Mr. Cam Johnston, acting CEO, and Mr. Jeremy Slobodan, board president. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have 31 students from the St. Joseph school in Whitecourt. They are accompanied by their teachers Mrs. Marilyn Wright and Mrs. Penny Bell as well as parent helpers Colleen Matvichuk, Michelle

Pederson, Kyla Rose, Ken Podulsky, Bryan Retzliff, Ken Westling, Tom Jackson, Sonya Lavallee, Kathy McIvor, Sheila Stuckless, Bea Samson. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe my guests may not have arrived yet, but I would like to introduce them to you and through you to all members when they arrive later during question period. They're a group of 21 political science students from The King's University College here in Edmonton. They'll be accompanied by their political science professor, Dr. John Hiemstra, and they'll be spending a couple of hours in the building here today studying how we do government in Alberta.

Thank you very much.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce a family friend and dynamic young political science student from the University of Alberta, Ryan Fontaine. I'll ask him to stand up and receive the welcome of the Legislature.

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

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a trusted friend, a valued supporter, a fellow Rotarian, and the past president of the Edmonton Gateway Rotary Club, Mr. Patrick Slinn. I would ask Patrick to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**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 three guests today. They are Janet Gibbens, Hellen Shiloff, and Don Crisall. Today is the 206th day of the strike at the Palace Casino. Janet has worked at the casino for 14 years as a dealer. She is one of the leaders of the strike and has been a powerful voice for workers. The union has just won a victory against the employer's attempt to refuse the right of workers to wear union pins, and Janet's testimony helped win this battle.

*1:10*

Hellen Shiloff has worked at the Palace Casino since the summer of 1991 and is a pit boss. Hellen grew up in Cambria, Alberta, and has lived in Edmonton since 1966. She has been a very strong picketer on the line and since the strike began has been appointed to the union's bargaining committee. Despite the length of the strike she remains as resilient as ever.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, they are joined by one of UFCW local 401's organizers, Mr. Don Crisall. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Lexi and Brad Golinsky. Lexi and Brad are from Leduc, where Brad

is a constable for the RCMP and Lexi is an elementary school teacher. They are also avid baseball and hockey players, and last but not least Lexi is my first cousin. I'd ask Lexi and Brad in the public gallery to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm especially delighted today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly five guests seated in the public gallery. Akashya and Prabhat Sharma are visiting our wonderful country and province from my home town of Jalandhar in Punjab, India. Akashya Sharma is a physician specializing in Ayurvedic medicine, and both he and his wife are proud parents of two lovely children, Priya and Pavithar.

Accompanying them are their hosts, three long-time Edmontonians, Kamni and Shakti Goutam and their son Nauneet. Kamni Goutam is one of the pioneers in the Indo-Canadian community, having come to Edmonton in the late 1960s, and has been a long-time local businessman in Edmonton. His wife, Shakti, has been serving our community for the past 30 years through her work with seniors at Extencare Holyrood. Nauneet, their son, is a student at NAIT studying business and marketing. I will now request my guests to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure and honour to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this great House of democracy three visitors to our Assembly today. They are Michael Janusz and his lovely wife, Irmie, as well as Catherine Obacz. Now, Michael is a former French foreign legionnaire, who distinguished himself in battle and was a 33-year engineer with CN Rail. Irmie was, of course, the executive director of the Whitecourt chamber of commerce in the past and was also the president of the executive directors across the province for chambers of commerce. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Alberta Legislature, and please welcome them.

head:

### Members' Statements

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

### Opportunities for New Canadians

**Mr. Pham:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is the home of approximately 40,000 Vietnamese Canadians, many of whom came to Canada in the 1980s as political refugees. If you were to ask these individuals what they value the most in Alberta, the answer would resoundingly be the freedom that they enjoy, followed closely by the respect held for human rights in our province. Vietnamese Canadians are provided the same opportunities as every other Canadian to reach their full potential, and as a result many of the first and second generations are highly successful. They have become doctors, lawyers, CEOs, engineers, and scientists. They have made their dreams reality, and our society is richer because of their contribution. These same people would have probably ended up on the street or in jail had they not left Vietnam.

When people are not allowed to reach their full potential, all of society loses. It is not a coincidence that poverty usually walks hand in hand with a poor record of human rights. Take North and South Korea as examples. North Korea has everything that South Korea

has, but their human capital is grossly underutilized and not allowed to fulfill its potential. As a result, North Korea is much poorer than South Korea.

In the United States following the American Civil War, Robert E. Lee, the general-in-chief of the south, was treated with respect and dignity by the north. When asked why a general of a defeated army was treated with such respect, the reason provided was that they were all Americans, and if one was humiliated, they were all humiliated. I believe that this is the correct way to rebuild a country, and I hope that all war-torn countries can learn from that lesson.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### **Dr. Thaddeus Demong**

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure for me today to draw to the attention of all Albertans through the hon. members of this House the incredible works of Dr. Thaddeus Demong, a hero of mine and a constituent of mine in Calgary-Lougheed. Thad was born and educated in Sarawak, Malaysia, on the island of Borneo. He's one of nine children of a tribal chief, and as a young man he was a top-tier Colombo plan student who fought hard to pursue studies in medicine at the University of Alberta. Afterward Thad returned to Sarawak, where as a medical officer he promoted development of a new rural hospital and public health policies in TB control and sanitation.

Dr. Demong immigrated to Canada in 1974 and began an ophthalmology residency at the U of A. He went on to obtain a fellowship in corneal surgery and then established his extremely well-respected practice in Calgary. Thad has worked extensively in establishing the Lion's Eye Bank of southern Alberta for the procurement and timely distribution of corneal tissue and has been recognized for his work by the Lions Clubs International Foundation as a distinguished Melvin Jones fellow.

In addition to all of this, Thad has participated in the Canadian vision care program, which operates in developing countries such as Jamaica and in Dr. Demong's native Sarawak. Thad has also taught medical students and residents at the University of Kuala Lumpur.

Mr. Speaker, in 2005 I was honoured to offer Dr. Demong an Alberta centennial medallion, and last month he received the 2007 immigrant of distinction professional award from the Calgary Immigrant Aid Society.

I have the utmost personal and professional respect for Dr. Demong and his wonderful wife, Carol, who have worked on so many organizations and have provided the priceless gift of sight to thousands around Alberta and around the world. I trust that members of this Assembly will join me now in expressing admiration and gratitude for the miracles that the Demongs work every day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### **Building Leadership for Action in Schools Today**

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize an outstanding group of young women attending the Nellie McClung program at Oliver school in Edmonton-Centre. These young women formed a BLAST team, building leadership for action in schools today, in their school with the help of the Alberta Lung Association and AADAC. They have done an undercover investigation, a video, a media event and public presentation, a postcard campaign to the previous minister of health, and have worked with me as their MLA. Last year I hosted this BLAST team

here in the Assembly during the debate on the cancer legacy act, and this year I am bringing forward Motion 523 to support their campaign to ban power walls.

These Nellie girls have been awarded a blue ribbon champion award by the Edmonton and Area Tobacco Reduction Network for their work in banning power walls. Now they're taking the next step in organizing a half-day conference for their peers at a rally on the steps of the Legislature tomorrow at noon, April 3, and we have asked again for a meeting with the minister in the hopes that we can convince him to join us and ban power walls. These power walls are the large tobacco displays that are a fixture in every gas station and convenience store showing the packages of most tobacco brands. This feature is why our kids know what the colour a package of du Maurier is and what the logo for a Camels pack of cigarettes looks like.

I'm very proud of the work that the Nellie girls have done over the past two years. Some members of the BLAST team have moved on but all have learned important lessons about working for the issues they believe in, how to conduct research, organize public and media events, including conferences, and how to lobby politicians to influence policy change. Supported by their teachers, parents, friends, and schoolmates, they've done a great job. My thanks to everyone involved.

Please join us on the steps of the Legislature tomorrow.

#### **1:20 Standards of Practice for Pharmacists**

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about the pharmacists profession regulation and new standards of practice which came into effect on April 1, 2007. Under these new regulations pharmacists, in accordance with their standards of practice, are permitted to continue or adapt a prescription written by another prescriber, prescribe drug treatments, and administer injections such as vaccines.

To ensure the highest standards of patient safety, pharmacists who choose to prescribe must complete training established by the Alberta College of Pharmacists. Pharmacists will only prescribe for those conditions that they are competent to assess. Community- and institution-based pharmacists will still need to maintain their continuing education requirements to keep up with new drugs and therapies.

Expanding the scope of practice of pharmacists is an example of our health workforce strategy in action. By leveraging the expertise of pharmacists, we are enabling them to work better as part of the health care team, along with doctors and other health professionals, to provide a better level of service in the community.

Pharmacists are drug experts. We rely on them to answer our questions in order to maintain our health. After a minimum of five years of university training, four of which are in pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences, pharmacists are able to take on more responsibility in providing advice, assessing patients, and prescribing and dispensing drugs.

The Health Professions Act is enabling legislation that allows all health professionals to use their skills and training to their full extent. Pharmacists now have that opportunity. The pharmacists profession regulation came into force April 1. Services offered depend on the expertise of the pharmacist. Each pharmacist will choose the expanded services they will add to their practice.

Mr. Speaker, for generations pharmacists have been a trusted source of advice and knowledge about drug products, associated supplies, and complementary therapies. We are looking to pharmacists and other health care professionals to take on a larger role in providing primary health care in our communities and neighbourhoods.

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

### Federal Barley Plebiscite

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the results of the federal barley plebiscite, that were announced on March 28. The federal barley plebiscite results show that a strong and clear majority of Albertan and western Canadian producers have chosen to have the option of selling their barley in an open market. Sixty-two per cent of western Canadian barley farmers and 78 per cent of Alberta barley farmers have voted for choice. These results confirm what the Alberta government already knew, that a strong and clear majority of Alberta producers are ready for more competitive options to maximize their grain marketing opportunities.

It is now time for action on this matter. We are pleased that the federal government will open the market by August 1 of this year. With the results in, it's time for the government of Canada, the Canadian Wheat Board, and the industry to work together to strengthen the barley marketing system.

The Canadian Wheat Board must now translate their extensive experience into success in an open market. Alberta's position has always been that there is a role for the Canadian Wheat Board in an open and competitive barley market. We are looking forward, as I know all Albertan producers are, to true marketing choice in the marketing of barley for all Canadian producers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Patient Safety in Hospitals

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans deserve to know that their health care system is safe and that when they visit a hospital, they won't come out sicker than when they went in. Albertans were understandably concerned when the government announced serious problems with infection controls at St. Joseph's hospital in Vegreville. The minister of health assured us at that time that this was an isolated incident, a claim that was brought into question by revelations about problems in Lloydminster and in Canmore.

There's clearly a need for an independent, system-wide, and public inquiry. The inquiry should start by getting a complete understanding of the impact of the drastic cuts to health care in the '90s and the chronic underfunding that followed. By consistently starving the health system, this government has forced many regions and facilities to simply make do. We know, for example, that St. Joseph's hospital has been requesting a surgical washing machine for a number of years but has never been provided the funds to obtain one.

The second issue is the failure of the Conservative government to support a province-wide system for monitoring and enforcing standards in hospitals. They have asked local hospitals to do more with less and then turned a blind eye to the pressures this approach brings.

The Health Quality Council is not the appropriate body to investigate this concern, and the self-evaluation the minister requested last week is just not good enough. The minister's review will not be independent and will not be public. Neither review will seriously assess government responsibility for this crisis.

In response to the numerous e-mails, letters, and phone calls received by my caucus, today I released a petition on behalf of the NDP opposition that we will be circulating among Albertans. The petition urges the government to immediately establish a public

inquiry into the failure of the health care system to protect the safety of patients in its care and provide recommendations to correct the situation. I invite all Albertans to visit [www.ndpopposition.ab.ca](http://www.ndpopposition.ab.ca) for more details on this petition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. chair of the Select Standing Committee on Private Bills, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

### Presenting Petitions

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I beg leave to present the following petitions that have been received for private bills under Standing Order 98(2):

- (1) the petition of Ian Wilms for the CyberPol - The Global Centre for Securing Cyberspace Act, and
- (2) the petition of Dan Reinhardt for the CREST Leadership Centre Act.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

### Tabling Returns and Reports

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

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am tabling a petition with the required number of copies from the residents of Monarch Place in Red Deer-North. The petition respectfully requests a formal inquiry into the reasons for the demise of this affordable housing complex before the impending sale.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter from Leona Laddish, Olga Eliuk, and Emily Palynchuk, who are the nieces of the late Dr. Myron Shewchuk. Dr. Shewchuk was admitted to St. Joseph's hospital in Vegreville and subsequently passed away, apparently because of complications arising from MRSA. The authors of the letter, like the Alberta NDP opposition, are calling for a full public inquiry into our health system's infection control programs.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents to table today. The first is the appropriate number of copies of British Columbia's Bill 17. B.C. is debating and passing legislation regarding the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, unlike the Alberta government, which has virtually been silent on this important issue.

My second document is an e-mail from Zelma Hardin. Ms Hardin's 83-year-old mother had a fall last year, and while she was in the Royal Alex hospital, she contracted a superbug. The letter vividly describes the agony she and her mother went through.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter sent to Dr. Erik Wasylenko, who is responsible for patient experience within the Calgary health region. In her letter regarding the changes to home care, Anne Lyon, on behalf of her husband, Richard Morris, notes that "whatever

problems the region was trying to solve . . . the implementation appears unplanned and uncompassionate.”

My second tabling, entitled Turning the Key, celebrates the opening of the fabulous new Ronald McDonald House adjacent to the equally wonderful, new children’s hospital in Calgary-Varsity constituency. I would encourage the government to consider supporting Inn from the Cold in acquiring the old facility.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today. The first is from constituent Rosalee Galper. She is a woman with a progressive disability who lives independently with the assistance of caregivers using the self-managed care program. She notes that the dollar values that were satisfactory for this program in the ‘90s are far behind what is needed to both attract and retain workers today. So that’s her letter.

The second tabling. I’d like to table the appropriate number of copies of correspondence from Betty Gamble, who was very concerned with the Premier’s comments on the old Holy Cross hospital. She feels that it’s time the government cleaned up their act and put citizens first and feels that this is nothing except for entitlement by some very prominent Calgary businessmen and their slow pressure toward privatization.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: 1:30

### Oral Question Period

#### St. Joseph’s General Hospital

**Dr. Taft:** To the Premier: when did the Premier first become aware that there were serious problems with health care delivery at St. Joe’s hospital?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I was made aware of the issue with respect to sterilization Thursday, I believe, March 15. That was the day.

**Dr. Taft:** Very interesting, Mr. Speaker. Connie Marcinkoski, whose father died of MRSA-related pneumonia, has phone records proving that she contacted the Premier’s constituency office and had a 16-minute conversation in October 2003 relating her concerns about her father’s safety and care at the hospital. She never heard back. To the Premier. The Premier committed 11 days ago to look through his archive to find this information. Has the Premier followed through on his commitment to find these records?

**Mr. Stelmach:** This member got up in the House the first time he raised it and said it was a letter, so we were going through all of the records. You asked a question, so we’re checking to see if there was a letter written through the archives because this goes back to 2003. Subsequently that afternoon we heard one of the media interviewing the lady, and it was a phone call to my constituency assistant at that particular time.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: has the Premier returned that call yet? It’s three and a half years overdue.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the lady had called. She had spoken to our constituency assistant at that particular time, raised what I believe was an issue with respect to a health service in the hospital.

My constituency assistant thanked her for the call, and that completed that particular issue.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It sounds, actually, like the Premier knew about this problem years ago. The Premier previously questioned whether there was any documentation to support the claims of problems at St. Joseph’s hospital. A November 2003 letter from East Central health region indicates that Robert Bruce “most likely [was] exposed to MRSA while in Acute Care at St. Joseph’s hospital in October 2003.” Further, a 2004 investigation under the Protection for Persons in Care Act recommended that St. Joe’s hospital in Vegreville “ensure all staff are trained and consistent in MRSA protocol.” Will the Premier admit that there was a serious breakdown in health care delivery at St. Joseph’s hospital?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, with respect to the follow-up the minister of health will answer.

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, this is no secret. It’s been talked about before. In fact, I mentioned it when this issue with respect to the sterilization was first mentioned two weeks ago. St. Joe’s hospital has had a problem over the years with MRSA. It’s not an unusual problem. Other hospitals, other places not just in Alberta but right across North America have been dealing with a superbug issue. There is a level of superbug and other bacteria. People would not be surprised to know that there are bacteria and viruses in hospitals right across North America and around the world. So this is not new, and the fact that there are incidents and that there were incidents at St. Joseph’s is not new.

**Dr. Taft:** Mr. Speaker, the residents of Vegreville and, indeed, Alberta have questions about the safety of their health facilities and the ability of this government to protect them, yet the Premier has still not made it a priority of his to meet with the residents of Vegreville on this issue. What was more important on the Premier’s agenda in the last 10 days than arranging a public meeting on this life-and-death issue?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, my agenda, where I’ve been in different corners of the province, is very public. I’ve been in very close contact with my constituents, and I can assure you I will always do a much better job of serving the constituents of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville than that person will ever do. [interjections]

**Dr. Taft:** Prop him up, folks. Prop him up. Clearly, this Premier needs to be propped up by his backbenchers here, Mr. Speaker.

Again I ask: what was more important on your agenda than meeting with your own constituents on this life-and-death issue?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, one of the other reasons why I’ll better serve the constituents of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville is because I tell the truth. That’s very important to this House and to all other Albertans.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask you: where is the truth in the Premier saying he only learned about this issue 10 days ago

when there's a strong paper trail indicating that his office knew about this three years ago? Where's the truth?

**Mr. Stelmach:** The truth, Mr. Speaker, is that there was a phone call to the constituency. He's talking about a paper trail, a strong paper trail. One phone call to the constituency, and that's raised by the Official Opposition.

But on the other hand, you know, with respect to being in Vegreville, because this seems to be a real issue for the Leader of the Opposition, the CBC had a program right out of Chin's restaurant. Our minister was there to take the calls with respect to a very specific issue with respect to health delivery. The people there were satisfied that we were doing a good job in terms of representing those constituents and the safety of health.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's not going to wash with the people of Alberta. They want a government that responds.

It's clear that cuts to the health care system have dismantled strict government oversight and left us with a patchwork of organizations trying to enforce and monitor events. Who, Mr. Premier, is responsible for protecting Albertans? Each facility? Is it the regions? Is it the Health Facilities Review Committee, the Health Quality Council, or some other organization? Who is responsible for the health care system?

**Mr. Stelmach:** The minister of health, who reports to me.

**Dr. Taft:** So, again, Mr. Speaker, why won't this Premier take responsibility, admit that this problem has been in place for years? His office has been informed. There is correspondence from the East Central health region. There is correspondence from the Protection for Persons in Care Act. There's a long set of records. Will the Premier finally take responsibility, meet his residents, follow through, and protect the interests of Albertans?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, this is more than just about meeting residents. This is critically looking at what had transpired in the hospital. Remember, there are two issues here. It's the lack of protocol, or protocol was not followed with respect to the sterilization of equipment, and of course the other issue was with respect to the superbug. With respect to the superbug, all we have to say: please wash your hands.

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

#### Medical Safety Standards

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, the Premier would love to wash his hands of this issue, but I think that's not going to solve it, Mr. Premier. Albertans are worried that the problems at St. Joseph's hospital in Vegreville and the women's health clinic in Lloydminster are just the tip of the iceberg. They're worried that when they go into a hospital or their loved ones go into a hospital, they might come out sicker than when they went in, and the government still refuses to allow an independent, system-wide inquiry. My question is to the Premier. How can the Premier reassure the people of Alberta that our health care is safe when he refuses to appoint an independent commission of inquiry to look into this matter?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, we have health professionals who have

been in Vegreville for some time. These are people very respected in the profession. They are of course studying the situation and will bring recommendations forward to the minister. If there's any requirement in terms of legislation or any other thing we could do as the government, we will move immediately on it.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, there's no centralized enforcement of safety standards in medical facilities, including hospitals, in the province, and there hasn't been one since the early 1990s, when this government saw fit to eviscerate the health care system by cutting funds, nurses, and doctors, led by the Deep Six, of which the current Premier was a member. Will the Premier finally admit that this is a province-wide issue and ensure that structures are put in place that will guarantee proper inspections and a follow-up of safety standards across the province reporting to the ministry of health?

**1:40**

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the leader of the third party talks about massive cuts. In 1993 to '94 the budget for health was about \$3.2 billion, \$3.3 billion, and I believe at that time the government took about \$200 million out of the total budget. Most of that was of course reducing the number of hospital boards we had across the province. So most of the substantial amount came in the reduction of administration throughout the province of Alberta.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Alberta New Democrat opposition is starting a petition calling for an independent public inquiry. We invite all members of this House to visit [www.ndpopposition.ab.ca](http://www.ndpopposition.ab.ca) to sign that.

I'd like to ask the Premier why it was the province has failed to provide money to St. Joseph's hospital for a surgical washing machine despite their request, which is outstanding for a number of years? Why has the government failed St. Joseph's hospital in this matter?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the government has not failed anyone.

With respect to the administrative matter the minister of health will respond.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I understand it, the piece of equipment in question is on back order, has been ordered and been approved a long time ago.

