

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, April 3, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/04/03

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibility laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 53-plus great rising stars of our education system from Blessed Kateri school. They are accompanied today by teachers Mr. Ray Brooks, Mrs. Darlene Payne, Mrs. Krista MacGregor and, I'm pleased to add, by two student teachers as well, Mrs. Karon Dragon and Miss Gina Lowther. I would ask all of them to please rise and receive the warm applause of the Assembly. Thank you for coming.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am so honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a wonderful group of young citizens who are joining us today from the Nellie McClung program at Oliver school. These are the BLAST team members that just held a rally outside hoping to convince the government to ban power walls. The students that are with us today are Eyerusalem Ghebremusse, Marissa Giroux, Shanice Morris, Jolene Paul, Shelby Fowler, Jessica Deschambeau, Janessa Hidber, Crystin Kilmarnock, Samantha Vaillancourt, Vivian Poon, Jule Silver, Taryn Pohl, Kat Fuller, Haylee Fortin, Alex Hyska, Amanda Annett, and Taylor Pinch, and they are joined by their teacher, Mrs. Heather Jubenvill, who has led them all this way. I would ask them all to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Brian Clelland and Rory Marusiak. Brian and Rory are members of UFCW local 401 and are on strike at the Palace Casino here in Edmonton. They've now been on strike for 207 days due in part to this government's unfair labour legislation. Brian has been working at the Palace Casino as a dealer for a year and a half. Prior to working at the casino, he worked full time at Canada Post and was a member of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers for 18 years. Rory Marusiak has been at the Palace Casino for five years and also works as a dealer. Rory is a dedicated trade unionist and advocate for all workers within the gaming industry. He has played a key role throughout negotiations as an advisory committee member. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would now ask that they rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Shalini Puri. Shalini is a social work student at Grant MacEwan College and is doing her placement in my constituency office. She joined us in September and has been extremely dedicated and has demonstrated a high level of competence in handling casework and in assisting the people of Edmonton-Strathcona. Shalini received her bachelor of arts in sociology from the University of Alberta with a minor in anthropology. She's very active in the community and has helped develop a nonprofit youth organization called Jagriti, which roughly translated from Hindi into English means awakening. She's also an organizer for a biannual community-based conference on seniors' health issues called Matters of the Heart. Shalini is sitting in the public gallery. I would now ask her to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have six members who will participate today.

Just an alert to all hon. members of the Assembly: on Thursday of this week we will acknowledge and remember Vimy Ridge and that historic event in the history of Canada, so perhaps members who would be wanting to participate in Members' Statements might wish to use that as the theme of their statement on Thursday of this week.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Primary Health Care Renewal Initiatives

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about primary health care here in Alberta. We are always seeking ways to improve patient care, producing better health outcomes faster and with lower costs. In my constituency of Livingstone-Macleod a group of health care professionals under the leadership of Dr. John Rottger from the Associate clinic have been able to do exactly that through a program called the good health initiative. This program changed the way some kinds of health care were offered, including chronic disease management, mental health wellness services, health promotion and screening, and surgical services. A good health team composed of a nurse, a registered social worker, a pharmacist, and a dietitian have been able to better educate patients to dramatically reduce hospital admission rates and doctor visits.

By combining a medical clinic under the same roof with home care, public health, and mental health services, patient convenience and communication have also been improved. By collaborating with community partners, the good health team, as it is called, is also carrying out a promotional campaign to draw attention to screening for a number of preventable health conditions. This same group of professionals is now working on a project called advanced access, that has managed to reduce wait times significantly.

I commend this group of health care professionals in Pincher Creek for their efforts, and I hope that all members of this House and all regional health authorities will look to their example as the kind of innovation the Alberta health care system needs at this time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Camrose Wild Rose Sports Arena

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This fall Camrose will open a new sport development centre, a major project of the city and

county of Camrose, the University of Alberta, and the province of Alberta. This past Sunday was a special occasion for the community to gather at the old arena, the Wild Rose, to say goodbye. The Wild Rose is the oldest operating arena in the province and the third oldest in Canada, having been built 81 years ago. Sunday marked the end of its fascinating history of service to sport in this community and in this province.

A figure skater and a hockey player are painted on the south wall of the arena, symbolizing the activities of 81 years. They represent athletes and teams who grew and excelled in their sports; the exhilaration of victory and the disappointment of defeat; the strain of injury and the patience of healing; the coaching, mentorship, and encouragement of parents and teammates; the value of respect for opponents and teammates; the dedication of the icemakers, the caretakers, the scorekeepers, and all the volunteers; the appreciation of the fans who cheered these athletes on to greater heights of success; and those who just skated for the fun of it.