This type of equipment is not something that's approved at the level of the province but, rather, at the level of the regional health authority. The regional health authority has responsibility to make sure that appropriate sterilization processes are in place for their facilities, and if they don't have it in that one facility, they can sterilize equipment at another facility, but they have dealt with this request. They've ordered the equipment in question. That is not the issue with respect to the problem, the failure in following the protocols, which happened at St. Joe's.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

#### Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

**Mr. Zwodzesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The unfunded pension liability in the teachers' pension plan has been a significant issue for a number of years now, and it's becoming more of a detriment than ever before to teacher retention and teacher recruitment. I'm very aware of previous efforts and of the difficulties involved in resolving

this. Nonetheless, the time has come. I feel that a formal process ought to be put in place. So my questions are to the Minister of Education. Mr. Minister, will you implement a formal process to address, perhaps to recommence, or to renegotiate this matter as soon as possible? [interjections]

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it needs to be put on record that there is an existing agreement in place, that was signed in 1992 between the government of Alberta and the Alberta Teachers' Association, to address the unfunded liability issue. However, we also recognize that that liability now stands at some \$6.4 billion, \$2.1 billion of which, it should be noted, is the teachers' responsibility. We also recognize that this unfunded pension liability is a detriment to recruiting new teachers, so we will be addressing it.

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Among all of the wrongful cries from opposition members, I would like, please, to have a little bit of silence for this next question. Perhaps we could get their attention to support this important issue and resolve this matter instead of just catcalling against it. So my supplemental question is: what roles would the minister foresee being played by the ATA and by the Alberta School Boards Association in addressing this complicated matter?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, it should be noted, Mr. Speaker, that the issue of the unfunded liability is between the government of Alberta and the Alberta Teachers' Association. To that end, I had a meeting last week with the president of the ATA to start these discussions, so that will be continuing. We would be seeking input from school board trustees as we would with any citizens of Alberta. However, this really is an issue between the ATA and the government of Alberta.

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I think it bears mentioning that there are other jurisdictions who have faced similar issues, and one of particular interest lately, in addition to several others, is the jurisdiction of Manitoba. I'm wondering if the minister has had a chance to look at that jurisdiction's resolution to this issue, and if not, will he proceed post-haste to take a look at it?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the Manitoba government last week decided to refinance their portion of the unfunded liability, and that's something that we are considering looking at, but that really doesn't address the unfunded issue that the teachers are facing, where 3 per cent of a teacher's salary today goes to paying the portion that in many cases young teachers had absolutely nothing to do with. That's the part that we're going to try and address.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

### St. Joseph's General Hospital (continued)

**Dr. Taft:** Mr. Speaker, the situation at St. Joe's hospital seems to have led to a number of deaths. It is requiring at least several hundred tests to be administered around the province. It has now spilled over into Saskatchewan, where they're having to undertake tests as well. There have been problems in the East Central health region, particularly St. Joe's hospital, for years. The Premier

mentioned his schedule. On Monday, March 26, no scheduled engagements were listed. Why was he not able to meet with the residents of Vegreville, in his constituency, at a public meeting on this issue on March 26?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I've said this before in this House. I've said it to the media. This is again being driven by the opposition in terms of why I'm not conducting some sort of a public meeting in Vegreville. This issue, of course, is a medical matter; it's not a political one. This issue is very important to me as the MLA for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, and I've also said that we'll do whatever we have to do to ensure that this does not happen again not only in Vegreville but in any other health facility in the province.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People in Vegreville and people around this province are concerned when one of their hospitals is closed. This is an issue of accountability. This is an issue of leadership. Why was it more important for this Premier on Wednesday, March 28, to go to Lac La Biche to address the Alberta Association of Colleges and Technical Institutes round-table than to meet with the constituents in Vegreville over the closure of their hospital?

**Mr. Stelmach:** First of all, the hospital is not closed. So that's wrong. Secondly, to me as Premier of this province the aboriginal and the Métis are very important. We were there to see how we can include them further in job opportunities that are available in this province of Alberta. We had a joint conference with leaders from British Columbia sharing their experiences with our college leaders in the province of Alberta, trying to find, of course, new ways of providing opportunities for First Nations and Métis to be involved in not only job opportunities but to see how we can further include them in the education system.

**Dr. Taft:** Again to the Premier. The Premier's schedule indicates that on Friday, March 30, no appointments were scheduled. Can the Premier indicate to the people of Vegreville and the people of Alberta why he couldn't take the time to have a public meeting on the crisis in the hospital in his own constituency?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, there wasn't a crisis. Friday morning I was on my way to Fairview. I spent the whole day in Fairview meeting with NAIT. We met with a group of farmers with respect to the issue of transportation. We met with a whole myriad of different individuals.

With respect to the public meeting the minister himself was there. It was a CBC-sponsored – I forget what they called it. He gave a full explanation. You know, for something that's been advertised and is supposed to be a crisis, like the leader says, the café was only about half full, and the people were wondering why the CBC was taking up so much room. They wanted to have their cup of coffee in peace.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

### Peace and Police Officer Training Centre

**Mr. Coutts:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The 2002 report of the MLA Policing Review Committee recommended a single-site centre for policing excellence for the training and ongoing profes-

sional development of police and peace officers in Alberta. In August of 2006 Fort Macleod, within the constituency of Livingstone-Macleod, was announced as the preferred site for the proposed Alberta police and peace officers training centre, but since then nothing has happened, and we have not heard of anything. My question is to the Solicitor General and the Minister of Public Security. Can he update the House on the current status of the project?

1:50

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Lindsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and let me thank the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod for the opportunity to shed some light on this very much-needed project. This training centre is an important part of our commitment to provide safe and secure communities in which Albertans can live, work, and raise their families. I can assure the hon. member that in the time since Fort Macleod was selected as the preferred site last August, a lot of work has already been done to make this centre a reality. But there's still a lot more to do before we can put a shovel in the ground. At the moment they're working with Alberta Infrastructure and the town of Fort Macleod to determine building requirements. Once this process is complete, we will release a request for expression of interest . . .

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

**Mr. Coutts:** Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: in keeping with the Premier's comment about safe communities, what are the advantages of a single-site facility such as this centre compared to the current training practices?

**Mr. Lindsay:** Mr. Speaker, training and professional development for law enforcement officers currently take place in a variety of locations across our province, and standards and practices are not always consistent. The new centre will help set and maintain a superior standard of training for all police and peace officers in Alberta. It will deliver basic training and professional development of police and peace officers, including special constables, corrections officers, private investigators, and security guards in Alberta. It will offer regular, recertification, and specialized training for all Alberta police and peace officers.

**Mr. Coutts:** My last supplemental to the same minister: will law enforcement stakeholders have an opportunity for input to the planning and to the curriculum developed for this centre?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Lindsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me say that few people are as passionate and dedicated about what they do in our community as those of law enforcement and security communities. Their feedback and input are critical as they move forward with this initiative and many others to ensure safe and secure communities. We will continue to seek their input on the design and development of the centre both on an individual basis and through these provincial bodies which represent policing. We have already received much valuable input. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that all of this input is being very carefully considered.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

### Support for Low-income Albertans

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the leadership campaign the Premier publicly stated that it's absolutely shameful that Canada's most prosperous province cannot take better care of the people who are not able to care for themselves. Over the weekend my colleagues and I here in this Legislature were awarded an automatic salary increase of 4.9 per cent. Given that the Premier himself has stated that the government's support for our most vulnerable citizens is absolutely shameful, will the Premier commit today to giving AISH recipients the same raise that we have received?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the amount of indemnity, the increase to all of us was done by the Members' Services Committee. This is done based on a formula that was agreed to by all parties – all parties.

Now, with respect to the other question on AISH and others in the province of Alberta, we are working through how we can best support those in great need. These are, of course, AISH, and our seniors in the province, that really are of great importance to this government.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seeing how the Premier has given me an inch, I'm going to go for the yard. Increases in the cost of living are affecting all Albertans, and many have not been able to keep up. Now that the MLAs' salaries have been increased, can the Premier tell us when the salaries of PDD workers, social workers, child care workers, and emergency shelter workers will receive similar salary increases?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, there has been some movement recently by the minister responsible in terms of closing the gap. There is a gap between those that are working for volunteer organizations, not-for-profit, and also those working for the government. We'd like to close that. The other is to ensure that we do support the not-for-profit organizations, and that's why we have a consultation in place to see how we can increase the charitable tax credits, see how we can match out of nonrenewable resources the funding going to charitable organizations, that do such a good service in this province.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Those are good words to hear. However, I'm really sort of a time-frame kind of person. So I'm willing to donate half of my increased salary to a related charity in a show of support for having AISH benefits indexed and will table a letter to the House monthly with the details of that. Given the Premier's statements of concern on the issue, would he join with me in that pledge?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I am of course quite happy, in fact privileged, that both my wife, Marie, and I have the ability to donate to so many charitable causes in the province of Alberta. Whether it will increase by whatever the percentage was, probably much more than that because I do have great warmth in my heart for the not-for-profit and charitable organizations in this province.

You know, everybody on that side, including now the Leader of the Official Opposition, got an increase. In fact, it says this morning that for the first time the Premier of Alberta has a bigger increase



than the Premier before. Well, I guess so has the Official Opposition leader.

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

### Calgary Industrial Sites Cleanup

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our Calgary-Fort constituency covers the largest industrial area in Calgary and our living environment is very important to my constituents, my question today is to the hon. Minister of Environment. Given that the Lynnview Ridge contamination cleanup work in my constituency has been going since last summer, can the minister update us on this file as to when it will be done?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, this remediation agreement has been in place since 2005, and Imperial Oil is continuing to clean up residential properties to Alberta Environment's very strict requirements. We continue to oversee this cleanup operation and will ensure that ongoing soil samples meet our standards before approving final remediation and issuing appropriate certificates. I can't give the member a specific date, but I can assure the member that the community involvement is and will continue to be a key component in any final plan for the future in this area.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Given yet another situation in the northeast corner of my riding, an industrial park where a demolished oil recycling plant was located, can the minister update us on this cleanup as to when the remediation plan submitted by the property owner will be decided on so new development can take place?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, Hub Oil is not posing any significant threat as it stands today, but I understand the concern of the community in that they would like to use the site for alternate uses. The member is quite correct. The company has submitted a draft plan, and our staff are currently reviewing that plan. It's the intention that that plan will be presented to a multistakeholder committee and the public for input. Once we're all satisfied that Hub Oil's plan meets our environmental standards, work can begin to remediate the site.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the same minister. Given another situation in the southeast corner of my riding, in Ogden, where the seepage of cleaning liquid from the railway shop was discovered three years ago flowing into underground water, can the minister update us on this file again?

2:00

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, when we're dealing with old industrial sites, these are the kinds of contamination issues that have to be dealt with. In this particular case there is ongoing monitoring. Again, CP Rail is responsible and will continue to be responsible to clean up the site in an appropriate manner. Indoor air quality monitoring in homes and in the Ogden school is ongoing. Where necessary a vapour control unit is installed, and that has proven successful in protecting indoor air quality. The committee that's ensuring that the indoor air quality and all air quality in the area is handled appropri-

ately is a joint committee of Alberta Environment, the Alberta health region, and the city of Calgary, and they continue monitoring on an ongoing basis.

### Trade, Investment, and Labour Mobility

**Mr. Bonko:** Yesterday the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, TILMA, came into effect in this province. There will now be no laws, measures passed in this House that may operate to restrict or impair trade or investment or labour mobility between this province and British Columbia. My questions are to the Premier. Will he publicly release all regulatory and legislative changes required to implement TILMA?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, we have till 2009 to work through various authorities, municipalities, academics, et cetera, as we work towards fulfilling the agreement. You know, it's 2007, and in this country we still have to bring about changes to trade rules that were put in place many, many years ago actually to impede the movement of goods and services. In fact, we had in this province two vehicle inspection stations to measure the weight of a truck, and to me, in this country I think a kilogram is a kilogram on this side of the border and on that side. Today we have one vehicle inspection station. The truck stops once.

**Mr. Bonko:** Many Albertans are concerned with TILMA's impact on the province. Many support the agreement, and there are many that disagree with the agreement, yet even on its face the government refuses to bring this before the House, the democratic heart of Alberta. It prefers press releases and backroom deals to democracy and debate. When will this government bring this agreement to the House for open debate in front of the people of Alberta?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, I do have to give credit to the Premier of the province of Alberta – of B.C. . . .

**An Hon. Member:** Well, sure.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Well, to me as well.

. . . to the Premier of the province of B.C. for his vision in moving forward. This now makes us the second-largest market force in Canada. It's of great importance to future generations in terms of future wealth creation.

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

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is already having to send a letter to municipalities trying to fill a hole in this agreement. They say it was not their intention for municipalities to lose their ability to set zoning bylaws. They even promise to speak up for municipalities when these problems appear. Given that this letter holds absolutely no legal weight and TILMA now does, will this Premier commit to changing TILMA so that these problems do not arise?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I've spent considerable time with municipal leaders. In fact, I had a good chat with the president of the AAMD and C, spent some time with the two city mayors. They have not raised a concern at all with respect to TILMA. If there are further issues that come forward – like I said, we have till 2009, and we'll keep working on any issues that are raised by those authorities.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will continue the same discussion. The trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement came into force on April Fool's Day, and Albertans have virtually been told nothing, absolutely nothing about this agreement. There's been no debate, no consultation, yet this agreement could have huge ramifications not only for business but for school boards, municipalities, health regions, and even farmers. As I say, the government has been virtually silent on this. My question is a simple, straightforward one. To the Premier: why have there been no public hearings or consultations with all the people potentially affected by TILMA?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, this is a very good agreement for both provinces. It builds the second-largest trade relationship, between Alberta and B.C. As I said before, we have till 2009 to work out any kind of differences that there are. The member says, "no consultation." We've had consultation with all of the groups, from engineers to – well, I'll have the minister next time list all the groups that we met with over the last couple of years.

**Mr. Martin:** Mr. Speaker, frankly, if you would ask people what TILMA is, they wouldn't understand or even know about it. They've never heard of it. My question to the Premier is simply this. The B.C. government brought this forward in legislation so that people would at least know about it. Why has the Alberta government not done the same thing?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, we have met with all those individuals, authorities, organizations that have anything to do with respect to the agreement. There were some issues in the beginning in terms of further dialogue. We worked through a lot of them. If there are any from now until 2009, then we'll continue to work with those groups, but this is a good agreement for Alberta. It's actually, quite frankly, going to help farmers because it's going to reduce the costs of transportation from Alberta down to the coast.

**Mr. Martin:** That's all you'll say. Mr. Speaker, if it's such a good agreement, why hasn't it been brought forward in the Legislature here like they've done in B.C.? If it's such a good agreement, then we'd all accept it. Why haven't we done it?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, with respect to TILMA, the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement that we have, it frees up organizations on both sides of the border to do good work. We're going to continue to work with those organizations to ensure that it does improve not only today's economy in the province but puts in place and secures a better economy for the next generation.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

#### Standards of Practice for Pharmacists

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of my constituents have expressed concern over the new regulations that will give pharmacists prescribing power. They feel that this is potentially unsafe given that pharmacists are not trained as doctors. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why are we moving the responsibility of prescribing drugs from doctors to pharmacists?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We value all health

professionals: physicians, pharmacists, nurses, right across the board. Changes to allow pharmacists to prescribe based on the outcome of their patient assessments is not intended to replace the physician's role in diagnosing and prescribing drug treatment or to limit other health care providers' expanded scope of practice. Pharmacists will only assess and prescribe based on their recognized competencies. They'll provide prescriptions when needed based on the outcome of patient assessments completed by them. This deals with one of the core values of the Health Professions Act; that is, to allow health care professionals to practise to the full extent of their experience, training, and expertise.

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

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how can we ensure that pharmacists have the clinical expertise needed to prescribe drug therapies?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The College of Pharmacists sets the standard of practice that determines the level of practice which can be provided by all pharmacists and any given pharmacist. Before assessing patients or prescribing drugs, pharmacists must meet the requirements established by the college. Pharmacists wishing to specialize will be required to demonstrate their competence in that specific area of practice. The public of Alberta will be assured that pharmacists who are prescribing have the competency to do so.

**Mrs. Jablonski:** My last question to the same minister: is it a conflict of interest to have pharmacists both prescribing and dispensing drugs?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, pharmacists prescribing drugs based on their patient assessment is similar to other medical services where health care professionals provide advice prior to providing medical treatment. We will rely on the College of Pharmacists to enforce the ethical standards under which pharmacists will practise. Pharmacists will be joining other professionals, such as registered dietitians and nurse practitioners, who have also had an expanded scope of practice, including prescribing and dispensing of drugs. This will be well under control, and the College of Pharmacists will make sure that ethical practice is followed.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

#### 2:10 Resource Development in Marie Lake Area

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Marie Lake, located just north of the city of Cold Lake, in the Alberta context is one of the few pristine lakes left with exceptional water quality. I've heard strong concerns from many landowners in the area that the lake is being threatened by a new and experimental project, already seeing considerable seismic activity, a two-kilometre tunnel from a mine shaft, and potentially up to 100 SAGD directional wells under the lake. To the Minister of Environment: can the minister tell us what effects the intense seismic activity, let alone the SAGD extraction over the next few years, will have on the aquatic environment? Can he guarantee that there'll be no adverse effects on the lake and the ecosystem?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, geophysical activity is really the

responsibility of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, so he may want to supplement my answer.

What I can tell the member about my understanding here is that the discussion regarding seismic activity is something that will involve air guns and would not involve any dynamite or explosions. Any activity that would involve fish-bearing water from a geophysical perspective would require application under the Water Act. No such application has come forward.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is still playing the same old tune when it comes to maximizing resource development at any cost. SAGD operations are notorious for causing hydrocarbon migration into both groundwater and surface water, in the Lloydminster area specifically. The EUB mandate is for responsible development in the public interest. To the Energy minister: is it in the public's interest to proceed with such a project, with the potential to permanently damage this pristine water body?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most certainly, no project with respect to oil sands, heavy oil, conventional oil, shale oil, deep tight gas, or any other project that we would consider for development in the province of Alberta would go ahead without the very stringent requirements that we put in place and adhere to in the province of Alberta with respect to these developments.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Water for Life strategy clearly states that "healthy aquatic ecosystems are vital to a high quality of life for Albertans and must be preserved." The government's strategy then makes the guarantee that "the province's aquatic ecosystems [will be] maintained and protected." To the Environment minister: will the minister tell us whether the Water for Life strategy will take precedence over an approval by the Minister of Energy? Whose competing mandate is going to be respected here?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly the responsibility of the government and this minister is to ensure the well-being of our water systems. I indicated that no application to date has been made. No studies have taken place. No approvals have been made. So I would suggest that the question is somewhat hypothetical, to say the least.

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

#### Health Regions Board Governance

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Whitecourt-St. Anne constituency has been well served by the board members of Aspen health and Capital health. Since these regional boards were designed, very little board renewal has occurred. My questions are all to the health minister. What are your plans to introduce new memberships to health boards across Alberta?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very important question. One of the mandates that I have is to look at the effectiveness and

the efficiency of our health system, and part of that is looking at board governance and making sure that we are using the resources that are applied to the system very effectively. I can tell the hon. member that I have met with board chairs on two occasions to talk about board governance, and one of the specific issues is: how do we do renewal of boards? How do we make sure that there's appropriate succession planning? We'll be coming forward with either three-year terms, perhaps two terms of three years each, or if not that, some other appropriate mechanism to make sure that there's succession planning and orderly renewal.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Well, again to the same minister: with the substantial growth here in Alberta are we planning to add any members, especially to the growth areas of this province?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The size of the boards is mandated. There is an opportunity for expansion to the size of the boards upon request. But I think it should be clearly stated that there's an optimum size for board operation, and the optimum size of the board is not necessarily impacted by the size of the population that they serve.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Well, given the first answer, that you've had meetings with regard to renewal, when will this renewal happen? When will we see a plan? Will it be weeks, months?

**Mr. Hancock:** The process is unfolding, Mr. Speaker, over the course of the next few months. As members will know, there was a task force on board governance struck, which is meeting now and will be reporting I believe in June. We're doing our board review with respect to the regional health authorities on that same time track. So I hope that by the time this House meets again in the fall, any legislation process that we might need with respect to boards will be available for the House by then. That's my anticipation.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

#### Affordability of Postsecondary Education

**Mr. Tougas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In his 2005 taxpayer-funded fireside chat to the province the former Premier made a vow to the people of Alberta. He said, "Alberta will define a new tuition policy . . . It will be the most innovative, entrepreneurial, and affordable tuition policy in the country." With no signs of a downward trend in tuition, my questions are for the Premier. Will the Premier now reaffirm the previous Premier's statement that Alberta will have the most affordable tuition policy in the country?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, as we look forward the next 20, 30, 40 years, we know that education is going to play a very key role in terms of building a knowledge-based industry here in the province of Alberta. There are many steps being taken today and into the future to ensure that we're competitive and to attract many young Albertans into postsecondary – it's not only university, but it's colleges and technical schools – and, of course further, not only with the education but additional research and also commercializing that technology in Alberta.

**Mr. Tougas:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a difference between being competitive and being the most affordable, so I'm going to ask the

question again. Will Alberta have the most affordable tuition rates in the country, as the previous Premier promised?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, approximately 70 per cent of university tuition is today paid for by the taxpayer. We're looking at ways of reducing the cost to individual students by furthering use of technology, pushing out the education into smaller centres so that we can get, of course, at least the introductory courses online. That will further reduce costs. These are all proactive steps taken in terms of increasing the number of students involved in postsecondary.

**Mr. Tougas:** Well, still no promise from the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, affordable means different things to different people. To the family of an oil executive with a high six-figure salary, tuition in Alberta would be considered affordable, but to a struggling wage earner in my constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark, \$5,000 a year tuition plus hundreds more for books may be anything but affordable. To the Premier: for the record how does the Premier define affordable tuition?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I'll have the minister respond in terms of the amounts of bursaries and remission policy that we have in this province because, quite frankly, it's outstanding compared to other provinces.

**Mr. Horner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue of affordability really isn't just about tuition. As the hon. member pointed out, there are different needs in different circumstances. Our program is among the most generous in the country as it is needs based. As we roll things out under the affordability framework, stay tuned.

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

#### Forest Protection in Kananaskis Country

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was suggested at a meeting last week in Bragg Creek that Kananaskis Country is threatened by a clear-cutting plan which was approved by the minister of sustainable development. My question, obviously, is to that minister. What is the minister doing to protect the recreational and watershed functions of K Country?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to remind all members of the Assembly that clear-cutting hasn't been allowed in this province for several decades. The current practice of block cutting respects important structural features such as watersheds, riparian areas, trails, and sensitive biological areas. I'd also remind all members that block cutting is better than the alternative, which is beetles and wildfires, which respect none of the above.

Mr. Speaker, 58 per cent of Kananaskis Country is already protected. Of what's left, only a third is available. Less than one-quarter is subject to any logging . . .

2:20

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

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Further comments from the meeting last week in Bragg Creek suggested that pine trees in Kananaskis Country are too small to be threatened by mountain pine beetles, that the beetles only attack large-diameter pines. I'm wondering if the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development can comment on how accurate that statement might be.

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, that's half true. It is true that the beetles prefer the larger diameter trees that you find in British Columbia. But if they can't find the wider diameter trees, they're happy to take the smaller ones. I want all members to know that our forestry models use 15 centimetre diameter for our predictions, the same statistic that is used by British Columbia, a province that's lost 9 out of 10 of its pine trees. Following the B.C. model, we predict similar potential losses here. We've already found isolated incidents of smaller trees being infected. The eastern slopes are at risk, and we intend to manage that risk in a responsible manner.

**Mr. Rodney:** To the same minister. Perhaps I'll be just a little bit more direct. The suggestion has been made that this government is using the threat of pine beetles as an excuse to allow timber harvesting. What is the minister's response to that accusation?

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, this is a simple question of risk management. You can look at what's happened in British Columbia, where they've projected to lose 90 per cent of all their pine trees by 2010 or 2012, and you can see what doing nothing does. We believe that responsible logging, responsible forestry is the answer. This is trying to balance long-term environmental health versus short-term aesthetic values. We will make the responsible choice, which is the long-term environmental health of our forests.

Thank you.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**  
(continued)

**The Speaker:** We were at the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to provide a sufficient number of copies of material relating to St. Joseph's hospital for tabling: a report under the Protection for Persons in Care Act, a copy of a phone bill, and various other information on the St. Joseph's hospital situation.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to table 123 letters and the relevant copies to call upon this Assembly to "try the accused killer of Joshua John Hunt as an adult due to the nature of this crime, his past criminal history and that he is so close to the age of 18 years old."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there others on tablings?

Hon. members, I have a tabling today with respect to a new brochure that we've put out called the Alberta Legislature Grounds: Self-guided Tour, which points out some 27 monuments on the grounds of this Legislature. I invite all members to go out for a walk one of these days when it gets heated in the Assembly.

Secondly, I provided to all members earlier today some information with respect to the changes as a result of a Members' Services' position on MLA remuneration that went into effect April 1, 2007. All citizens of the province of Alberta can access this information at [www.assembly.ab.ca](http://www.assembly.ab.ca). The adjustment of 4.92 per cent follows the average weekly earnings index in the province of Alberta.

Thirdly, before we left, prior to the little break we had, I advised members of the Members' Services Committee to be on standby for a possible Members' Services meeting this week because the normal

practice is to give you 10 days' notice. I'm giving you notice now that we'll probably try to meet on Wednesday night at 6 o'clock. Now, I'm assuming that one thing is going to happen: the three House leaders are going to have a motion in this Assembly to go forward because if we don't move it, we won't make the budget process. If we don't make the budget process, well, then, what sense are the reforms?

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. Liepert, Minister of Education, Alberta Education School Jurisdictions audited financial statements for the year ended August 31, 2005, sections 1, 2, and 3, and pursuant to the Teaching Profession Act the Alberta Teachers' Association 2005 annual report.

**The Speaker:** There being no further ones, we'll deal with Orders of the Day.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that written questions stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that motions for returns stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

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

**Bill 203  
Service Dogs Act**

[Debate adjourned March 19: Mrs. Forsyth speaking]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to continue.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I may, because of the time last time, start again.

**The Speaker:** Yes.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** I am pleased to have been given the opportunity to join the discussion on the Service Dogs Act. I fully support Bill 203 because it allows for a wider cross-section of citizens to be fully integrated within Alberta. Bill 203 would guarantee that people who use service dogs are legally and adequately protected from discrimination. This bill would clarify and strengthen the rights of those with physical disabilities who need service dogs to assist them.

Bill 203 calls on Albertans to move towards greater understanding of diversity within our province. It eliminates the current confusion regarding people who use service dogs and makes them feel more

comfortable about carrying out their daily routine, such as going for coffee, grocery shopping, picking things up from the ground. And, yes, Mr. Speaker, I recently read about a dog that can even put his owner's ATM card in the ATM bank machine. A service dog can make all the difference in the world for someone with reduced mobility. Certain chores which are essential components to leading independent lives are not equally accessible to all Albertans. While these things are essential, they are also taken for granted by most Albertans.

Personal stories are always nice to share, and I would like to share one that affects one of my constituents. It's called 4 Paws 4 Matthew. As a child with autism, Matthew is a little boy who many of my constituents in Parkland would recognize. He's a fair-haired little boy who likes to run and who many will recognize at his visits to Park 96. Matthew has many safety issues which could put his life in danger as well as various communication and social difficulties.

Matthew's family has recognized the need for a highly trained service dog and how these wonderful dogs have come to the aid of many children suffering from the same disability as Matthew. In January of 2006 the family asked for help from our community, their family, and their friends. The response, Mr. Speaker, has been overwhelming and helped raise a whopping \$13,200. Since the training of service dogs is quite expensive and predicted to take as long as two years, they hope to receive their dog at the end of this year or early 2008.

Although the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act includes protection for those using service dogs, often the general public is unaware of it. Mr. Speaker, blind persons are no longer faced with speculation concerning their rights to use guide dogs in public places. With the help of legislation the use of guide dogs has become an accepted and commonplace practice throughout our society. We have come to understand and appreciate the need blind people have for their guide dogs. Unfortunately, similar knowledge concerning service dogs is not as widespread due to the current ambiguities surrounding this issue.

The Blind Persons' Rights Act helped Alberta's visually challenged people gain access to the benefits of Alberta's quality of life. The same allowance should be extended to those with other disabilities. There have been numerous instances when people with physical disabilities who depend on the aid of service dogs have been excluded from social settings due to the confusion the general public has regarding the admittance of their service dogs into these areas. Bill 203 presents us with the opportunity to help all Albertans live happier and more fulfilling lives no matter what their disabilities. There is no doubt that people with physical disabilities stand to gain with the help of their service dogs. Mr. Speaker, for the Matthews of the world and many other Albertans who have or are waiting for a service dog, I urge members of the Assembly to support Bill 203.

I will leave you with the story of Riley, who suffers from autism. A cute, precocious seven-year-old, Riley likes trucks, tractors, and any other kind of heavy equipment. But he loves his best friend, Yogi, a golden retriever. Riley had a history of bolting but not anymore. His family waited three years to get Yogi, but it didn't take long for the dog to have a huge impact on their lives. When Yogi first came into the house, it was like ducks to water. It was just so unbelievable. The bond was instant, said his mother.

Bill 203 will help fulfill an environment where many Albertans would be able to participate more fully in society. Bill 203 is a step towards making this vision a reality. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:30

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. I rise to support my colleague's Bill 203 on service dogs. I have worked extensively at the University of Calgary trying to improve the lot of disabled students. I have met with them with regard to examination rooms and accommodating schedules to recognize the fact that depending on their disabilities, they may require extra time when taking an exam. Disabled students have had quite a bit of difficulty over the years having their disabilities recognized, not to the point where they are singled out because of their disability but for the need for their disability to be supported.

I worked with one young lady in particular over the past year who had a service dog because she had the misfortune of having been run into while driving, so her spine had suffered some damage. Then on top of that she suffered from an industrial accident while working for a lumber company that didn't have proper saw guards. She had injuries to her back, and she also had severe injuries to the tendons in her right hand. As a result, she had a service dog that basically did the lifting for her, that carried her books from class to class.

Initially at the University of Calgary she was received in sort of a mixed way in certain areas. For example, she wasn't allowed into Dinny's Den. Some of her professors had a degree of discomfort with the dog, so her access was very much prevented. With all the other difficulties that she had in terms of having her disability recognized and having tuition support and funding for books and so on, just paying the daily rent was extremely difficult for this young lady. Fortunately, because everybody was willing to work in a collaborative fashion, the solution came through the recognition of the dog's qualifications.

I would like to thank a young lady that I worked with when my wife and I ran the Cataract Creek wilderness campground. Nokia, the young lady in question, trained dogs as well as being a conservation officer. While she loved working in the forest, she found that the salaries that were paid to conservation officers could not begin to compare with what the city of Calgary was offering with regard to their canine service work. In fact, her salary basically doubled that of the individual responsible for managing the Sheep River ranger station. He was sorry to lose her but realized that she had to be thinking about her financial future. Anyway, this young lady intervened on behalf of the university student and assisted the university student in receiving recognition for the qualifications and the training of this particular dog to carry the load.

Service animals basically are the links between people with disabilities and the world around them. We're more used to the idea of a dog for the blind, but the reality is that there are a large number of dogs that are performing a great variety of functions. The member opposite noted one actually being able to access an ATM, and I noticed that same article. It's amazing what animals can do.

The comradeship of an animal is also extremely important. I know that when my grandmother was in a seniors' home, the Sarcee auxiliary, there were visits by dogs that were brought in. For a senior who, depending on their family situation, may not be subject to having that many visits, these dogs perform a valuable service just in terms of their friendship and their openness. Of course, all the seniors along the route would have special treats for the dogs, so I'm sure that by the time the dog got home, there was no need to feed it. There is no doubt that this is a wonderful bill.

Another example that happened this past fall with the Calgary board of education was a young man who required the support of a service dog. Initially there was quite a bit of fear and trepidation within the school from administration, from classmates as to this dog. You know: how well was it trained? Was it friendly? Was it thoroughly cleaned? And so on. There were a whole series of issues, but again due to collaborative effort, information, and

education these initial concerns were overcome, and the young gentleman and his service dog have been allowed access. He no longer had to stay at home, but he could receive the full support of the service dog.

One thing that Bill 203 must have is a large portion of education and information support. There are a number of individuals – and I gather it runs sometimes with regard to ethnic backgrounds – that have a severe fear of dogs, and that fear might cause them discomfort. What we need to do is provide the education and information for people to realize that these service dogs are not a personal threat and that they serve a very special function.

There is another concern that we have too. This young lady who I helped at the University of Calgary had a large poster draped over the saddlebags of her dog saying: "Please do not pet. This dog is a service dog." I know the number of times I tried to drag a stray dog home and claim that it had followed me home. We have to treat people and their service dogs with respect and recognize that this isn't your regular pet, that this animal has a specific function to perform.

Therefore, I hope that as part of making Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act, successful, there will be a great amount put aside to inform the public on the role of these dogs, not just taxi drivers who may question whether or not this dog can be admitted or individuals in apartment complexes who may not realize that this is no regular pet. This is the equivalent of a human companion and needs to be treated with and awarded the same degree of respect that we would provide to a person who is serving as an aide to an individual with disabilities.

I want to pass along my support for Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act, and to please ask that the education and information parts of this bill along with the follow-up in terms of allowing the access to occur take place.

Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, then the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise in strong support of Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act, 2007, and I would like to congratulate and commend the Member for Strathcona for bringing this bill forward. It's a very timely and a necessary bill as the need for service dogs develops to a higher degree in our society. This bill does clarify and strengthen the rights of service dog owners and it does ensure that things like occupancy, accommodation, service for people with service dogs is properly recognized. The need for service dogs is as clear as the need for guide dogs for the blind.

2:40

You know, the ways that we deal with problems that arise for people who are disabled are things that change over time. I remember when we started to change the nature of the corners of our sidewalks and make ramps. I talked to some folks who had vision problems. They found that their cane no longer was good for them to deal with coming to the corner because they couldn't use it to find out where the road started anymore. Now, the fact was that they needed those guide dogs. The same is very, very true for service dogs in many, many circumstances in our society. I've had many people in my constituency call me about this particular bill, and it's very interesting that there is such support for legislation of this nature.

There are savings for the province in that there are not adequate numbers of people to work with the disabled right now because of shortages in our labour market. Service dogs – and a number of my constituents have brought this forward to me – provide an alternative to realistically helping the disabled operate within our society. The savings in not having people do that I think is clear. The need for this bill is important.

I commend the arguments of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and also the Member for Calgary-Varsity and what they have said in terms of the importance of the comradeship, the partnership that these animals provide. I support this bill, and I support it very strongly.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Webber:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Strathcona. The efforts the member has put forth in the sponsorship of this bill are commendable and should be applauded.

I want to acknowledge that this act benefits all persons with disabilities who need to use service dogs. Persons with disabilities who need service dogs currently lack sufficient protection. The Service Dogs Act will enable service dogs' users to lead lives free of discrimination. This act defines the use of a service dog for the betterment of every individual who relies on them throughout their daily lives.

I want to draw attention to other jurisdictions where similar legislation has been a success story. British Columbia, Quebec, Manitoba, and New Brunswick are provinces that have enacted legislation that permits service dogs, allowing persons with disabilities who need service dogs to have unrestricted access to public accommodations and facilities. These jurisdictions have recognized that persons with disabilities and their accompanying service dogs should not face intolerance.

It is imperative to outline that in the Service Dogs Act an accredited service dog will be used by individuals who are affected by a range of physical disabilities. It is important to provide persons with disabilities who need service dogs an opportunity to live and interact in their community free of bias. We should strive to recognize, as other jurisdictions have, that service dogs for persons with disabilities are an essential part of their lives. For many individuals service dogs become indispensable and are required to perform day-to-day errands and responsibilities. Service dogs are a necessity. They assist the individual to reduce some of the complications that a person with a disability faces. Service dogs provide these individuals with the capability to perform basic tasks that persons without disabilities take for granted.

I'd like to take this opportunity to refer to the example of British Columbia and this province's Guide Animal Act. This jurisdiction recognized the importance of service dogs and the useful purpose that they serve. Service dogs provide a necessary service to their dependants. We need to ensure that a person requiring a service dog is not discriminated against when they attempt to access public accommodations and facilities.

In Quebec they acknowledge that their dog guides are equivalent to a prosthetic device. Equating the service dog to a prosthetic device communicates their importance very effectively. This description makes it possible for fellow citizens to comprehend the legitimacy of service dogs and the purpose that they serve for those who use them. The Manitoba Human Rights Code acknowledges that a person with a disability is someone who relies on the use of a guide dog or other animal assistant.

I want to emphasize that Bill 203 does not reduce the legitimacy of a guide dog. It is intended to strengthen the understanding that both guide dogs and service dogs are relevant aides. This is an important distinction, and one that Bill 203 will further and sustain. New Brunswick has legislated the right for a person with a disability who needs a dog guide to have fair access to rental, residential, and commercial properties as well as the purchase of real estate. Newfoundland and Labrador also recognize that persons with disabilities who need dog guides should have equal access to housing accommodations. Bill 203 provides an opportunity to demonstrate that we care about and acknowledge the complex life of a person with a disability.

We have an obligation to acknowledge the personal challenges that persons with disabilities face. A service dog should not be perceived as a barrier. Those who can better their lives by using accredited service dogs should be allowed to do so. Service dogs for persons with disabilities serve to benefit their wellness and improve their overall quality of life. Service dogs empower their companions, providing them with the ability to actively participate in society. We have to realize, as other jurisdictions have, that persons with disabilities feel as though they have limited capabilities because they are not comfortable and need the assistance of a service dog to go anywhere. The public perception assumes that service dogs are not permitted into public areas. For persons with disabilities, this restrictive atmosphere contributes to feelings of apprehension and isolation. We must recognize that service dogs provide a potential to alleviate these feelings, ensuring that persons with disabilities can live the best possible life.

A problem that has been documented in Alberta and other jurisdictions is that people who need service dogs were being denied access to restaurants, businesses, and other public places. We need to address this issue so that Albertans, both those with and without disabilities, will understand the necessity and legitimacy of a service dog. For most citizens it is common knowledge that the visually challenged are allowed to be accompanied by a guide dog into any public setting. The intention of this bill is to establish that persons with disabilities who need service dogs are permitted to access public places without discrimination. It is Alberta's turn to recognize that the use of a service dog can only serve to better people's lives. Bill 203 will communicate to businesses and other public venues that service dogs are equal in purpose to guide dogs. We need to allow the disabled the full advantages afforded to all Albertans. It is in the best interest of everyone.

This act will also ensure that a person with a disability and their accompanying service dog will have equal access to housing. Persons with disabilities should not be discriminated against when they attempt to purchase or rent an available housing accommodation. Any potential vacancy that would be available to a person without a disability should be available to a person with a disability and their accompanying service dog. There should be no discrimination. If a person with a disability can meet the financial requirements, they should be recognized as a qualified candidate for a housing vacancy.

Bill 203 will clarify any discrepancies that are currently occurring with persons with disabilities and their accompanying service dogs. It is important to establish that the rights of persons with disabilities and their accompanying service dogs will be protected. This piece of legislation will allow a person with a disability who needs a service dog unrestricted access to all public facilities and accommodations. A distinction is especially important because of the potential conflict that could arise if a person, with or without a disability, is not aware of their rights and how to treat the situation.

Not only will these individuals be allowed unrestricted access to public areas; they will also be able to fully participate in the workforce. It is a necessity that persons with disabilities are not discriminated against when they are seeking employment. If the person with a disability is employed, their need for a service dog must be respected. The employer must recognize the reliance on the service dog and in no way limit the potential opportunities of the individual. This will allow a person with a disability to live a more fulfilling life, which cannot be achieved if they are restricted from working. The rights established in this act will enable those individuals who need a service dog to be in a better position to contribute to our society. They'll be able to improve their social status and advance their personal aspirations.

2:50

Other jurisdictions have concluded that service dogs have a minimal impact in day-to-day life. The expectations are that the service dog will be kept obedient in a manner that would be solely, in a public area, for the assistance of the person with a disability.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to applaud the intent of Bill 203. It serves to improve the lives of individuals who need service dogs. This act offers the potential for persons with disabilities to gain the respect and dignity that they deserve. Those of us who are not familiar with the struggles of physical disabilities can surely realize the comfort and useful purpose that a service dog provides. This act addresses a problem that has been well documented in the province of Alberta and several other jurisdictions. It's time to offer those who face disadvantages a chance to improve their lives. It is in the interests of our province and will benefit many.

Bill 203 will demonstrate that our government is continually trying to assist persons with disabilities by allowing them the right to be accompanied by an accredited service dog. I believe that this is a commendable piece of legislation, and it is in our best interest to pass Bill 203.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the next four speakers that have advised me of their desire to participate are the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, then the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, then the Member for Red Deer-North, then the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. If there are others, kindly advise.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Mr. Martin:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be short because there are other people who want to participate in this debate. Again, like others I would congratulate the Member for Strathcona for bringing forward this bill. It's certainly designed to eliminate discrimination based on the fact that a person is dependent on a service dog. We know this can be problematic for certain people. There are bylaws in condo associations and others where you can't have pets. There are rental places – especially now, with the rent increases and lack of vacancies, this becomes an even more severe problem for people that need service dogs. So it's a good bill.

I just want to say that there could be an unintended loophole, though, that I'd like the member to think about because it allows for the minister to issue identification cards as proof of a service dog's qualification. My worry there is that, knowing how bureaucracies work sometimes, it may take a long time to get these service cards. People lose them. It seems to me that this could allow some leeway for those that might want to do it to discriminate in case the proof of a qualification isn't immediately available, and I know that's not the intention of the act.

I would say that this is a good bill, but maybe the member would take a look at what I'd call a friendly amendment stating something like this: at no point shall the lack of identification issued by the ministry abrogate the rights and responsibilities under section 3. It seems to me that if we did that, even if they didn't have the card – it was coming; with the bureaucracy they'd lost it, but it was still coming – that would still not stop the grounds for discrimination. I just throw that out to the member to consider. Other than that, we certainly will support the bill, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, then followed by the members for Red Deer-North, Cardston-Taber-Warner, Calgary-Hays, and Calgary-Fort.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to acknowledge that animals contribute tremendously to all of our lives. Our dogs, for example, aid us on our farms, help us retain our independence, offer us comfort in time of need, find missing people, and partner with the police in canine units. It's time to reward the contributions of our animal population and give them the protection and recognition that they deserve, so I thank the Member for Strathcona for bringing Bill 203, Service Dogs Act, to us.