At Sunday's event the community gathered one last time to see their favourite Camrose Maroons hockey team of years gone by gather as alumni to play the younger Augustana Vikings, who also played a role in the history of this arena. In the intermission the Rusty Blades precision figure skaters team performed to perfection to a large, nostalgic crowd. At the conclusion Stu Bailey, who was born shortly after the arena was built and now still plays hockey for the old old-timers, a hero of the Maroons era, skated one more time around the ice to end a glorious 81 years of sport at the old rink in Camrose.

To all involved in sport history through the Wild Rose Arena, I say: thank you, and may the great memories and friendships last forever.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

1:10

Bessie Roffey

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. High Prairie, Alberta, has a great distinction that no other community has; that is, being home to Alberta's oldest and wisest person. To quote the *Spotlight* paper of March 14: it took all her breath, but Bessie Roffey, Alberta's oldest person, managed to blow out two of the three candles on her cake. That's pretty good. The supercentenarian celebrated her 110th birthday on March 2, 2007.

Born in London, England, on March 2, Bessie lost her father in 1904 at a very young age. Her mother put her two brothers in grammar school in England while she took Bessie on a journey in 1906. They travelled across the Atlantic Ocean in what she says in those days weren't the big ships they are now; they were just tubs. They survived those tubs and made it all the way to Quebec.

Both Bessie and her mom began their new life from there and subsequently moved all around North America. Although she mostly grew up in Fort Macleod, she also lived in such places as Fernie, Lloydminster, Florida, Sunnyside, and finally settled in Kinuso, where she met and married her husband, Bill Roffey.

Mr. Speaker, when asked what her secret to a long life is, she giggles with a twinkle in her eye and says: the good Lord doesn't want me, and the devil won't take me, so I am still here.

Mr. Speaker, Mrs. Roffey, as you can tell, is still lucid, recognizes people, and sure can tell you off when you need it. I've received a few of her barbs.

I'd ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating Alberta's oldest resident, who I fondly call Queen Roffey.

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

School Closures

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the movie *Fahrenheit 451* a fire brigade torches a pile of books, and a boy asks: Daddy, is it true that firemen used to put out fires? As neighbourhood schools continue to close, I imagine a child asking: did all schools used to be community schools? The answer to both questions is yes.

As the west was settled, each town and village had three structures: the grain elevator, schoolhouse, and church, food for the body, mind, and soul. There was a choice of grain companies and religious denominations. Schoolhouses were common to all, the original community centres. Work bees, public meetings, dances, and parties took place there, and the local school board sponsored or approved them. To talk of community schools would have been redundant.

Though Alberta provided separate education for Roman Catholic students, our forebears recognized that these, too, were public schools, publicly funded and intended for all who chose to send their children and direct their taxes there.

Then came busing. Schools became plants and facilities, factories for delivery of educational products and services. Nonproductive lines were discontinued, underutilized outlets closed.

In the 1970s Alberta Education designated community schools to be specially funded and maintained to serve their communities. Then idealism died and bottom-line thinking took over. Government cut funding and stripped school boards of the power to raise their own revenues. Now every year families wait to see if the neighbourhood school will be on the chopping block.

With our province in the flux of rapid growth we need neighbourhood schools more than ever and not just in the boom communities. If building strong communities is a priority, then let us understand that schools are cornerstones of strong communities. I suggest that we can bring these together without sacrificing fiscal responsibility if we choose to.

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

Trade, Investment, Labour, and Mobility Agreement

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in question period the Premier said that the government has "met with all those individuals, authorities, organizations that have anything to do with respect to the agreement," talking about TILMA. But the fact is that this government is only now planning to consult Albertans, when the agreement has already come into force and our hands are tied by it, and we can prove it. For starters, we know that the government put a request for proposals to do the TILMA consultation on the Alberta Purchasing Connection on March 26, 2007. The deadline for proposals was yesterday at 12:30 p.m., about an hour before the Premier assured us that everyone had been consulted.

Then, Mr. Speaker, there's this notice from the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association to their members. The headline is AUMA Wants Full Consultation on New Alberta-B.C. Trade Agreement. Clearly, they don't think that they've been consulted. The notice goes on to say that they asked "last year that municipalities be consulted on any initiative to implement TILMA." The municipalities haven't been consulted. They were told to wait for the consultation, which will occur sometime this spring, well after the agreement has come into force.

This agreement will affect all Albertans, not just businesses. Farmers, school trustees, nurses, health regions, and municipalities will all be affected by this agreement. All these individuals and

organizations deserved to be consulted before this government signed this agreement. The Premier has promised to govern with integrity and transparency. The way TILMA is brought in shows a total lack of integrity and transparency.