I'd like to share a dog story that's important to our history, not purely a Canadian dog story but one with a Canadian connection. It took place in 1867, a year that has a certain significance for Canadians and a different significance for Brits. The British, as you probably know, have a reputation as dog lovers, and 1867 was the year a new dog tax and registration were introduced in Britain. In Canada, with our three plus levels of government, such a measure would come in the form of a municipal bylaw. In Britain, where there are no provincial governments except in Northern Ireland, and where dogs are really important, the new dog tax came in a bill introduced in the Mother of Parliaments, at Westminster. Dog lovers all over the country had strong opinions on this proposed law. They were writing letters and lobbying their MPs, and many of them showed up in the visitors' gallery the day the bill was to be debated.

Now, the same day there was another bill on the Order Paper, for the passage of the British North America Act to join a number of colonies in the New World into a dominion called Canada. The terms of Confederation had been debated back and forth for a long time. There had been arguments over the name of the new entity, arguments over the division of powers between the central government and the provinces, and arguments over the makeup of an upper House to be called the Senate. Does this sound familiar?

With more than three rounds of bargaining behind them, the Canadian Fathers of Confederation who made it to London for the final reading of the bill were hoping that this would be the final reading. With Canadians' penchant for debating constitutional proposals, they were hoping that some backbench member would not throw a monkey wrench into the process by coming up with some new proposal or variation. The Canadians sat, worried, in the gallery with fingers crossed and bated breath. They needn't have worried. With all of the spectators crowded in for the next bill, on the dog tax, the parliamentarians wouldn't dare begin any new discussion that would come between British dog owners and their dogs.

So Canadian Confederation passed in a matter of minutes. The MPs yawned as the bill was read, shuffled as it was explained, gave it perfunctory agreement, and saved their speeches and energies for the real business of the day: the dog tax bill that followed. Mr.



Speaker, we owe the existence of Canada to British dog lovers, and today I would like to return that favour.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

In my earlier member's statement on this topic I talked about the way dogs, working with humans, mirror and enhance our humanity. They draw our attention to moods we barely sense and accept us as their leaders with an unqualified loyalty. In providing finely tuned supports for persons with many kinds of disabilities, they have extended awareness to the ways we all are differently abled. They show sensitivity to others' needs in their gentleness to young children. We use the expression "dog eat dog." It better describes the business world than the canine one. Dogs show greater loyalty than many employers do to their employees and suppliers.

Mr. Speaker, this bill provides for dogs who work with humans to be able to do their job more effectively, without hindrance, and so helps to limit discrimination toward people who depend on them. Our passing it puts us on the road to a more human society.

In my earlier member's statement I referred to an *Ode to a Dog* by Albert Payson Terhune, author of the *Lad of Sunnybank* stories. Here I'm going to read a part of that poem about canine qualities.

Staunch friendship, wanting neither thanks nor fee  
Safe privilege to worship and to guard:  
That is their creed. They know no shrewder way  
To travel through their hour of lifetime here.  
Would Man but deign to serve his god as they,  
[The Kingdom would] dawn within the year.

Mr. Speaker, by passing this bill, let us let service dogs do their jobs that they do so well, and let us do the job we need to do: the building of a human society that brings us closer to the kingdom.

Thank you.

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

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured to speak to this private member's bill, and I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Strathcona for his efforts over the last five years.

People have come to love their dogs so much that some of them have a hard time understanding why anyone would not be willing to welcome a dog in their homes. As the old saying goes: love me, love my dog. Harry S. Truman also thought that dogs were very important. He said, "Children and dogs are as necessary to the welfare of the country as is Wall Street and the railroads." Emily Dickinson ranked dogs right up there with human beings. She said, "They are better than human beings because they know but do not tell."

3:00

As loving and as important as my dogs are to me, they do not serve in the same way that a service dog serves its master. Whether the master be a young, autistic child, a person who is blind, or a person who is deaf, dogs joyously serve our needs in ways that are amazing. We have all heard the incredible stories of how dogs have saved the lives of family members who would have otherwise slept through a raging fire or a burglary, and we can see in our own communities guide dogs that safely lead those who are blind across busy streets and through crowded sidewalks. Dogs are amazing, and well-trained service dogs are essential to help meet the needs of their masters with disabilities.

I have a constituent in Red Deer-North who has been very active over the last few years working to help people in our community to understand why service dogs for those with hearing impairment require equal rights. Liz Craig often walks in downtown Red Deer

with her beautiful, well-trained dog, whose name is Rain, by her side, protecting her and giving her warnings from sounds that he hears that Liz cannot hear. In one sense Liz asks that all service dogs be given the same rights as guide dogs. I would like to sincerely thank Liz for all that she's done to help bring legislation forward to recognize these service dogs. She asks that service dogs be given the respect and rights of guide dogs as recognized under the Blind Persons' Rights Act.

Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act, will do just that. Bill 203 will enshrine the human right of mobility for those with disability into the laws of our province. Bill 203 is about ensuring that persons with disabilities can succeed and not be discriminated against. This government has made a commitment to Albertans to consider the needs of the disability community when developing legislation and policy. Bill 203 upholds this government priority. Bill 203 will create legal recognition for service dogs and extend rights to those who rely on service dogs for assistance with everyday tasks. The Blind Persons' Rights Act guarantees that those who rely on guide dogs are protected from discrimination. The vast majority of Albertans and Alberta businesses recognizes the value of service dogs to the disability community and are amenable to their use in public places. Entrenching the right to use a service dog in law will ensure that this right is applied consistently and systematically.

Bill 203 contains provisions to ensure that the use of service dogs in Alberta is effectively regulated, and the potential for abuse of the system is minimal. Also, very importantly, Bill 203 would allow the minister to regulate training schools for service dogs. The regulation of training schools would be beneficial not only to the disability community but to the general public as well. Regulating training schools would provide an assurance that the animal is properly trained to meet everyday needs. These regulated training schools could enhance public safety by ensuring that service dogs are prepared to meet the challenges of interacting with people in a variety of settings. They would assist in making sure that service dogs are trained to deal with issues such as public transportation procedures and emergency scenarios. Bill 203 will help to clear up any confusion regarding the acceptable use of these animals.

Some groups have raised concerns about this bill. There is the possibility that this legislation could cause some confusion due to overlap with the current Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act. These concerns are valid, but it would be a real tragedy if this legislation did not proceed for this reason. The beauty of legislation is that it is adaptable to changing conditions. If we see a need in the future to improve this legislation, we are able to do that through amendments and changes to regulations.

An open, inclusive, and just society is something that we as Albertans highly value. I urge all members of this Assembly to strongly consider giving their support to this bill. After all, dogs are a person's best friend, and as my husband often says, they're the best kind of people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to get up and to talk on Bill 203. I applaud the intent of this bill and the many accolades that have been given to dogs. I'm a dog lover. I'm a dog owner. I understand and really appreciate the value of dogs in our society.

It helps in many ways. For such things as the border there are many things where the dog is the most efficient and the best that we can use for finding drugs, firearms, money that's being smuggled.

Then there is the positive aspect in society. For many people that are sick, there's nothing better than a loyal companion like a dog to help them to recover, and many seniors in their homes place great importance on their dog and the comfort that they give them and also the safety. The list goes on and on.

Many members here have spoken to the benefits of dogs, but due to time shortage and to try and be quick, I'll use my remarks brief and talk about the other side, where I have a few concerns and think maybe we need some friendly amendments in order to protect the rights of all Canadians. Our freedom and rights as individuals generally end where they infringe on other people's freedoms and rights. We always need to look at that and be careful when we want to entrench a so-called new right that we think someone has been neglected in having.

My concern, Mr. Speaker, is for people with allergies. There are many people that have allergies to dogs. I'll use the example of a restaurant owner. Perhaps his whole family works in that restaurant, and they're allergic to dogs. If we entrench this to where they cannot protect their own rights, what's going to happen in a situation like that? If a dog comes into a restaurant like that, then all of a sudden the owners and the workers are put in a situation where they're having a terrible attack, and they can do nothing about it because this law is written such that they have no rights.

So my concern is that there needs to be some sort of little amendment in here that would address the rights of owners, workers, and other areas that are allergic to dogs and could have perhaps even a life-threatening situation in the presence of one. Somehow there needs to be a balance where that courtesy, that respect, that understanding is extended out, and people's rights are protected. It's not that we want to stop service dogs from going everywhere, but there are those rare occasions when there are circumstances. If this law is passed and written in stone such that they now have the absolute right to go anywhere and everywhere they desire to go, we are infringing and perhaps putting other people in danger because of that.

So I would like to see a little bit of softening of the wording on where they can go, like I say, for businesses and owners to be able to have a little bit of courtesy and respect for their rights for those things that are affecting their health. But on the whole, like I say, I love dogs. I'm a dog owner. I think the intent of this bill is excellent, but we need to look at those who it maybe isn't excellent for in the way the wording is and respect those people.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to join the discussion on the Service Dogs Act, 2007, introduced by the hon. Member for Strathcona. I support Bill 203 because it clarifies the ambiguities concerning the rights and responsibilities involved in the utilization of service dogs. No legislation specifically addresses the use of service dogs by physically disabled persons in need of assistance. Many people who use service dogs have been faced with uncomfortable and avoidable situations stemming from the vagueness of the rights of these people.

People with disabilities face additional, unnecessary burdens due to the general public's lack of knowledge regarding the nature of service dogs. People seem to be less informed about the myriad of daily tasks service dogs help the physically disabled complete. Albertans are fully aware of the extent to which guide dogs assist blind persons. There is a need to clarify the rights of those who use service dogs in order to allow the physically disabled to utilize service dogs so they, too, can receive help in completing essential tasks throughout their days.

Since there is no clear legislation addressing service dogs, the public has not come to a consensus on which protocols to follow. Each situation appears to be dealt with on an individual basis with no set standards. Mr. Speaker, if Bill 203 is enacted, it would no longer be unintentionally left in the hands of the general public to determine if persons accompanied by service dogs can enter certain establishments. Bill 203 would empower those of us who use these dogs as they would have clear and solid documents to present if their rights were being contested.

3:10

Clarification of the rights of persons with service dogs is important as it will strengthen their rights; for example, renting an apartment, entering grocery stores, or having equal access to public spaces. The Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act is intended to provide protection for physically disabled individuals who need the use of service dogs. It is currently the only protective measure set in place to safeguard the rights of physically disabled persons who use service dogs.

Provisions are often unclear regarding the recourse if the right to be accompanied by a service dog is denied. Protection under the act has proven to be insufficient. Local police currently lack a standard for enforcing the provision of the act, and more cases go to the human rights court because of the lack of clarity. It often takes extended periods of time for the courts to rule on complaints filed under the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act. Bill 203 would ensure that persons with disabilities have the legal right to be accompanied by an accredited service dog in all areas open to the general public, free of discrimination, no questions asked. Mr. Speaker, with the enactment of Bill 203 it would be clearly against the law to ask someone accompanied by a service dog to leave a public area. Confusion would be eliminated, and their rights could not be denied if they were explicitly outlined in legislation.

The Blind Persons' Rights Act clearly establishes the rights of blind people and prohibits discriminatory practice against persons accompanied by guide dogs. Most people and organizations understand that guide dogs for the visually impaired are protected under the Blind Persons' Rights Act, but most do not necessarily understand that the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act does the same for persons with disabilities accompanied by service dogs. The Blind Persons' Rights Act sets the precedent for explicit rights regarding use of service dogs for all the physically disabled community.

Provisions in Bill 203 include references to service dogs themselves. This provision would make it illegal to ask someone to keep their service dog outside while in a public area. The bill would identify who is legally entitled to the use of a service dog. Only those defined under the Service Dogs Act as having a physical disability would be entitled to use a certified service dog.

Bill 203 strictly stipulates the standards of the service dogs. In order to be classified as service dogs, the animals would have to meet safety and training requirements to ensure their reliability. Service dogs are trained in such a way that while they are assisting those in need, they act as though they are on duty and are fully attentive and on task. Service dogs are used to avoid hazards, assist the deaf or hard of hearing, assist with mobility disabilities, assist with seizure response, and otherwise compensate for a disability.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 would provide more freedom and enhanced quality of life for the physically disabled. Persons who utilize service dogs would no longer have to worry about confrontations while they go about their daily chores and activities. We as Albertans want to create an environment where those with service dogs can fully participate in all aspects of the province's activities.

Bill 203 presents an opportunity to enhance social cohesion and Albertans' quality of life. It is our duty as legislators to correct this unacceptable situation and to ensure that all Albertans are treated in an equitable manner.

I urge my fellow members to support Bill 203. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to speak on Bill 203, Service Dogs Act, 2007, and I must commend the Member for Strathcona for bringing this excellent bill forward. He's certainly giving this House an opportunity to put stock in the commitment to doing what's right for all Albertans, including taking action on behalf of Alberta's disabled community.

Mr. Speaker, I echo the sentiments of Alberta's disabled community when I point out what a progressive piece of legislation this is for so many disabled citizens. In this piece of legislation we are continuing to ingrain the fundamental principle that all Albertans will have the opportunity to partake in our society. Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act, is a positive measure in assuring that Alberta's disabled population would be afforded the opportunities necessary to excel in their communities.

As members of this Assembly it is our responsibility to ensure that the rights and the needs of all individuals are secure as per the ever-changing needs in our society.

Mr. Speaker, this bill fits well with the priority aiming to improve Albertans' quality of life. That is our government's priority, improving lives by creating policies that reflect the varying needs of disabled Albertans.

All Albertans are unique, including those with a disability. We are consistently looking at various ways that we can facilitate the ease of inclusion of all Albertans. Assistance for disabled individuals is a priority that is always undergoing fine-tuning. This includes making infrastructure improvements, with the installation of ramps and elevators, lifts for the physically disabled, and offering TTY service via telephone for the hearing impaired. The general use of dogs assisting the disabled in Alberta has been facilitated by the Blind Persons' Rights Act and the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act. They have justly served both the blind and the visually impaired by making it illegal to discriminate against individuals with guide dogs. The former provides the necessary framework for regulating the use of dogs as a form of visual assistance.

As social norms continue to change, this Assembly is being presented with opportunities to ensure that our laws reflect what's right and fair in this community. The important role of the service dog is in no doubt. A specially trained service dog is one of the means available to aid in everything, from safely performing day-to-day tasks to even obtaining an education and developing a successful career. Some of us might not be aware that the use of a highly specialized canine friend is not limited to the scope of seeing eye dogs, Mr. Speaker. Other functions include assisting the hearing impaired, providing timely seizure response, aiding in the completion of day-to-day tasks, and generally enriching the lives of disabled citizens.

I'm touched every time I hear yet another heartwarming story involving Albertans, regardless of age and affliction, being better equipped to contribute to society as a result of their loyal service dog. The opportunities for service dogs to help disabled individuals are as varied as those who require the support and are often for activities that many of us take for granted. For example, cerebral palsy is a neurological disorder and causes serious physical disabili-

ties in posture and movement. For individuals with cerebral palsy, this particular dog is able to do things such as pick up dropped items, open doors, and even press the necessary speed-dial on the phone in case of emergency.

When the majority of Albertans see an individual with a service dog, they are happy to afford the dog and the handler common courtesy and the space necessary to do what they must. That's why I'd like to think that this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, is very proactive in empowering disabled persons rather than restricted to instances of discrimination, considering the hardship that can arise when viable members of our society are discouraged from doing what they need to do as a result of a service dog, especially in a culture that so openly accepts guide dogs for the blind.

I'm sure that the members in this Chamber are comforted by having a certain dog in their lives although I don't think that any of our four-legged friends are performing on quite a scale as these other service dogs.

So, Mr. Speaker, this very important bill strengthens our social infrastructure, affirming our commitment to all Albertans. When we call dogs "man's best friend," let's treat our best friends the way we treat ourselves, particularly those friends who not only play with us but also seriously work with us to help our vulnerable citizens. For this reason I call on the whole House to support this bill wholeheartedly and with every vote that you can draw on.

Thank you.

3:20

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief, but I just want to make sure that I'm on the record for having spoken to this wonderful bill that my colleague from Strathcona has brought forward. It has been many years since this has been discussed, and good on him for bringing this forward and actually getting it to the point where we're creating legislation. Certainly, in my mind, it is something that should be passed at this point.

**An Hon. Member:** Question.

**Ms Pastoor:** Perhaps I should ask my hon. colleague a question.

One of the experiences that I had where I learned the difference between a guide dog and a service dog was quite by accident with one of my constituents. I was making a presentation for a 60th wedding anniversary. When I was invited into their home, they had pictures of many dogs. Then we got into the fact that the man was deaf but also had a depth perception, in fact, that he was prone to falling. The dog that he had used for many, many years would, when he was going towards steps or if there was an incline, actually step right in front of him to warn him. I just thought that that was really wonderful, and I found this, as I mentioned, quite by accident.

One of the things that I can't believe is that the general society is still not aware of the value of these animals in our lives and that they don't realize that this is what helps these people live to their highest potential. I think of the horses that are used in our Handicapped Riding Association. I think it's been mentioned about the ability of dogs to bring out the very best in autistic children. I've also seen that work with horses.

I think that we really have to value and understand the quality of life that animals bring to our lives, not just in terms of service and in guides but also in my particular area of geriatrics, the wonderful bringing out of some people, in particular Alzheimer's, when animals are around. They love bunnies, and they love animals, and they love the cats that will come up and cuddle with them. Animals are very, very important.

In the regulations that would go along with this legislation I would like to see a very, very strong educational component put in so that we can educate the general public. I think the general public, in fairness to them, are probably no different from the rest of us. Unless something sort of really affects us personally, we often aren't aware of it. I believe that a good educational program would make general society a lot more aware. In the awareness and in the understanding I also think that we create acceptance so that at some point in time this conversation that we're having right now would be absolutely an obsolete conversation because everyone would understand and appreciate and accept that animals are important in our lives.

Also, for us that are not disabled, I think we really have to be able to have the opportunity to learn. In the learning, as I've said, and also in the acceptance I believe that it would create an empathy for people less fortunate than us and certainly an empathy for people who want to be a part of society that probably never had the opportunity to be a part of our society before.

So I stand here and, like my colleague ahead of me, ask for full support of this House for this very, very important bill for those of us who are less fortunate.

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

**Mr. Cenaiko:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Strathcona. His work for disabled people as the chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities is commendable.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 is a very meaningful way of recognizing the needs of disabled people in Alberta. People who have challenges or burdens need to have the tools and the means to lead meaningful and productive lives. We all know the importance of having a strong economy and a healthy business climate. None of that is sustained without ensuring that we have strong and healthy Albertans.

Our government has made it a priority to improve the quality of life of Albertans. Bill 203 comes at a time when our government is focused on making sure its policies and directions reflect the needs of the disabled community. All Albertans are a critical component of a strong and successful province. Lifting up those Albertans who need help allows the province to meet its full productivity. The Service Dogs Act will help disabled people participate fully in society and the economy free of discrimination. It will help all Albertans to gain a greater understanding of the needs of disabled people. This bill addresses how a disabled individual can have a service dog and use the dog as a critical support to daily living.

The Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act does not provide sufficient recourse to individuals who face discrimination as a result of using a service dog. The HRCMA does protect persons with disabilities, but there are no provisions in the act that support individuals with service dogs if they are refused access to a restaurant or are not allowed to travel on a bus. Individuals should not be restricted in their day-to-day goings-on because they lack the necessary legal protections. Individuals should not be denied access to public places or transportation because of an ambiguity in legislation. As such, Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 serves to build on the HRCMA by prohibiting discrimination towards disabled people who have a service dog and putting in place fines to send a message to those who act in discriminatory ways. Albertans recognize how a Service Dogs Act represents common sense.

The Blind Persons' Rights Act has been very effective in protecting blind people and allowing them to participate fully in society. Guide dogs play such a valuable role in the lives of their handlers.

Albertans understand the role guide dogs play in supporting the visually challenged. The role of the Blind Persons' Rights Act is well regarded and respected. The BPRA was amended in 2004 to strengthen its provisions relating to enforcement and identification. It is a strong piece of legislation, and it will continue to be a stand-alone piece of legislation. Through a Service Dogs Act we have an opportunity to extend the provisions of the BPRA to all other disabled people. Bill 203 also levels the legislative playing field between provinces. British Columbia has similar legislation.

Bill 203 is the right thing to do. We are giving the opportunity to persons with disabilities to get around in their communities in a way that they may have been prevented from doing in the past. Bill 203 allows for greater self-reliance. Persons with disabilities can lead more independent lives in doing their groceries, going to medical appointments, visiting family and friends. It can improve their self-esteem and confidence, and it allows caregivers and service providers the ability to try new approaches in assisting persons with disabilities and attempting new types of care.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 will protect individuals with service dogs from discrimination in accessing housing. We must ensure that they are not discriminated against if they want to rent a house or an apartment. There's a great deal of pride for an individual in his or her place of dwelling, and without protections in place for people who need service dogs, they can be limited in where they could live on their own.

Bill 203 can serve to increase the opportunities available to individuals with disabilities who seek employment. There is no better way to increase a person's self-worth and self-esteem than the opportunity to be employed. There are meaningful opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate in the workforce. If barriers exist for individuals, it is incumbent on us that they are removed to allow people to lead independent lives.

3:30

Bill 203 allows individuals with disabilities to lead improved lives and I believe is moving in the right direction by giving disabled people the rights as outlined in the bill. Our responsibility, Mr. Speaker, as MLAs is to ensure that Albertans have a great quality of life. Our government is moving ahead to improve the quality of life of Albertans, most importantly, making sure that disabled individuals can participate fully in the life of this province. I think Bill 203 is a step forward towards fuller participation. Legislation allowing people to lead active, independent lives is legislation we should be keen to support.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This bill is the latest step in continuing efforts to protect the human rights of Albertans with disabilities. It reflects government's priority of ensuring that our policies reflect the varied needs of the disabled community.

It is a basic principle of fairness that everyone enjoy a full life regardless of what their abilities or possibly disabilities may be. No person should be deprived of the opportunity to participate fully in the social, economic, and cultural life of the province. For some a trained service dog provides the opportunity to live independently. It enables the successful completion of an education. It also opens the possibility of holding a job.

In Alberta more than 350,000 people, about one person in eight, live with some form of disability. Many people are quite capable and not in need of a trained dog, but a trained dog can perform more than 100 different tasks.

Service dogs raise the standard of living and the quality of life of their handlers. Research has found that within six months of receiving a trained service dog, people with ambulatory disabilities showed a significant improvement in self-esteem and psychological well-being. They were more integrated into their community, they increased their school attendance or hours of part-time employment, and they required fewer paid and unpaid hours of assistance.

Trained service dogs raise self-esteem and psychological well-being. Participants in one study reported nearly a threefold increase in their self-esteem on a standardized psychosocial status questionnaire one year after being paired with a trained service dog.

Trained service dogs help their handlers integrate into their communities. Service dogs also have a positive effect on marital status, helping separated or divorced handlers reconcile with their spouses. There is evidence showing that people are less awkward around individuals with disabilities who are accompanied by a trained service dog.

Having a trained service dog can reduce by more than two-thirds the number of hours each handler needs assistance and aid. Disability support workers can focus on enabling additional activities and have more time to assist their clients. After factoring in training costs over the course of its lifetime, a trained service dog can mean dollar savings in the tens of thousands. The province has a shortage of well-qualified staff in all facets of the health care service, and they have a hard time finding people to help individuals with disabilities. The burden also falls on family members, who cannot always offer their services all the time.

Trained service dogs are well qualified to do the demanding work of assisting people with disabilities. They're loyal, obedient, and spend their entire day helping their handler. A trained service dog becomes part of the handler's family. Those dogs can do things that people cannot. There is some evidence that some dogs can sense impending seizures and warn their handlers, and other dogs can sense low blood sugar and remind their handlers to eat.

British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, Quebec, and the entire United States already have legislation protecting service dogs.

Now, this bill is designed to emulate the very successful Blind Persons' Rights Act. Many private organizations have had success training seeing eye dogs, also known as guide dogs, to assist the blind and the visually challenged. The success of these training programs has come in part because of the legislation recognizing the unique service seeing eye dogs provide.

All persons with disabilities are protected by the Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act, and blind persons are also protected by the blind persons act. This bill is complementary to the blind persons act, and it affirms that dogs who are aiding a person with a disability deserve the same recognition and protection of the law. Service dogs benefit both society and those they serve.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

**Mr. Coutts:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certified service dogs are an excellent way to improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities as well as supplying security for people that are in the service industry and people that are their customers. In other jurisdictions certified service dog programs have been successful because these dogs have been held to the highest standards. In Alberta guide dogs, otherwise known as seeing eye dogs, have been successful. I know from our restaurant experience in our family that we have seen some of those successes.

They're due in part because of the protection they're afforded by

the Blind Persons' Rights Act, which protects certified dog trainers and dogs in training and allows an identification card to be issued for a blind person/guide dog team. The Service Dogs Act will extend these advantages to people with other disabilities, and that's the security that is needed in the service industry today.

Training standards for guide dogs are high. Dogs can only be certified as guide dogs after going through a careful selection process and several months of thorough training and testing. High standards have been set for service dogs prior to certification. Assistance Dogs International, ADI, as it's known, is an umbrella organization of not-for-profit assistance dog training schools. Sharing best practices for training, placement, and utilization of service dogs is one of their highest priorities as well as upholding the highest ethical standards for their members and having well-established and well-regarded training standards for both guide dogs and service dogs.

Most service dogs programs have a two- or three-year apprenticeship training program intended to ensure that the trainers are well acquainted with a variety of dog temperaments and are knowledgeable about a broad range of disabilities. People who are training service dogs must have the knowledge and experience to offer the highest standards of service to people with disabilities, including a selection of clients and canines, training, team matching methods, and follow-up protocols.

Relatively few dogs meet the very basic criteria to be service dogs. Breeds like golden and Labrador retrievers are good breeds to be service dogs because they tend to have the right balance of behaviour, temperament, and energy. First-rate service dogs are not overly active, yet they are still people oriented and confident.

Potential service dogs must be physically screened to ensure that they are disease free, physically capable of taking the tasks that are required of them, and not prone to chronic health symptoms. A service dog must not be aggressive, should not be protective because that is not their job. Over time dogs may begin to sense their owner's vulnerability and be protective when it's inappropriate. Service dogs are not permitted to bark aggressively, only in situations that they have actually been trained for. The point of this rigorous selection process is to find effective dogs.

Dogs that are put through this comprehensive, individualized training program are well-trained service dogs that are trained for an hour or two each day over a period of six months. At least a quarter of this time is roughly scheduled for public exposure training.

**3:40**

Service dogs are taught to remain within their handler's control at all times. Service dogs fail the training process if they show aggression, bark inappropriately, bite, snap, growl, jump inappropriately on strangers, beg, or sniff people. Service dogs are taught a set of basic commands including sit, stay, come, heal, and return on command when off leash. There are over 100 tasks that a service dog can be trained to perform. The exact skills each service dog is taught depend on the needs of the person they will be eventually paired with.

Training processes are conducted to the highest humane standards, and the welfare of each dog is of critical importance. Accepted training methods ensure that the physical and emotional safety of each dog is given the highest priority, and each dog is allowed to learn at his or her own pace. They're not paired with a handler until they're sufficiently physically or emotionally mature, and pairing must consider the needs and abilities of both the handler and the service dog. They can be paired with people of a broad range of ages. Personal and physical characteristics of a dog that enable it to assist with an active toddler may be much different from that of a dog being able to assist a 60-year-old businessperson.

Service dogs need attention and affection, so they are placed only with persons who are able to interact with them. Recipients of a service dog must be able to provide a physically, emotionally, financially stable and secure living environment as well.

Handlers and service dogs undergo several weeks of training together, including dog handling skills and an orientation on canine health and obedience issues. After the formal training there are regular follow-ups with handlers, with additional training to provide for handlers' changing circumstances.

A service dog team will only be legally considered a service dog team once its members have been issued identification cards by the responsible minister or a designate. That will provide the minister with a way to ensure that all service dogs meet the highest qualifications. This bill is concerned with service dogs, not service animals. There is no certification for any animals other than dogs.

Mr. Speaker, this bill provides, certainly for restaurant owners, store owners, and people that are out in the public, that for an individual entering that premises, a dog is absolutely necessary. Myself and my family, having been 38 years in the restaurant business, recognize and know that having a well-trained, licensed, and certified dog provides comfort to your customers, knowing that it is a working dog and it is safe in a crowd. It also provides security and a quality of life for persons with disabilities. This is a win-win for everyone.

I urge everyone to support Bill 203.

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

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. First of all, I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Strathcona for recognizing the needs of Alberta's disabled community through this bill.

The challenges of stress, injury, illness are typically temporary inconveniences which can usually be overcome with treatment and time. However, some diseases cannot be cured, and some injuries cannot be fully healed. Genetic predispositions, such as epilepsy, can result in a disability that can present a real and pressing impediment to mobility, daily function, and quality of life. Modern medicine is just one component in the larger goal of overall wellness.

The government is committed to wellness, an integral part of which is the development of policy that allows all Albertans to live full, healthy, and productive lives. When conditions prevent an individual from reaching their potential, we must consider and facilitate alternative means of enabling and enhancing their overall state of wellness and quality of life.

Bill 203 proposes an example of this facilitation and builds on Alberta's past innovation and success in fully ensuring that opportunity and prosperity are attainable for all. The government is committed to enacting policy that reflects the needs of the disabled community. Extensive legislative and policy framework are in place and are augmented by a series of publicly funded programs. They work in conjunction to provide opportunity and security for Albertans with disabilities. Examples are AISH, PDD, and distinct legislation which allows the use of guide dogs for visually challenged individuals. This legislation has evolved over time, resulting in unrestricted access to amenities enjoyed by the visually impaired who utilize a service animal. They can experience freedom and independence, that would otherwise be unavailable. This is an example of proactive public policy inspiring equality and reinforcing the basic moral principles of fairness and justice.

This Assembly has more than once recognized the challenges of the disabled community and provided legal protection not previously

enjoyed. Examples of how this Assembly aspired to make life more enjoyable for the visually challenged include The Blind Persons' White Cane Act in 1955, The Blind Persons' Guide Dogs Act in 1977, and the consolidation of these two acts into the current Blind Persons' Rights Act in 1980.

We are presented today with an opportunity to carry on this evolution of policy and build upon a strong foundation of inclusion with our support of this bill, Bill 203. There are Albertans with disabilities whose lives would be enriched with the assistance of a service dog, individuals who do not currently enjoy the same opportunity and legal protection as the visually impaired, groups with potential to be refused access to an establishment and could benefit from access to a service dog. This includes epileptics, those who are hard of hearing, those who are mobility impaired, and any individual suffering from a disability of any kind, such as a brain injury. There are many establishments that disabled persons could access with the help of this legislation, including restaurants, theatres, recreation facilities, schools, and of course various businesses.

The Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act provides extensive human rights protection to all disabled individuals, including those who use guide animals. This legislation has set Alberta apart as a leader in the promotion of human rights and is in theory both comprehensive and sufficient to protect those individuals addressed by the provisions of Bill 203.

There have been cases where this protection has not been sufficient. The issue of access for those using service dogs presents a definite problem which needs immediate attention. The problem is not with the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act; the problem is with public perception and understanding of the role played by guide and service dogs. A visually impaired person with a guide dog is quite acceptable, whereas an epileptic individual with a response dog may not be.

The legislative evolution of blind persons' rights in Alberta has not only provided legal protection; it has served as a function of raising public awareness of the visually impaired and their use of guide dogs. Alberta's human rights legislation provides equal protection for all individuals using service dogs. Problems with public perception is due to the fact that we do not have stand-alone legislation providing and promoting specific protection for the persons with disabilities who are not visually challenged. The provisions of Bill 203 obviate these concerns. More importantly, they take nothing away from the existing legislative structure; rather, they complement it.

In conclusion, the legislation, then, upholds the government's commitment to general wellness and the needs of the disabled. Bill 203 can meet the objectives that this commitment aspires to. Through Bill 203 there is a great opportunity to reinforce our dedication to the protection of Albertans and the future well-being of our province as a whole. Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all members of the Assembly support Bill 203.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and speak in support of Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. This act will ensure that persons with disabilities have the legal right to be accompanied by a service dog in all open areas in the public and to do so free of discrimination. This new act will complement the Blind Persons' Rights Act. Bill 203 extends the rights and

protections available to the legally blind and to all other persons with disabilities who need a service dog.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, while the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act provides protection to those persons with disabilities who require a service dog, there is a lack of clarity surrounding the provisions for recourse. Bill 203 will remedy this situation. Individuals who require a service dog will require identification as proof of their need for this service dog. Matters relating to the certification of service dogs and the qualification of service dog trainers will be dealt with through regulation, not unlike the process used through the Blind Persons' Rights Act. Fines will be in place if individuals claim to be disabled persons when they are not in fact so for the purpose of gaining the benefit of a service dog.

Bill 203 can also assist individuals who have faced stressful situations as a result of the general public not having sufficient understanding of the purposes of a service dog. This will enable individuals to have the opportunity to participate fully in the economic, social, and cultural life of our province. The government is committed to ensuring that its policies reflect the varied needs of the disabled community in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 builds on the mandate of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. It also advances the Alberta disability strategy by eliminating barriers and allowing for greater inclusion of persons with disabilities. I commend the Member for Strathcona for his work in this area, and I would urge all hon. members to support this bill.

Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there others? Does the hon. Member for Strathcona wish to close?

**Mr. Lougheed:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to offer a few closing comments with respect to Bill 203, Service Dogs Act. In the public gallery is Larry Pempeit, whom I'd like to welcome to the Assembly, and perhaps at this time we would ask the members assembled to give him the traditional warm welcome. We appreciate Larry's presence here.

Larry is with the Canadian Paraplegic Association and is one of many people who offer from time to time insight and advice about the challenges that people have when they have to get around the community in a wheelchair, those challenges and those barriers that exist. We're trying to do what we can with the help of the Canadian Paraplegic Association and other organizations like the Alberta Disabilities Forum and also through our work with the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Those insights are important as we develop bills like this Bill 203, and their work at the Canadian Paraplegic Association is important to help eliminate those barriers that exist. So, Larry, on behalf of persons with disabilities and on behalf of the Premier's council as well I'd like to thank you for your contributions and your support. Thank you very much.

It's been mentioned several times by several speakers that Bill 203, Service Dogs Act, will parallel the BPRA, the Blind Persons' Rights Act. If one takes the two acts and puts them side by side, there is a great deal of similarity there. I really appreciate the notes that several people have sent over to me mentioning different things that they see as questions or challenges about the bill. Some things will have to be answered, and we'll answer those questions as best we can during the committee stage if we're favoured with your positive response in the vote here in a minute or two.

I'll just mention briefly one other thing that's important, and that

is, as was mentioned as well by several speakers, that education and awareness are going to be very important for this bill. It's been critical for the Blind Persons' Rights Act. It's critical that the public understand and recognize the issues and, well, what kind of work those dogs do. Currently there are often challenges that pop up with the guide dogs, that are fully legislated and regulated today, yet people sometimes don't know what the circumstances are. If this bill passes with your support, then we would see at that time some awareness being brought forward, and that will help with both the guide dogs, that are currently legislated and regulated, as well as the new service dogs, that would fall into that new category.

ID cards were mentioned, and certainly there would be an intent to have ID cards, much the same way as seeing eye dogs, or guide dogs, are used currently.

There was mention of allergies and what's going to happen in circumstances where somebody is allergic to dogs. In all of these things, certainly, there is a balance of rights that has to be considered, and accommodations have to be made in circumstances no matter what they are currently, and it will be the case with this legislation.

Again, I would ask for your support. The disability community has indicated to me and indicated to many of you who spoke today that this is important to them. It's not going to affect a great many people, but it will affect a few people very significantly.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I thank those who have offered their support in speaking and have spoken positively about this bill. I would ask all members assembled to please support this bill, and I would call for the vote.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a second time]

**Bill 204**  
**Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan**  
**Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007/**  
**Loi modificative de 2007 sur les emblèmes**  
**de l'Alberta (reconnaissance**  
**du fait franco-albertain)**

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, before I recognize the first speaker, I'd like to point out that this is the first private member's bill in the history of our province to be introduced in French, as we understood, when it was introduced by the hon. member in first reading. The first government bill to be introduced in French was the Languages Act of 1988.

With that, the hon. Member for Peace River.

**Mr. Oberle:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for recognizing that I introduced that bill in French.

Mr. Speaker, it is my great pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill 204, the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007.

The official recognition of this symbol as a provincial emblem is a way for us to acknowledge the many unique contributions that Franco-Albertans have made to our province dating back to the fur trade in the mid-1600s and recorded settlement dating back 260 years ago, to when Pierre and François de La Vérendrye, the first in a long line of French pioneers, came to our province. In 1751 French settlers from Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, established a fort on the Bow River near present-day Calgary. From these humble beginnings, Mr. Speaker, Europeans of all descent have come to our province. Then as now Alberta's wide prairies and striking rivers beckoned, offering a new beginning and a chance for prosperity.

Those same prairies and rivers form the basis of the emblem that this bill proposes to recognize, Mr. Speaker. This emblem is composed of blue and white diagonal stripes that represent the waters and the roads travelled in Alberta by francophone explorers and colonists. The fleur-de-lys in the blue field in the upper left represents the francophone community, while the wild rose in the white field in the lower right is emblematic of the Alberta that we all know and cherish.

As European settlers arrived in Alberta, they gave their new settlements names characteristic of the countries they had left. The names of many towns around the province reflect the French background, places like Beaumont, Grouard, Lac La Biche, Morinville, and St. Paul. My corner of the province, in the northwest, is home to very healthy and thriving francophone communities in Girouxville, Marie-Reine, Donnelly, Falher, and St. Isidore. The French legacy in these towns is very strong. Some have even designated themselves as officially bilingual.

4:00

Our French history is not only found in towns first settled by French settlers. Today in Alberta there are over 334,000 people of French descent, more than 1 in 10 Albertans. Sixty-six thousand Albertans are native French speakers while over 205,000 Albertans are able to speak some French.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most distinctive traits of the country in which we live is the fact that we are officially bilingual. The number of Albertans who are conversant in French is, in part, a reflection of this. Officially recognizing an emblem of the Franco-Albertan community demonstrates to the rest of Canada that we believe that the French and English cultures can collaborate and coexist. The two solitudes need not be so lonely.

Other provinces have recognized the role that francophones played in their history with similar legislation, Mr. Speaker. The Fransaskois emblem has been included in the provincial emblems of Saskatchewan while Ontario has passed the Franco-Ontarian Emblem Act, 2001, that makes the Franco-Ontarian emblem the official emblem of Ontario's francophone community. This is exactly the same thing that Bill 204 proposes. I am certain that we can count on the same warm reception here that Ontario and Saskatchewan's francophone communities gave to the passage of their respective pieces of legislation.

However, Mr. Speaker, the advantages of recognizing the symbol go beyond mere symbolism. Because of our belief in a bilingual Canada, Alberta is a signatory to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which recognizes Canada's unique linguistic duality. The Charter gives parents a legal right to educate their children in either official language. Granting official recognition to the Franco-Albertan emblem will help promote the many advantages of being educated in both of Canada's official languages. Fluency in English and French is an increasingly valuable skill both here in Canada and in the globalized world. Thousands of Albertans have taken French courses in school or simply for their own interest because of the doors that bilingualism opens. Bilingualism is good in and of itself as there is ample evidence showing that it is an excellent way to keep one's mind healthy and well exercised.

Mr. Speaker, the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007 is also an excellent way to recognize the contributions of l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta in the promotion of French history and culture in Alberta. This organization works tirelessly to educate Albertans about the significance of the francophone contribution to our province. In fact, the emblem that we are discussing today came about because of the efforts of the ACFA in March 1982, 25 years ago. The

Francophonie jeunesse de l'Alberta, the francophone youth of Alberta, held a contest seeking an emblem for Alberta's francophones. Jean-Pierre Grenier's winning entry has been the symbol of Franco-Albertans in the 25 years since. I can think of no finer way to celebrate the anniversary of this symbol than to grant it official recognition as the emblem of Alberta's francophone community.

I understand that there are concerns about the appropriateness of granting this recognition. However, there is nothing new about this Legislature recognizing an emblem representative of a specific cultural group. Since 1961 Alberta has recognized its proud Scottish heritage with an official tartan, and in the year 2000 we passed Bill 205 to give Alberta an official dress tartan. The emblems of this province are not static but are updated to reflect the changing composition of our society. I submit, Mr. Speaker, that it is appropriate that we grant special recognition to a symbol of the Franco-Albertan community because Franco-Albertans have had such a special impact on the course of Alberta's history.

Mr. Speaker, it is also the job of MLAs to exercise discretion in deciding what symbols are worthy of this government's official recognition. Needless to say, official recognition of a provincial emblem is not granted on a whim and is subject to debate, exactly like the debate we are having here today.

I think it is also essential to understand that the passage of Bill 204 will not in any way alter the nationally recognized flag protocols that govern the display of our provincial flag and the emblems of other organizations. Pride of place will always be given to the flag of Canada and to the flag of Alberta. Bill 204 will not change what flags are flown here at the Legislature or at any other public location around the province. The emblems of organizations are always assigned the lowest precedence in flag protocol even if they have been granted official recognition. Mr. Speaker, the experience of Ontario and Saskatchewan in recognizing their own francophone emblems is illustrative. The same flags continue to fly on government buildings and in public places in both of those provinces.

Mr. Speaker, the French influence in Alberta ranges back to the great fur trade, which opened this country nearly 400 years ago, and the first settlement back 250 years ago, before we even became a province, to today and the excellent work done by the ACFA and many like-minded organizations. The 25th anniversary of this emblem of Alberta's francophone community is a perfect time to recognize our province's rich French heritage and the continued role that French culture plays in our lives.

I hope all members will join me in approving this bill and granting official recognition to the Franco-Albertan emblem by voting in favour of Bill 204. Thank you very much.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Les membres du Parti Libéral apprécient beaucoup les contributions des francophones dans la province de l'Alberta. Cet emblème et ce drapeau reconnaissent leurs efforts. Vive les francophones de l'Alberta. En levant ce drapeau, nous célébrons les cultures diverses des groupes de l'Alberta.

The members of the Liberal Party appreciate tremendously the contributions of francophones in the province of Alberta. This emblem and this flag recognize their efforts. Long live the francophones of Alberta. By raising this flag, we celebrate diverse cultures which make up this province.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.



**Dr. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to join my colleagues in debate on Bill 204, the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007, sponsored by the hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to begin my remarks by acknowledging the tremendous contributions that the francophone Albertans have made to the history of our province and also to the development of our country of Canada. The great explorers Jacques Cartier, Samuel de Champlain, La Salle, La Vérendrye, Radisson, Des Groseilliers: these are the names that illuminated the history of our country.

Canada's oldest city, Quebec City, was founded over 400 years ago by Champlain. Francophone involvement in Alberta, as the hon. member for Peace River has mentioned, began with the fur trade, which was really the first industry in what is now our province of Alberta. The establishment of the fur industry by French Canadians and the Métis culture helped pave the way for the development of this province.

The fusion, as I mentioned, of the French culture and the native culture in Métis is also a part of Alberta which we celebrate today. I think this serves to illustrate a broader point, Mr. Speaker: that the francophone culture is, in fact, very deeply ingrained in the history of our province.

Franco-Albertan settlement, as my hon. friend has mentioned, helped to shape the province by virtue of the fact that we have many French names of places in our province. Everyday life in these communities continues to be very heavily influenced by francophone culture. Everything from architecture to literature to education draws a great deal of inspiration from the ideas that the French-speaking people have brought to our province. While it's doubtlessly true that francophones have played an important role in our history, I don't believe that making the Franco-Albertan emblem an official emblem of the province is necessarily the best way to extend that recognition.

4:10

According to Statistics Canada data 15 per cent of Albertans were foreign born; 329,000 Albertans, or 11 per cent of the population, identify themselves as visible minorities, and 16.4 per cent of Albertans identified themselves as allophones, or persons whose first language is something other than French or English. In our urban centres there is even greater diversity; 17 and a half per cent of Calgaryans and 15 per cent of Edmontonians identify themselves as visible minorities, and those are, respectively, the fourth- and fifth-highest percentages in the country. For Edmonton and Calgary 20 per cent of the population self-identify as allophones. In both of those cities Chinese is, in fact, the leading nonofficial mother tongue, accounting for about 4 and a half per cent of the population in Calgary and 2.9 per cent of the population in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that it's likely that the multicultural nature of Alberta is going to continue to increase in the future. At the present time the government is working hard to attract people from around the world to Alberta. It appears that, in fact, this strategy is working because nearly 16,000 people came from abroad, outside of Canada, to Alberta in 2006. So people from a wide variety of backgrounds, with origins stretching to all parts of the world, are striving to make our province the best place to live, work, and visit.

It's important, Mr. Speaker, in my submission, that we recognize the many contributions that numerous cultural groups have made to our past and continue to make to our communities on a daily basis. There are many ways that we can recognize and celebrate the cultural diversity of our province. We have designated days, designated weeks, dinners, speeches, tributes, and statements in our Legislature, and we also have more lasting and permanent monuments, statues, and memorials to various cultures. One example

would be the tribute to the Ukrainian community as recognized on the grounds of our Legislature here in Edmonton. Another would be the Sien Lok Park, which is a tribute to the Chinese culture in the city of Calgary.

So I do have some reservations, Mr. Speaker, about the content of this bill and the fact that it refers specifically to a flag, and flags of course are items which sometimes cause divisions in society. It's not simply a pragmatic matter to officially adopt flags for the many cultural groups that contribute to our province as official emblems of Alberta. There are several hundred different official emblems which are possible if we should proceed down that road. I believe that there is great significance, as my hon. friend has mentioned, in the Alberta flag. For 40 years this flag has been a unifying symbol for Albertans, and all Albertans, regardless of their language, their religion, their ethnicity, can look upon that flag with pride because it symbolizes unity, and it also symbolizes strength, tolerance, and compassion, that the people of this province stand for.

We also have a number of other symbols and emblems and songs and other items of cultural significance which we recognize here in Alberta. We have an official fish emblem. We have an official grass emblem. We have an official gemstone, or rock. We have an official bird. We have an official mammal, an official tree. What all these emblems have in common is the fact that they are commonly applicable to all Albertans. They unite us. They are something that all Albertans share, not simply one cultural group or another.

Mr. Speaker, another concern I have with Bill 204 is that it might lead to future controversies or divisions based upon what cultural groups are represented in the future under similar legislation. Would Chinese Albertans, for example, take offence to the inclusion of a distinctive Tibetan-Albertan flag as an official symbol? Would Russian descendants object to a distinctive flag for Chechen Albertans or Ossetian Albertans? Would the people of Darfur and the rest of Sudan agree on an appropriate symbol for Sudanese Albertans? Would the Kurdish people of Turkey agree with the symbol proposed by the Turkish community in Alberta? Would people oppose the adoption of an Alberta gay community flag as a distinctive symbol of our province? The problems that could arise are quite considerable.

So while I support the intentions of the hon. Member for Peace River, I'm not prepared to support the bill in its present form. I do look forward to working with him and members of the francophone community to examine other meaningful and significant ways of recognizing this important cultural group and recognizing it here, specifically in our Legislature, for all Albertans to celebrate and enjoy. I look forward to hearing the views of my other colleagues respecting this bill.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Peace River will be glad to know that there are some people on this side that are going to support the bill. I point out that I think the previous speaker is a bit of a red herring. This is Canada. We have accepted – other provinces are moving ahead in terms of recognizing – what is the reality of our history with the Franco-Albertan emblem recognition.

I mean, when we look at the history – and I think that the member mentioned it – francophone history stems back to the 1700s, when French explorers came here. We see the legacy by the names of cities and towns around Alberta: Lacombe, Brosseau, Bonnyville, Girouxville, to say a few. Over 500 French names identifying rivers, lakes, and places can be found in Alberta. Frankly, as I understand

it, French was the first European language spoken in what is now Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, this may be ancient history, but I would like to go to more modern history, something that happened right here in this Legislature, to show you how far we've come. In the early '80s there were 16 of us on the NDP side, and we had an MLA named Leo Piquette. Now, some people would remember. He got up and alerted a member across the way who was bilingual, a cabinet minister, that he was going to ask a question. He was ruled out of order. He created not only a storm in Alberta but a national storm, as this went across the country.

That was in the early '80s, and now, of course, I think it shows you, at least somewhat, how far we've come, that we can at least be debating and, I'd hope, passing that we have an official flag of the francophone community to be called the Franco-Albertan flag. As a result of that, just recently Leo has written a book about francophone rights and the fight for francophone rights. So I think that the francophone community would be very happy to see this Legislature at this time coming forward with this emblem. I don't think it takes anything away from other cultural groups. This is in fact Canada, and this is in fact Alberta, and we're recognizing the obvious, Mr. Speaker. As I say, when we think that that was just in the early '80s and that it created a national storm here in this Legislature, I think it does show somewhat how important that this particular bill come forward at this time, and it shows you how far we've come.

4:20

As I say, we will certainly support it on this side of the House. I'm speaking, of course, for this caucus. I would say that we still have a ways to go because we had the debate in this Legislature not that long ago about the number of people coming in and doing the tar sands. You may recall that a francophone worker in the tar sands was basically fired because he couldn't speak English well enough. That seemed to us rather ironic as we're bringing people – I think that the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill was right, that we have all sorts of people up there that couldn't speak English, but all of a sudden a Canadian, a francophone from Quebec, was fired for his lack of English. While we certainly recognize, Mr. Speaker, that this is a step in the right direction, the Franco-Albertan flag, I think that we still have to go some ways to protect francophone workers' rights if what's going on in the tar sands is any indication.

Mr. Speaker, I certainly commend the Member for Peace River. You'll notice that I didn't try to speak French because I can mangle the English language well enough without trying French. I think that this is a step that's especially important for this Legislature in view of the history going back with Leo Piquette and what happened in the Legislature at that time. I think this is a good step forward.

Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am indeed very pleased to have this opportunity to speak in support of the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007, and I want to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to the hon. Member for Peace River for bringing it forward at this time.

M. le Président, j'aime beaucoup la culture française, la langue française, toutes les chansons françaises, les traditions, et sans doute tous les membres de la communauté francophone aussi. Donc, je suis prêt en ce moment à supporter ce projet de loi en deuxième lecture.

Simply put, Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 formally acknowledges a lot of

important things to our community in general and to the French-speaking community in particular. It addresses, I suppose through the symbolism that it portrays, the incredibly important role that French Canadians have played in our province, going back centuries literally. Through this recognition of the Franco-Albertan emblem we can certainly stand proud with our francophone community members and salute them as well.

We've heard some eloquent testimonies already today with respect to the role that francophone explorers played in helping settle our province and discover it and so on, the cities that are named after famous French individuals, the communities we have, and so on and so on. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this particular emblem which is of debate today has been utilized by our francophone community since about 1980 or '82, somewhere in there, so it's not a strange emblem to any of us. Alberta is such a wonderful and beautiful place with such an enormous and rich cultural heritage. Why wouldn't we take this opportunity to salute one of those at this time?

M. le Président, j'aime beaucoup ces choses, comme j'ai déjà dit. Ici en Alberta nous avons beaucoup de cultures et beaucoup de peuples qui ont choisi notre belle province, et cela inclue les francophones, plusieurs qui sont de nos premiers pionniers de l'Alberta. So it's fitting at this time to in fact honour and recognize them in this way.

Francophone heritage, as we all would know, can be traced to the earliest days of the fur trade, when the Montreal peddlers came out to the northwest region of Canada, specifically here to Alberta, in search of adventure, business opportunities, and what have you. Métis communities soon became very prevalent, and they were Alberta's first francophone communities. Of course, these were established when the voyageurs married Cree women. Now, while Alberta's most common official language is English, it is interesting to note that French was the first European language spoken in Alberta. That is a fact. This is due, of course, to the additional fact that the first settlers to the province were of French-Canadian origins, joining in with our aboriginal friends of the day.

Today, Mr. Speaker, we have over 330,000 Albertans who can trace their ancestry to French descent. Specifically, there are about 66,000 Albertans who are classified as francophones, and I'm very proud that Alberta has the fastest-growing French-speaking population outside of l'autre belle province, Québec. Francophone Albertans live everywhere in our province. As we would all know, Edmonton and Calgary certainly have very large concentrations, but there are many other communities that you've heard of in northern Alberta: the Peace Country, St. Paul, Falher, Girouxville, et pas loins d'ici nous avons Beaumont and . . .

**Mr. Ducharme:** Bonnyville.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Of course, Bonnyville. How could I forget that? And so on.

I also want to emphasize that there are a number of communities with very large groupings of French speakers now in the southern half of our province as well. I encountered this particular wonderful fact just over the past couple of years when I was minister of education, and I had the opportunity to travel there and meet with them. In addition to that, our Francophone Secretariat would tell you very proudly that Beaumont, Legal, and Falher are even officially bilingual communities. It's a wonderful story to tell.

Mr. Speaker, French education in Alberta, that I've just referenced, is also a phenomenal success, and part of the reason for that success is because the number of Franco-Albertans and French-speaking Albertans is increasing very significantly. I can tell you that the enrolment in our francophone schools, run by our

francophone school authorities, has quintupled over the last few years – quintupled – and it's a testament, I think, to the incredible strength of second-language learning and third-language learning and official-language learning and so on in this province, as bolstered by an outstanding education system.

We also have a significant issue with respect to immigration and interprovincial migration and a growing popularity of our francophone, our French immersion, and our French second-language programs, all of which I know that members here support, and so do I with a great passion. Mr. Speaker, these education programs receive government funding and promotion as a vital component of our multicultural reality in Alberta. Nous sommes très fiers d'offrir et d'avoir ces programmes, et je vais toujours donner mon appui pour assurer leur succès.

The French culture and language are also legally recognized in Alberta, as has been recognized, and I won't go into that any further other than to say that that, too, is a wonderful thing. So whether you're taking French as a second language or you're involved in the immersion programs or you're involved in some other form of cultural and linguistic enterprise that features the French language, the fact simply is that it's a good thing for this province, and it's equally important that we recognize that growth and development. We have a number of French programs with a very large economic impact that are aiding our population to become more competitive in our Canadian labour market as well as internationally.

Just as I wrap up here, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the interests of our large francophone community are also represented by more than 200 regional and community organizations. That's a phenomenal statement to be very proud of. Adopting this particular Franco-Albertan emblem as an official emblem would certainly increase our awareness of this large cultural community, that is so vibrant in our province. Bill 204 would help further the idea that Alberta is indeed a very progressive place in which to live and in which to support the various cultures that are here as well.

4:30

Finally, Mr. Speaker, our Francophone Secretariat, that I alluded to earlier, also wishes to formalize, I'm sure, its commitment to Franco-Albertans. This of course is a special committee that liaises between the government and Alberta's francophone community. It represents to government the needs of the francophone community, and it supports initiatives aimed at promoting French language and culture. Our chef de mission là, Mr. Denis Tardif, et son assistante, Antonine, do a phenomenal job promoting that and working with them.

Enfin, M. le Président, je voudrais encourager tous les membres de notre Assemblée à donner leur appui pour ce projet de loi.

That having been said, I will take my seat, Mr. Speaker, merely to say that this a good move. I'm hoping that it will be supported, and if for whatever reason it might not be, perhaps some other form of recognition equivalent to this can be pursued.

Merci beaucoup.

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

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to speak in support of this bill, which recognizes a reality of which many Albertans may be unaware. When we look at a provincial map, we cannot escape the francophone influence. Second after aboriginal names there are probably more names of French origin in the northern half of our province than from any other source. These reflect the voyageurs who travelled together with the First Nations

and Scots, opened the west, and travelled its lakes and waterways. We see this influence in the Jasper area in Lac Boisvert and Maligne, Annette and Trefoil Lakes. We see it in Grande Prairie and Grande Cache and in Rivière-de-la-Paix, the original name of the Peace River.

Then we have settlements named after missionaries, saints, and homesteaders. North of Red Deer we have Joffre, Lacombe, Leduc, Beaumont, Breton, and north of Edmonton we have Morinville, Picardville, Legal, Vimy, up to Falher and the Peace River country, where French names predominate.

Before our province and Saskatchewan were created in 1905, there were alternative plans to create two provinces one atop each other, like North and South Dakota in the U.S. Each would have had one transcontinental railway and one branch of the Saskatchewan River, so they might have ended up being called north and south Saskatchewan. Under that plan the northern province, where a majority of the French names in both provinces are clustered, would have been bilingual or French-speaking, like the lower territories had been before our two provinces were created.

That plan lost favour in the wake of the second Riel-led uprising, the Northwest Rebellion of 1885. Anglophone reaction, some of it outright bigotry, said: no more French provinces. And the scheme was dropped about the same time as French language rights were revoked in Manitoba, which was created as a bilingual province. Mr. Speaker, think what a difference it would have made to Canada had that rebellion and that reaction not taken place. We would have had four of our 10 provinces either French-speaking or bilingual: Quebec, New Brunswick, Manitoba, and northern Saskatchewan. There would be no fortress Quebec mentality because francophone Canadians would not be limited primarily to one province but spread more widely across the country.

We can't turn back time or redraw the map now, but we can give credit to an influence and heritage where it is due. The French community has a rich history in this province. The French community plays an important role in our province. The members of the community contribute a great deal to our province, and as Albertans we are proud to recognize their heritage.

Bill 204, the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007, is an important recognition of their history and contribution to our culture and history, and for that reason I am happy to endorse the Franco-Albertan flag as one of the emblems of this province.

Thank you.

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

**Rev. Abbott:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to join the discussion regarding Bill 204, the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007. There is a long tradition of multiculturalism in Alberta, that has enabled the province to build one of the most prosperous and progressive societies in the world. People want to move here. Things are good here in Alberta. Real estate values are rising. There are plenty of jobs. It's just a great place to live. People from other countries and other provinces are moving to our province every year.

Mr. Speaker, through the celebration of diversity and the encouragement of cultural identity, we have become more unified as a whole. This is something we see reflected throughout Alberta, not only in our progressive government policies but also in the sense of co-operation that results from increased tolerance and understanding. In almost every town and every city across the province we see the

proud heritage and traditions of various cultures reflected in a variety of ways, from monuments and architecture to parades, festivals, and celebrations. Even in my own community of Calmar we have the Zirka Ukrainian dancers, that not only perform in Calmar but all around the province and even in other provinces.

Mr. Speaker, today we have the opportunity to provide increased recognition of the francophone heritage with our support of Bill 204. I understand that the purpose of Bill 204 is to include in the official emblems of Alberta the Franco-Albertan emblem as created and adopted by the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta, or ACFA. I would remind all members of this Assembly that the ACFA is officially recognized by the *Statutes of Alberta* as the official representative of Alberta's francophone community, and they have advocated on behalf of the Francophonie in this province since 1926.

Mr. Speaker, it is fitting that this emblem similarly be given official, legislated recognition. It has been used as an unofficial symbol of the province's francophone community for the past quarter century. The Francophonie has been an integral part of this province for over 200 years. Their achievements, their language, and their culture have deep roots here. More than 1 in 10 Albertans is of French descent. That is a significant number, which I believe deserves to be better reflected in the official emblems of our province, which carry with them great significance. They are designed to paint a picture of Alberta's past, present, and future by giving official recognition to the symbolism which makes our province unique. This symbol includes adjacent fields and diagonal bands of blue and white along with the wild rose and fleur-de-lys.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Speaking of symbolism, Alberta would not be the place it is today without the contributions of its francophone citizens. They are justifiably proud of their heritage. This is why the ACFA saw fit to encourage the creation and subsequent adoption of a banner to recognize these contributions in 1982, and this is why the Franco-Albertan emblem has been used consistently by the francophone community these last 25 years. What better way to express cultural pride than through the display of a banner whose symbolism describes it so well?

The ACFA has not been alone in its creation of an emblem symbolizing French culture and achievement on a provincial level. They've been joined by the francophone communities in almost every other Canadian jurisdiction. The francophone communities in almost every province or territory in the federation have created emblems with the same purpose as the Franco-Albertan emblem; namely, to symbolize and commemorate the historical and cultural achievements of the jurisdictions' Francophonie.

Other jurisdictions, like Saskatchewan and Ontario, as has been mentioned, have done what we are doing today. They have debated the matter of officially recognizing the emblems of these groups in their respective Legislative Assemblies. The outcome of both discussions, Mr. Speaker, was positive. Members of the Legislative Assemblies of Ontario and Saskatchewan decided in both instances to adopt such an emblem as an official provincial emblem. Now, it has been over six years since Saskatchewan officially recognized the Fransaskois emblem and nearly that long since the Franco-Ontarian emblem was given a similar honour.

Mr. Speaker, there may be those who feel that Bill 204 shows undue favouritism to a particular group, such as my seatmate, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill. However, there have been no hard feelings that I am aware of in either Saskatchewan or Ontario. In fact, if anything, there's been an increased sense of belonging and

accomplishment in each francophone community. So the intent of Bill 204 is to promote inclusion – inclusion. We are all united by our diversity, a point which I think bears reiteration.

The portrait of our province today is different than it was in the time of our parents and grandparents. Likewise, it will be different in the time of our children. This reality requires a degree of flexibility in all areas of public policy. It requires that our province's official emblems remain open to change so as to accommodate present and future recognition of those groups who have contributed and continue to contribute so much to our identity as Albertans.

4:40

I think that the Alberta government is more than willing to show such flexibility. We have demonstrated it repeatedly in the past. Proof is the constant evolution of not only our official emblems but our entire framework of legislation and policies aimed at promoting and enhancing cultural development and tolerance. Mr. Speaker, they have evolved as Alberta has evolved, and I believe that the proposals advanced by Bill 204 represent a desirable and necessary next step in this evolution. They illustrate the government's commitment to developing a cultural policy which will encompass Alberta's historical and cultural heritage and will improve Albertans' quality of life.

So, Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to offer their support for the adoption of a symbol recognizing the contribution of Alberta's Francophonie, joining the provinces of Ontario and Saskatchewan. I support the principles of inclusion and the celebration of culture which have been so instrumental in our collective growth and for Bill 204.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

**Mr. Ducharme:** Merci, M. le Président. C'est avec une fierté franco-albertaine que je supporte le projet de loi 204, Loi modificative de 2007 sur les emblèmes de l'Alberta (reconnaissance du fait franco-albertain).

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with a pride of being a Franco-Albertan that I stand today in support of Bill 204, the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Peace River for bringing this legislation before the Assembly and providing a unique opportunity to expand Alberta's framework of cultural recognition.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 proposes to include in the official emblems of Alberta the emblem adopted by the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta in 1982. Bill 204 captures the essence of multiculturalism that Albertans treasure and continues the tradition of private members' legislation that adds to the composition of our official emblems. We're all Albertans, regardless of heritage or background. We are privileged to live in a society that recognizes the importance of celebrating and paying tribute to the cultural contributions of our forebears.

There is some concern that this bill may promote the emblem of the francophone culture to the exclusion of others. The idea of recognizing a specific cultural group through the adoption of an official emblem is not new or revolutionary. For example, I recall Bill 205 in 2000 proposing an official Alberta dress tartan. The passage of the Emblems of Alberta (Alberta Dress Tartan) Amendment Act, 2000, added a second official tartan to Alberta's official emblems. This dress tartan, in addition to the existing tartan which was adopted as an official emblem in 1961, gave recognition

to the Scottish heritage which comprises a large component of Alberta's cultural landscape. There are direct parallels between these tartans and the Franco-Albertan emblem. They are distinctly similar and their adoption equally beneficial to the common good.

The francophone community has consistently used the francophone Alberta flag for over the past 25 years, displaying it at cultural events and functions in accordance with national flag protocol. National standards of flag protocol dictate how any flag may be displayed in relation to other flags or banners. The Franco-Albertan emblem as a banner of the organization occupies a very definite place of precedence in the universally accepted Canadian flag protocol.

This protocol will not and cannot be changed by Bill 204. This means that on any occasion when the Franco-Albertan emblem is displayed, it will be displayed in exactly the same fashion as it has been displayed since 1982. It means that the national flag of Canada, the flags of other sovereign nations, the flags of the provinces and territories of Canada, and the flags of municipalities and cities will continue to take precedence over the proposed Franco-Albertan emblem. It also means, of course, that the Alberta flag's order of precedence will not change. It does not mean adoption of the Franco-Albertan emblem as an official emblem which will result in mandatory display on any structure or at any event. Bill 204 is not about forcing the culture of one particular group on Albertans. It is about providing recognition to that group through the official adoption of an existing emblem.

When considering the adoption of a Franco-Albertan emblem, you must also consider the extensive recognition that has already been granted to Alberta's francophone community. As far as legislation and policy in this area go, there is a great deal of precedent. French is an official language of Canada. Parents have a recognized legal right to educate their children in either official language, and government ensures that services available to English-speaking Albertans are also made available to those who speak French.

We have legally recognized l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta, the organization responsible for creating the Franco-Albertan emblem, as an official representative of Alberta's francophone community. In this capacity we have empowered them to advocate on behalf of the Francophonie and to advance their interests.

In 1999, as was mentioned earlier by some speakers, the Francophone Secretariat of Alberta was established to recognize the commitment of Alberta francophone citizens. Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of serving as the first chair of the Francophone Secretariat, until December of 2006. The Secretariat acts as a liaison between the government and Alberta's francophone community in addition to ensuring that their specific needs are reflected in the forms of policy and services. In addition to these forms of recognition, we also look to the Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, a celebration honouring Alberta's French community, which takes place annually here at the Legislature rotunda. At this ceremony, since 1999, we raise and recognize the Franco-Albertan flag, so the flag is not new to this building.

Alberta has a long-standing tradition of offering recognition to a group which has contributed a great deal to the social, cultural, and economic prosperity of our province. Recognizing this emblem, Mr. Speaker, is in keeping with our past and ongoing recognition of francophone culture. It enhances the comprehensive and inclusive nature of our province's official emblems, a step forward not only for the 334,000 Albertans of French descent but for Albertans of all backgrounds and cultures. This represents a natural evolution of our official emblems. It reflects the significant impact of a group that has been integral in forging our collective destiny.

Consideration of Bill 204 shows the openness and flexibility of our democratic society in advancing the cause of multiculturalism. It embodies the essence and reflects the purpose of our official emblems. It reflects the commitment of this government to the ideals of tolerance and acceptance that have made Alberta the best place in the world to live. Bill 204 has potential to improve the quality of life of all Albertans by enhancing the government's priority of promoting a culturally and historically encompassing cultural policy.

M. le Président, je demande à tous les membres de cette Assemblée de supporter la loi 204. C'est pour reconnaître certainement les contributions qui ont été faites par les franco-albertains pendant des siècles et des siècles dans cette province.

Merci beaucoup, M. le Président. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Mr. Speaker, thank you. M. le Président, je suis très heureux d'avoir l'occasion de parler de la loi 204, the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007, présentée par le membre pour la Rivière-de-la-Paix. J'ai applaudi sa participation et édification en avançant la culture et la langue franco-albertaine.

Mr. Speaker, I applaud the involvement in recognizing and advancing francophone Albertans' culture and language by the Member for Peace River. Bill 204 is an opportunity for the province to acknowledge the cultural role and the heritage of Alberta's francophone community by including as an official emblem of Alberta the Franco-Albertan emblem.

The francophone community is strongly represented throughout Alberta. Over 334,000 Albertans are of French descent, with over 66,000 considered native French speakers and over 205,000 able to speak some French, like myself.

Prominent cultural groups have helped to lay the foundation for the great multicultural society that we enjoy and live in today. Alberta is a growing multilingual society. Nationally there have been considerable increases in the number of multilingual Canadians. Multilingualism can help reduce feelings of isolation and marginalization and also increase understanding by all of us as Canadians.

4:50

Looking into the past, the history of Franco-Albertans dates back to the early days of exploration in Canada as Europeans of French descent charted expeditions across our great country and, in fact, across the North American continent. The ancestors of Franco-Albertans were among the first to settle on the vast prairie, along our rivers and lakes, and these explorers and voyageurs came to Alberta and established communities in the hope of a prosperous future.

It should be noted that many historians conclude that Pierre and François de La Vérendrye were among the first European explorers to reach the Rocky Mountains, in 1741. Less than 10 years later 10 Frenchmen from Portage la Prairie in Manitoba travelled up the Bow River to Alberta and eventually settled and built a post on the site of what is now Calgary.

Back to the present. Franco-Albertans are participating in over 200 regional and community organizations. As you heard before, Mr. Speaker, the Francophone Secretariat, one of the organizations very important to our government, co-ordinates initiatives to promote French language and culture to ensure that francophone citizens are provided culturally and linguistically appropriate services in essential areas such as education, justice, and health.

I just want to name a few. For example, l'Association

canadienne-française de l'Alberta, ACFA, operates as a leader, providing resources and direction for many francophone organizations and community initiatives. Le Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta, CDEA, facilitates economic and tourism development, strictly working for the interests of francophone business, and provides a francophone Albertan with resources, advice, consultation, and networking between Alberta and Quebec and the French in France.

Also, we have the Centre d'accueil et d'établissement d'Edmonton, or CAE, an immigrant-serving agency helping immigrating francophones from all parts of the world. It assisted in the development of the French version of the Welcome to Alberta guide, which provides basic information about Alberta for new immigrants. Services are consistent with our government priority of providing a made-in-Alberta immigration strategy. Also a group called Regroupement artistique francophone de l'Alberta, RAFA, recognizes the government of Alberta's Foundation for the Arts as a provincial art service organization and provides services and assistance in the francophone arts and associations.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has been universally enhanced by the cultural, social, historic, and economic contributions of francophone Albertans, and acknowledging the Franco-Albertan emblem is an act of gratitude and appreciation historically which will strengthen the solidarity of Albertans.

Now, Alberta signed Canada's Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms accepting and supporting the linguistic duality of Canada. There are many members of the Assembly who represent Franco-Albertan constituents, so granting official emblem status to the Franco-Albertan emblem will be perceived as a sincere thanks to those constituents which have a historical . . .

**The Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, but the time limit for consideration of this business has now left us.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

**Mr. Flaherty:** The hon. Member for St. Albert.

### **Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability**

503. Mr. Flaherty moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to recognize the unfunded liability in the teachers' pension plan as a public debt that should be addressed as soon as possible in order to reduce the unfairly high contribution rates of Alberta teachers and increase the resources available for classroom services.

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An unfunded liability is the amount by which liabilities exceed assets. The Alberta teachers' pension plan had a \$7.1 billion unfunded liability as of August 31, '06. Put simply, an unfunded liability is a pension account funding shortfall. In 1992 the government committed to paying two-thirds, \$4.6 billion, and the teachers committed to paying one-third, \$2.3 billion. According to the ATA, at present, based on this funding scheme, the unfunded liability is expected to increase each year until it reaches about \$14 billion in 2045, after which it will rapidly diminish until it is eliminated by 2060.

Teachers now pay approximately 4.25 per cent, and the government pays 7.25 per cent, meaning that the teachers are paying a much higher proportion than most recent agreements that have been laid out. The problem with the 1992 deal is that, one, the province is not debt-free. The current unfunded liability is \$7.1 billion. Two,

teachers, particularly after 1992, are paying for an inherited debt. Three, according to the ATA, in 2005 Alberta teachers paid 12 per cent of their salary for a pension plan, compared to B.C. which is 8.1 per cent, Saskatchewan which is 7.7 per cent, and Ontario which is 7.8 per cent. Four, teacher contributions to the fund have not been met because the government reduced teachers' salaries and the number of teaching positions.

If you look across Canada, we see that in 2005 the government in Newfoundland and Labrador paid the entirety of the teachers' pension plan unfunded liability, totalling \$2 billion, in exchange for a four-year collective agreement which included a wage freeze in years 1 and 2, and 3 per cent increases in years 3 and 4. In March Manitoba put \$1.5 billion towards the unfunded liability in the teachers' pension plan, covering 75 per cent of the liability. The province took out a loan to cover the amount, which was calculated as saving money in the long run.

What is the government's position on the unfunded liability? Well, the Premier has looked at this and said that it should be resolved and has asked in a letter outlined to the Minister of Education that he initiate negotiations on options for a reasonable, long-term solution to the teachers' unfunded pension liability issue. This is very promising.

During the recent leadership campaign the now-Premier wanted to resolve the issue of the unfunded liability in the Alberta teachers' retirement fund through a framework agreement similar to those established in other jurisdictions. He said:

I have clearly stated that the Teacher's Pension Fund unfunded liability is a matter for the Government and the ATA to negotiate a final, fair and lasting resolution. I would never use such an emotional matter as a bargaining chip in the heat of a labour dispute. It doesn't matter any more how we got to this point, I have always bargained in good faith and know that solutions can always be found if we don't create unreasonable deadlines or prejudice negotiations before we've even sat down at the table.

The now Minister of Finance examined an indexed increase in teachers' salaries and an assumption of an unfunded liability in the teachers' pension fund in return for a 10-year moratorium on labour action.

In the campaign the present minister of health in an interview at the ATA said:

The Alberta government should take responsibility for all of the pre-1992 unfunded liability regardless of how it arose. The unfunded liability is a burden on young teachers, who will never benefit from it, and a disincentive to people entering and staying in the profession. Government needs to work with the ATA and school boards to reach an agreement under which the government would take immediate responsibility for the teacher portion of the liability. Government should pay it off over a five-year period, and it should be clearly identified separate and apart from monies budgeted for the current education system.

This government has also included \$40 million for a lump-sum payment for a portion of the government's share of the management employees' pension plan unfunded pension liability in the 2006-07 supplementary supply. The Liberal caucus position is this: the unfunded liability is a problem that will only get worse if action is not taken.

5:00

There are three major reasons to resolve this unfunded liability problem, we believe. Fiscal responsibility. The unfunded liability will only increase if action is not taken now. It is predicted that the unfunded liability, if the current rate is left in place, could reach up to \$45 billion in 2060. Strengthen the education system is part (b): difficulty recruiting and retaining new teachers. Currently teachers in Alberta are contributing to their pension plan at the highest rate

in Canada. This rate has increased significantly since a deal was reached in 1992. The Alberta Teachers' Association and the former education minister have pointed out that the unfunded liability discourages new teachers from entering the field. It is also reported to affect the retention of new teachers.

Increased funding for education. Currently spending on teachers' unfunded liability is housed within the education budget even though this funding has no real impact on learning outcomes. This both skews the amount of funding that is provided to education and potentially also represents money that could have been spent elsewhere within education and areas that would have directly impacted students and learning.

The third aspect is improved labour stability. The unfunded liability has led to tense labour relations between teachers and the provincial government, which may lead to strikes, stalled negotiations, et cetera in the months to come. A previous resolution to the unfunded liability was offered to teachers in exchange for 10 years of guaranteed labour peace. This was viewed by some as coercive.

Fairness. Teachers are paying for benefits they won't receive. The percentage of the pension payments that is put towards the unfunded liability is paying down a problem that new teachers had no part in creating and from which they will not benefit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to speak to Motion 503, which seeks to address the unfunded liability issue in the Alberta teachers' pension plan, or what's formally called the Alberta teachers' retirement fund, I guess. I'd also like to thank the hon. Member for St. Albert for raising the issue because I know that both of us would like to have this matter addressed and resolved, and I'm sure that virtually all members of the House would feel somewhat similar to that.

I hope it wouldn't be the case, but as worded, I suspect that the motion might well fail. I'm not trying to be presumptuous and foretell the votes in the House, but just looking at it, it suggests to me that it might be at risk of failing. Yet I know that the hon. member is very sincere in having brought it forward, so in that particular vein of thought I would like to propose an amendment. I would like to move that Motion 503 be amended by striking out "as a public debt that should be addressed as soon as possible in order to reduce the unfairly high contribution rates of Alberta teachers and increase the resources available for classroom services" and in their place substitute "and immediately initiate negotiations on options for a reasonable long term solution to the teachers' unfunded pension liability issue."

Mr. Speaker, the amended motion would then read as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the Government to recognize the unfunded liability in the Teachers' Pension Plan and immediately initiate negotiations on options for a reasonable long term solution to the teachers' unfunded pension liability issue.

I would then like to speak to the amendment.

**The Speaker:** To the hon. member and to all members – please continue with the circulation of the amendment – this amendment is to a motion of a private member, Motion 503. If hon. members take a look at the document in front of us, hon. members will note that there are no signatures of either Parliamentary Counsel. In other words, as part of our tradition Parliamentary Counsel is expected to look at the proposed amendments, and if they choose because of the practices of our Assembly to advise the chair, they advise the chair by not having their initials on the amendment.

The chair was aware of this earlier today, and there's reason for us to do this. First of all, the absence of their approval does not mean that the proposed amendment is automatically out of order, but it simply means it is drawn to the position of the chair. Hon. members know that this is a private member's matter. The chair has looked at that, heard the words, and basically is of the view that the amendment does change the intent of the motion.

In keeping with tradition, particularly since 1997, while I've had the privilege of being your Speaker, a great deal of deference is shown by the chair to the position of private members and the business of private members. There's limited opportunity for members to have their motions considered by the Assembly. Even prior to the arrival of my position in the chair in 1993, when major amendments were made to the Standing Orders, there was a spirit of those amendments that the work and the advocacy of private members was to be paramount in the Assembly. Successive Speakers have limited the scope of acceptable amendments to private members' motions so that their intent is not substantially altered.

I particularly refer members to page 273 of *Alberta Hansard* for March 2, 1999, for an example of a purported amendment to a private member's motion which was ruled out of order. By ruling it out of order, it could not proceed.

In this case the proposed amendment would remove any reference to "unfairly high contribution rates of Alberta teachers," which seems central to the motion.

The chair would also like to note that there is a spirit of co-operation that has developed in this Assembly since we have arrived here in the spring of 2007, and the chair would work in accordance with the mood, the new mood of the Assembly, to see whether or not we can find a solution to this.

The solution that the chair would suggest would be that the chair would ask the member for St. Albert, the sponsor of the motion, to advise whether he is of the view that the amendment is in keeping with the intent of his motion. If he agrees and advises the chair that the amendment is in keeping with the intent of the motion, then the chair would be inclined to allow the amendment to be moved, and it would be subject to debate and subject to a vote on the floor. If the member doesn't agree, then the chair will enforce the ruling that the purported amendment is out of order and cannot be moved.

So to the hon. Member for St. Albert, would you be supportive of the amendment? You may advise me by standing and saying yes or no.

**Mr. Flaherty:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm somewhat uneasy here in the sense – can I go through you and ask a question about the amendment? Am I allowed to do that? I'm not clear on one part of the amendment, and that's the word "options." Maybe I'm out of order here but anyway: "immediately initiate negotiations on options." That's like a picture with only . . .

**The Speaker:** I think, hon. member, we have a greater difficulty now because the chair cannot be involved in the debate and the chair is not in a position to know what the word would mean by a person with the intended amendment. Clearly, what I need to know in keeping the process moving is whether or not the member for St. Albert would say yes or no to the proposed amendment.

**Mr. Flaherty:** Yes.

**The Speaker:** Then that being the case – you may sit down now – the House has before it an amendment that it will now consider. The debate now is on the amendment. That is the subject: not the motion, it's the amendment to the motion.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, would you like to proceed then?

5:10

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for St. Albert. I'll start by immediately addressing the question that he has put forward. The word "options" simply means that we shouldn't try and preclude some clever and possibly brilliant solutions and methods and so on that might still form part of the discussion process because, as we know, this is a very complex and complicated issue and numerous attempts have been held in the past to one way or another try and address it. So all I'm trying to point out here is that the word "options" is a friendly word there, hon. member, and I don't think that it will be a difficulty whatsoever. The spirit here is to address this liability and put in place a mechanism to have it resolved.

With that, I'll go on for the other eight minutes I have. Perhaps I won't. I would just ask for the question to be called.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Well, that would be an impossibility. There are a number of speakers who would like to participate this afternoon, so I'll proceed in this immediate order: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, and a number of the members have advised me as well. If there are more, please advise me.

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, in the spirit of a new mood – I find that intriguing – perhaps we can pursue along that line. I certainly expect the mood to be always consistent in looking for what's best for the population and using debate constructively. If that's the case, then certainly I'm happy to participate with that.

I have before me the amendment to which I'm speaking to. Whilst it seems to perhaps capture some of the intention of the hon. Member for St. Albert's original motion, I think it sort of serves to somewhat emasculate that same motion that he put out there, so I find it a little bit difficult. But then a tool from my own teaching career came back to me, which is the Venn diagram, right? The Venn diagram seeks to find some commonality inside of two perhaps divergent thoughts. So by using this amendment and drawing a Venn diagram around that and then with the hon. member's original motion, we do find some common ground; that is, to at least have an acknowledgement that there is a problem.

It's an education problem only to the extent where it limits the capacity for our profession to attract new teachers and perhaps puts some constraints on labour recruitments. But, essentially, it is a financial problem. You know, when we're looking to ensure, Mr. Speaker, that we in fact close our debts off, which I believe that the Conservative government has endeavored to do and made their first priority for many, many years, then this is a glaring problem that has escaped notice, or it's just been neglected for so many years.

As I said, in the spirit of finding something in common, the amendment from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek does perhaps at least send us in the right direction, so I would in fact support this amended motion.

It's as though you're looking for some direction, and the direction is that ultimately we have to address the unfunded liability problem, not just for the teachers in this province but for the economic well-being of this whole province and the well-being of our public education system. So if this motion is an intention to move forward – and I'm looking for direction from not just our Education minister but from the Finance minister and the Treasury Board president, of

course, hon. sir – then, you know, I think we'll all be better off for trying to address this somehow.

The only question or quibble that I have with this amendment, Mr. Speaker, is using this "long term" as part of the language. It says, "options for a reasonable long term solution to the teachers' unfunded pension liability issue." I guess that technically we do have at present a long-term plan, but it involves a ballooning debt and, you know, quite an imposition, a cloud over the profession for many, many years. So I think we need to ensure that long-term in fact doesn't mean the rest of the careers of these teachers that are just now entering into the profession, but we deal with this in a most expedient and immediate sort of manner.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the Minister of Education, then the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

**Mr. R. Miller:** Mr. Speaker, is it my understanding that we're speaking to the amendment now and not to the main motion?

**The Speaker:** Yes.

**Mr. R. Miller:** Mr. Speaker, I would actually wish that we could dispense with this question as soon as possible so that we could deal with the actual issue at hand, so I'm going to save my comments, and I would ask the indulgence of all other members to save their comments for the actual issue. If we could get to that debate, that is what I would wish we would do.

**The Speaker:** Is the hon. Minister of Education choosing to speak on the amendment?

**Mr. Liepert:** No.

**The Speaker:** Is the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner on the amendment? No.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment?

**Mr. Chase:** No.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed on the amendment?

**Mr. Rodney:** No.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Then shall we call the question?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

**The Speaker:** Okay. So now we have a motion that's been amended. We will proceed, then, with the debate on the motion as amended.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, you want to get back in?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Yes. I'd like to start.

**The Speaker:** We're dealing with time here now, and I don't think that's appropriate anyway. You've already participated.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.



**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to Motion 503 as amended. I thank the members of the House for allowing us to move forward with this. The most important thing, I believe, is that we discuss the issue, and just how it's described in the motion, as you'll know from the comments made earlier, isn't the most important thing. It's actually the issue.

Now, Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from St. Albert made a number of references to the importance of dealing with this unfunded liability as soon as possible. He pointed out that there are two very important aspects to his Motion 503, the first being the educational component; that is, involving the attraction and retention of teachers, the freeing up of hundreds of millions of dollars for front-line educational services, and the possibility of improving labour stability given the number of agreements that are up for renewal this summer and fall. But there is also another aspect to this motion which is in my mind equally as important, if not more so, and that is the fiscal responsibility aspect of the unfunded liability.

Mr. Speaker, for the past two and a half years I have been asking questions in this House of the Education minister and the Finance minister, trying to have this issue addressed. It's no secret anymore, I don't believe, that the total unfunded liability at this point is nearly \$7 billion, and this will grow to some \$45 billion over the next number of years if it's not addressed now and before it is eventually paid down by the end of the agreement, which was already mentioned to be in the year 2060.

One of the reasons, Mr. Speaker, that the Official Opposition was willing to go along with the amended motion, which removes the dreaded "d" word that the government is so afraid of, the "debt" word, is that, in fact, this is already recognized as a debt in the government's own accounting. Whether or not government members recognize it as a debt, whether or not they like the word "debt" really isn't the issue. The bottom line is that on page 25 of the consolidated statement of financial position from last year's annual report, under Liabilities there is a line item that shows \$5.435 billion in pension obligations. So there is absolutely no question, no ifs, ands, or buts that this is a debt.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, nearly \$13 billion all together in debt is currently held by this government, and by far the largest portion of that is the pension obligations. So for anybody, whether it be a member of this government or somebody else, to go around and talk about Alberta being debt free is simply, categorically wrong. We have a debt. We have many debts: \$13 billion in total. But as I say, the largest by far is the pension obligations at nearly \$5.5 billion this year.

5:20

Now, Mr. Speaker, I mentioned the fact that by addressing this debt, we could free up literally millions of dollars that could be used for funding front-line services. I know that that was in the original motion, before it was amended. Whether we're talking about the original motion or the amended version of it doesn't change the fact that in the 2004-05 year actual dollars spent to fund the unfunded portion of the teachers' liability were \$124 million. That's forecasted to have been \$145 million in 2005-06. The estimate for the 2006-2007 year, which ended on Saturday, is \$152 million. Those are numbers out of the budget documents, directly out of the educational portion of the budget, and those are numbers that would be freed up were this government to address the unfunded teachers' pension liability in its entirety.

Now, I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, that the debt will grow and accumulate a total cost to Alberta taxpayers of \$45 billion over the remaining 53 years of the agreement as it currently stands. One

indication I think of just how bad an agreement this is in today's fiscal reality is that a child born today who 22 years from now becomes a teacher will pay for this unfunded portion of the pension their entire career. For an agreement that was put into place in 1992, 15 years before they were born, and they become a teacher 22 years from now, they will pay the equivalent of a car payment every month for their entire career. Sounds rather ludicrous to me.

Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague from St. Albert mentioned that just two weeks ago in this Assembly the government passed supplementary spending, which approved \$40 million to address the government's share of the unfunded liability in the management employees' pension plan. That was off-budget spending, I might remind all members. There's an example of the government recognizing that they had a share of an unfunded pension liability. They recognized that they had money in the bank, and they recognized that in the long run it was the best thing to do for taxpayers to pay off their portion of that fund. All we're asking is for them to take the same principle and apply it here with the unfunded teachers' pension liability.

To put it into terms, Mr. Speaker, that the average Albertan can relate to: when you get your monthly credit card statement, you have the option of paying a minimum monthly payment, or you can pay the balance in full, or you can pay some portion thereof as long as it meets the minimum. What we've been doing in this province for the last several years is paying the minimum monthly payment. When you've got money in the bank to the extent that this government has, it does not make fiscal sense to sit on that money and continue to pay only the minimum monthly payment.

Relate it to a mortgage: same thing. We've got a \$7 billion debt. We have, Mr. Speaker, in short-term savings alone approximately \$14 billion in the bank today. I just can't imagine how anybody could make a reasonable argument for fiscal responsibility not to be addressing at least a portion of this debt. Pay down that principal, and save us some money down the road.

Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, it's time that we had that debate. I would encourage the Finance minister, the President of the Treasury Board, and the Education minister to look seriously at dipping into the sustainability account as an example. Everybody knows that in the Fiscal Responsibility Act the section that refers to the sustainability account literally refers to making balance sheet improvements. If we've got in excess of \$4.5 billion more in that fund than what legislation requires us to hold in that fund, here's a perfect opportunity to address balance sheet improvements. My fear is that if we don't do that, with a general election looming some time either later this year or in the year 2008, we're going to see a spending spree like we've not seen before. Here's a perfect and legitimate reason to be using some of that money now.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I think it's legitimate to point out the concerns that many people have expressed to me over the last several days. Once I became aware of the fact that the government was going to move this amended wording, I was busily consulting stakeholders, whether it be teachers, members of the ATA executive council, and so forth, and their question is exactly that which the hon. Member for St. Albert asked: what does "reasonable" mean? There's no question that the will of this Assembly this afternoon appears to be to move this forward, to move the yardsticks and get us along the path to addressing this most serious issue. Obviously, with the amended wording "reasonable" is open to interpretation, as is "long-term."

The Member for Edmonton-Calder mentioned the fact that we do – and it's not just technically, I would say to the Member for Edmonton-Calder, but it is a fact. We do have a long-term agreement in place right now. It extends another 53 years. I would

implore the government that if, in fact, they're going to vote in favour of this motion as it's amended, 53 years doesn't cut it. Forty-three years doesn't cut it. We have to address this, and we have to address it now and to a substantial extent, not just throw a little bit of money at it in the budget and hope that it will make teachers happy and make fiscal watchdogs like myself happy but some serious commitment to addressing the reality that this unfunded liability places in front of us.

Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that there's been any time since 1992, when this agreement was first reached, where we've been in a better position to address the unfunded pension liability.

**The Speaker:** The Minister of Education, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, the Member for Calgary-Varsity, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

**Mr. Liepert:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to make a few comments. First of all, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek for moving an amendment that I think more clearly recognizes the issue before us and the Member for St. Albert for agreeing to that amendment. Unlike the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, who has just been speaking, I want to talk about the possibilities that exist here in dealing with this and not politicize the event.

If I heard the hon. member correctly, I think I heard him say that we've got \$14 billion in the bank. Is he suggesting for a minute that we should take money out of the heritage fund? This is the same group that is standing there talking about putting 30 per cent of nonrenewable resources in the heritage fund, and now you're saying that we should write a cheque for \$7 billion from the heritage fund. You can't suck and blow at the same time, member.

Mr. Speaker, this particular issue is all about recruitment and retention. It's all about encouraging our best young students to enter the teaching profession and keeping them there. That's why we're going to address this issue. We're not going to address it for political reasons, as this hon. member keeps talking about.

As we stand here today, Mr. Speaker, we have an agreement that was signed in 1992 by the Alberta government and by the Alberta Teachers' Association in good faith. We're going to try and improve upon that agreement, but at the end of the day, if we don't get improvement on that agreement, we have an agreement in place, and if that's the resolution, then we'll stick with it.

What we have before us, Mr. Speaker, is an agreement that will be negotiated. It will take some time, and we will do it fairly, and it will be done with the Alberta Teachers' Association. There was some mention about school boards. We would be happy to have input from school boards, but let's make it clear that school boards' responsibilities are to negotiate salaries with ATA locals, to negotiate contracts with their ATA locals. The unfunded pension liability is an agreement between the Alberta government and the Alberta Teachers' Association, and that's how it will be addressed.

I want to just very briefly touch upon some of the comments that were made relative to somehow, because we've got this unfunded liability, it's taking money out of the education system. Well, that is just – well, I won't say what that is. We spent in this province over \$5 billion in this budget year, and I suggest that it'll probably increase when the Minister of Finance brings down his budget on April 19. That's some \$27.9 million per school day on education in Alberta. So to somehow leave the impression that students' education is not being served because we have this 1992 agreement in place is just not correct.

5:30

I just wanted to make those few comments, Mr. Speaker, to set the

record straight. This government will address the issue. We will not politicize it. We will get a deal that is good for teachers and is good for the taxpayer.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand up and to speak to the amended Motion 503 and the problem that we're facing here in the province for some 15 years on this unfunded liability, the teachers' pension plan. There are a few points, I guess, that I'd like to bring forward. It's always about economics when we're doing things: what we can and what we can't afford. We need to look at things and put our House in order.

But to go back to 1992, when this deal was signed, I believe the number was approximately \$2 billion, between \$1.9 billion and \$2 billion. Had the government at that point put it into their plan on reducing or eliminating the debt, I believe that we would have been out in 2005.

The debate has continued – who's going to do it and what portion? – and there has been far too much politics involved in it. I agree with the hon. Education minister that it's time that politics get pulled out of this and we start in a fashionable and an economical way of addressing this.

My biggest concern with the motion is the "options for a reasonable long-term solution." I think it has been a long-term problem, but I'm asking the Finance minister and the hon. President of the Treasury Board: it has been long-term already, and it's time to address it with a much faster and appropriate method, especially in times of surplus right now. We have the means to address it.

Newfoundland, which is not in such a good position, has addressed their unfunded liability, and I would urge the government that when our budget comes out, this is addressed in a major way. The reason why it needs to be, in my opinion, addressed in a major and quick fashion – I would hope that within five years at the very longest this would be addressed – is that what happened by not giving that fund the \$2 billion in 1992 has really damaged the long-term, I guess, size of the fund.

When we look back to the Ontario teachers' fund, the Quebec pension plan, and those other ones, it's been a boom time. Had that money been in there, then even their one-third portion perhaps would be made up and they wouldn't be in such a terrible situation now. But having no money in there definitely has been to the detriment of the teachers' pension fund. So I would hope that we would address it quickly, fairly and realize at least our share and put in the \$5.1 billion and let them start investing it in a major way.

The other area that I would like to address, though, with the teachers' pension fund – and this concerns all Albertans – is that their pension fund is 2 per cent over 35 years, so 70 per cent of salary after 35 years of service to our good youth in this province is addressed. But .4 of that 2 per cent comes from the Canada pension fund, and the problem that we always seem to forget in this is that the Canada pension fund is also an unfunded liability. Last year I believe the Finance minister spoke of an extra \$60 billion-plus to that. In order to truly secure the future for all Albertans and the ATA, we need to look at having an Alberta pension fund that is funded and not left unfunded. The Quebec pension plan is very well funded at over a hundred billion dollars, I believe now, and their future is secure. But we don't want Albertans and teachers to lose possibly 15 per cent of their 70 per cent because of a failing Canada pension plan.

Once again, last year the Finance minister talked about the Canada pension plan and our possible necessity to look after that, and I'd say

that that also is where we should be funding our future liability, an Alberta pension plan as well as making sure that we fund our share of the teachers' pension plan. Therefore, the future will remain bright. We'll have an opportunity. I hope, like I say, that for this amendment the long term will only be looking at the past and the short-term future and that it'll be addressed in this coming budget. We don't want to continue the lost opportunity.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. I would like to begin by correcting the Minister of Education's false financial assumptions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford never suggested using any of the money from the heritage trust fund. In fact, a Liberal government would build up the heritage trust fund to the point that by 2020 the heritage trust fund would have risen to \$120 billion given today's economic reality.

However, I would like to point out both to the Minister of Education and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek that you can paint a white horse with black stripes and call it a zebra, but that doesn't make it so. You can stick a horn on its forehead and call it a unicorn, but that doesn't make it so. The fact that the unfunded liability is still a debt whether it's taken out of this amendment or not – Albertans have the intelligence, especially those from the constituency of Calgary-Varsity, to know when a debt is a debt.

We have an unfunded liability debt approaching \$7 billion just within the teachers' unfunded liability. Let's add another billion and a half of other public unfunded pensions to that amount, so we're getting closer to the \$9 billion mark. The former Infrastructure and Transportation minister can correct me if I'm wrong, but I would say that lowballing the infrastructure deficit – and I'm not talking new construction – would probably be in the area of \$10 billion. So guess what? We're close to \$19 billion now of dedicated debt.

Now, the Education minister and the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation think that P3s are the next best thing to sliced Wonder Bread. Well, guess what? They're debt too. So let's throw on the cost for just the portion of the Anthony Henday that's under a P3. That brings our debt up to closer to \$20 billion. The Conservatives can say all they like, they can manipulate words, but Albertans are smart enough to know when a debt is a debt.

However, I do agree with the Minister of Education's assumption or statement – I shouldn't say that it's an assumption; it's a statement that I agree with – that we've got to stop politicizing. We've got to stop using teachers as pawns. We've got to look at the future, and the teachers and parents and grandparents are the ones most responsible for forming the young minds and establishing a successful future for the province of Alberta.

So we've got to address the debt. Weasel words like "options," "reasonable," and "long-term" don't truly address the debt. We don't need long-term solutions that are going to cost us upwards and exceeding \$50 billion if it doesn't get resolved in the next 53 years. We need smart short-term solutions. We need to work together both as government and opposition to get this right. We cannot continue in this conflicted mode and teachers and new teachers in generations to follow be saddled with this debt.

Two-thirds of this debt, which will continue to grow, belongs to the government. Premier Klein, the individual who liked the idea of being on autopilot, made the statement that we need to foolproof our government's solutions so that in the event of a Liberal government being elected, they couldn't screw it up. Well, let me tell you: that

advent is coming sooner than you might think, and I would love to work with you to resolve this one of many debts.

Thank you.

5:40

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

If additional members want to participate, please advise.

**Mr. Rodney:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad we're not overpoliticizing here today. I am pleased to rise today to speak in support of the amended motion as presented by the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Creek. But, first a clarification: the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity wanted to clarify a few numbers. I thought I might have clarified that one-third of the debt is actually the teachers' portion. I know this because this is an issue that's close to home for me. Many of my relatives, including my dad, are educators. I was a teacher and an administrator for 13 years, as well, at each level.

Now, in that time I learned very, very well that Alberta's future is in the hands of our students and it's in the hands of our teachers and administrators who are ensuring these students have rich, rewarding learning experiences. It's in the hands of all of us who are working together to shape our education system to be the very best in the world.

We have a lot of parents in this fine House, and they know very well that education has an incredible influence on children's daily lives and on their future hopes and aspirations. They care very deeply in this House, and they care very deeply across the province. I also know that staff down the road at Alberta Education strive daily to keep ahead of the curve, and they understand what demands will be placed on our children and youth when they leave school. They care very deeply as well. Every day we see teachers in our classrooms showing that they are also very, very concerned.

I think we've all seen first-hand the dedication of teachers to children and youth in their classrooms. When students are enthused about learning, they develop a hunger to learn more and they develop an ability to think critically for themselves, and that's certainly something worth celebrating. We celebrate because it took a lot of effort, more than the student will probably ever know unless, of course, they themselves become a teacher one day. When we celebrate, because our society is better for every student who develops these attributes, we celebrate the great education system we have.

**An Hon. Member:** What's the relevance?

**Mr. Rodney:** The system works because of the great teachers, because of the world-class curriculum, because of the standards and assessments that are in place. It works, and it will continue to work as new and innovative ways to enhance and deliver education together are explored. How do we accomplish this? Three ways: keeping lines of communication open, recognizing a shared, common goal when it comes to educating our children and youth, and working together to find solutions that serve in the best interest of the student. Really, that's what this is all about.

We have one such solution presented to us today in the amended motion. As the hon. Minister of Education has suggested, it serves no purpose to politicize this issue. It really comes down to something quite simple. If students are to continue to achieve their best, whether it's graduating from high school into the job market or pursuing postsecondary education, this can only be accomplished with qualified, quality teachers in the classroom every day.

As the hon. Minister of Education stated, it's all about recruitment

and retention. So you ask the relevance: in order to attract and keep the brightest and most creative teachers, we need to make it attractive for them to come to work in Alberta and to stay working in Alberta. One way to do that, very simply, is to address the unfunded pension liability for our young teachers in the classrooms now and in the future. It's simply for that reason, Mr. Speaker, that I support the amended motion.

I would like to thank you, sir.

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

**Rev. Abbott:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't really planning on speaking to the motion today, but certainly the debate has intrigued me and drawn me in. First of all, I'd like to say that I would like to speak in support of the motion as amended, and I certainly would like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek for putting forward that amendment. I know that he has done a lot of work on this as the former minister of Education, now as a very, very hard-working MLA, working on behalf of his constituents but also on behalf of all teachers in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that this is an issue that we as a caucus, the Progressive Conservative caucus, have been certainly concerned about and working on for, I would say, a number of years now. It's something that we have brought forward. We've sat down with the local ATA presidents. We've sat down with representatives from the ATA, and we've discussed this issue, I would say, in great detail. We've received packages, handouts, letters, et cetera. We've received in-depth analysis from paid professionals with regard to the best course of action to deal with this issue, and certainly it is an issue.

Mr. Speaker, we know that if we deal with this sooner rather than later, it will be beneficial to the taxpayers. It will be beneficial to the teachers. It will just be a better thing to do. That's why I am in support of this motion.

I think that it is unfortunate, some of the rhetoric that's happened today from the other side of the House: finger pointing and this kind of thing coming from the opposition, one member calling his fellow member a weasel for accepting certain amendments. It's just unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, because, quite frankly, I think that the motion as amended is a good one. This amendment is something that I think we as the government side of the House should support, and certainly I would urge my colleagues to do that.

Mr. Speaker, as I read the new motion, it says:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to recognize the unfunded liability in the teachers' pension plan and immediately initiate negotiations on options for a reasonable long-term solution to the teachers' unfunded pension liability issue.

I think that that is the key right there: negotiations. We find that negotiations do work. As we all sit down around the table, we talk about the issue. We bring these issues out. We get all the facts, the real facts, the real figures on the table. Then I think that we can reach an agreement on this.

Again, I have to reiterate that I certainly support the ATA's position that this is something that we could and should deal with in the near future rather than allow it to run its full course. Certainly, the teachers are prepared to bring something forward in negotiations. Obviously, we as a government need to be prepared to bring something forward in negotiations. I think that our new Minister of Education, that spoke so eloquently earlier, is certainly the right man for the job to do this.

I am certainly wanting to lend my support in any way when these negotiations begin. As one who's followed this for a few years now

and certainly wants to see it resolved, I would just like to urge this Assembly to support this motion and to get on with the business.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm going to take a little bit of a different tack on this, and I think it comes right back to my personal experience. I think we do most of the teaching profession a disservice when we say that if we just give them more money, we're going to have better teachers. The teachers that I know that I respected the most, that taught me the most, wouldn't have done it better if you had doubled their salary. Some of the teachers that tried to teach me and others couldn't have done it better if they had doubled their salary. Most people enter teaching because they love it. Most teachers are doing something, quite candidly, that they know they don't intend to get rich at. It's a little bit like being an MLA.

But, you know, it's not just teachers. Most firemen, most policemen, most nurses go into the job they do because they love doing it. We measure their salaries, and that's how they measure, I think, what you do at coffee time and see what you can get. I don't begrudge anybody in this world trying to get all they can when they sit at a bargaining table to do it. That's an age-old tradition that we all use. Some use it better than others.

But I will say this to the Bob Bachmans of the world and the Phil McKerihans, the people that taught for years in Vermilion that did have a huge effect and, I think, universally go through the classes: the Dean McMullens, the Angus Smiths. The teachers that literally spent their lives doing it really never cared much about what was in it for them. I think Dean got a little more after he retired and went to work for the ATA. But, I mean, there was a guy that was one of the best teachers, one of the most respected people in our community. So I think we're kind of not being fair to the teachers to sit here and say that if we just look after this pension fund, all of a sudden we'll have a whole bunch of better teachers, because we won't. It will make their lives easier.

5:50

It will make it easier to determine what we have for liabilities down the road to even get it looked after. I don't think for a minute that we understand how much our liability into these pension funds really is. Where we may think we have a funded pension in some areas now, we may find years from now that we don't. We'll have to address these things as we move along. The critical thing here is to take the opportunity we've got as a government because of some prudent financial management years ago, that gives us the opportunity now to be a partner in this discussion with the ATA about what's in the best interests of the students of Alberta, of the teachers, and of the taxpayers. The Rotarian creed would say, you know, that it's got to be fair for both sides. From my personal point of view, I think the accountability in the classroom is as critical as any of the other accounting we do with the pension plan.

So, I mean, I would like to see, and I hear many times in a row: "We don't mind paying the teachers a fair thing. We don't mind that. But we'd sure like to be able to get rid of some of the ones that make many of the good teachers look bad." Now, that's horrible to say, but ask your kids. I'm not sure how many members still have children in school, and the way my 17-year-old acts we might not have children in school on any given day. But ask the kids what they know. They know more than we give them credit for. Some teachers deserve twice as much, and some should maybe go to Fort

McMurray. But that's a different debate. [interjection] Well, they could make a lot more money up there, and they'd be happier.

So the debate around the pension fund has to be put in the context of: this isn't going to give you better teachers; it's going to give us a better idea of what we all owe. If you tell me that giving somebody more money all of a sudden makes them better, I don't buy it. I look forward to the minister and to the ATA representatives talking about this, being open and honest, and keeping in mind that it's about the student, that it's about the taxpayer and also about the teacher.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Well, thank you. I just have a few minutes here, but I would like to make a couple of comments if I might. Again, the words "reasonable" and "long term" are the two that I'm having problems with on this one. I like things a little bit tighter than that.

One of the other things is that there is no question in my mind that a debt is a debt, and this is a debt. The Minister of Education was very theatrical, and I'm sure that the people in the gallery to whom he was probably playing appreciated it. One of the things that has been brought up is the fact that we are politicizing the issue. The question is: why is it being politicized? Why is it being politicized? It's being politicized because it hasn't been handled. Had it been handled in the proper manner between the government and the ATA, all of the teachers and everyone else that has been complaining about this would not have tried to bring it to the political people to have it brought out in the open. The problem is politicized because it's not being handled. It hasn't been handled properly from the very beginning.

The other comment that I heard about: teachers and nurses go into their jobs for the love of doing it. I'm a nurse. Absolutely, I went into the job to do it. However, money is absolutely not the issue. I have said time and time again that the reason that people are leaving part of the social areas of our lives is not because of the money but because they're not being allowed to do the job that they know they should be doing. We are getting burnout, and I don't think that some of these teachers are any different than the ones you were pertaining to.

**The Speaker:** I hate to interrupt the hon. member, but we've now

arrived at the point in time where I'm going to have to call on the hon. Member for St. Albert to close debate. Prior to that, might I just call on the Minister of Education for an introduction of guests.

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

**Mr. Liepert:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to take the opportunity for the House to recognize a former member of the Legislature and the gentleman who I will be spending a fair bit of time with in rooms, arriving at a fair and equitable solution to the unfunded teachers' pension liability. I'd like to introduce the president of the ATA, the newly elected president, Frank Bruseker.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**  
**Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability**  
(*continued*)

**The Speaker:** I now call on the hon. Member for St. Albert to close the debate on the amended vote.

**Mr. Flaherty:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the other side for helping us to get this done. I think it is fair and beneficial to all concerned, and I mean that specifically in terms of the parents, the kids, and the teachers. I'm looking forward to the minister – I didn't realize the Minister of Education had a temper. Loved it. I used to be able to play football, too, so you and I might get into a fight yet. So anyway, it's good, it's fair, and I think it's wonderful to see it get on the road. I hope we see an agreement as soon as possible, and I'll call the vote.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 as amended carried]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader, do you want to reply.

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1 o'clock tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 5:57 p.m. the Assembly adjourned]