Curling Events in Lethbridge

Mr. Dunford: Well, now for something completely different. Mr. Speaker, I know that you appreciate this, but I'm not sure everybody in the room appreciates just the hotbed of curling that Lethbridge happens to be in. Let me give some examples. In February we hosted the Scottie Tournament of Hearts, and I want to say congratulations to Jody Meli and all of those volunteers. According to all of the feedback that we have received, it was a very, very great event, and people just fell in love with Lethbridge.

Let me secondly, then, talk about the junior world championships, and of course the team from Alberta were the winners. The skip, I believe, was originally from Grande Prairie, but the third, Brock Virtue, is Lethbridge born and raised, a Lethbridgite. We're very, very proud of him. We know that his dad, George, is. A personal friend of mine, his grandfather, Charlie Virtue, unfortunately is no longer with us, but Charlie will be watching somewhere and, I'm sure, will be very, very proud of his grandson.

Now, the third one is that in the senior women's Canadian championships a team skipped by a woman from Calgary had three Lethbridge curlers on it, and I want to mention their names. There were Chris Wilson, Shirley Kohuch, and Shirley McPherson. Now, they've won this tournament. They will represent Canada at the world's in 2008. We don't know what the site is yet, but knowing Chris Wilson as well as I do, given the choice I'm sure it will be Provençe or Tuscany.

So, ladies and gentlemen, that wild, windy, warm Lethbridge hotbed of curling.

head: Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 99 the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petitions that I presented on Monday, April 2, 2007, and I can advise the House that the petitions are not in compliance with Standing Orders 90 to 94.

The committee has considered the petitions and recommends to the Assembly that Standing Order 94(1)(b) be waived for the petition of the CyberPol – The Global Centre for Securing Cyberspace Act, and for the petition of the CREST Leadership Centre Act, subject to the petitioners providing proof of advertising in accordance with the Standing Orders before the committee hears the petitioners.

Mr. Speaker, this is my report.

The Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Speaker: Opposed? Carried.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to present a petition from a group of Albertans petitioning the Legislative Assembly to

“urge the Government of Alberta to hold rent increases to no more than the rise in the average monthly wage until December 31, 2010,” all gathered at one tanning establishment in my riding.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 1,062 signatures that read:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to add the drug Elaprase to the Drug Benefit List approved by Alberta Health and Wellness in order to ensure that those suffering from Hunter's Syndrome, including Jordan Miranda, Riley Miranda and Tyler Chauhan, get the care they need to reduce their suffering and live full lives.

head: 1:20 Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Bill 23 Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 23, the Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to establish a primary repository and claims system for the unclaimed or abandoned personal property of Albertans consistent with the recommendations of the Uniform Law Conference of Canada. It will also establish a clear process for managing and resolving issues relating to property that vests in the Crown when a corporation is dissolved.

Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to table six copies of the Choosing Child Care booklet, which is a guide to licensed and approved child care in Alberta. This helpful tool was designed by Children's Services to provide parents with the information they need to make an informed decision about the different child care options available in Alberta. This booklet also provides parents with a telephone interview planner and a checklist they can use to determine which type of program is best suited for their child's needs.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling from my constituents Gordon and Karin Daniher. They are concerned about shortages of beds, long waiting times for detox. Thousands of people and their families are paying a horrific price, and they are urging this government to act fast, before it's too late.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is from constituent Jennifer Semeniuk, who is raising the issue of rent controls. She feels that she's "an educated overworked individual who is sadly one paycheck away from being homeless." She is "disappointed in this government for not taking care of its 'average' persons and [holding] out for big business instead."

The second is from constituent Paola Guasp, who is writing with her concerns about the teachers' unfunded liability. She feels that the cost of the current generation of retirees is being passed on to a generation of teachers not yet born, and she would like to see this situation resolved.

Thank you.

Mrs. Mather: Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings. The first is from Jean Luke, called foster care, in need of care. She's talking about the stigma attached to foster care. "Losing children to care or a breakdown of a family can happen to the best of us . . . We need to provide this child with a family that not only cares for them but cares about them."

My other tabling is from Debbie Goeseels asking for support for child care that is safe and affordable. She's concerned about the lack of options available for both daycare and out-of-school care.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and table two groups of documents. One is the annual report and strategic plan from the Institute of Human Development, Child and Youth Health plus supporting documents. I recently spoke at their conference.

Also, the second group is a hundred letters from good Albertans petitioning our Alberta Legislature to support that the accused killer of Joshua Hunt be sentenced and tried "as an adult due to the nature of [his] crime, his past criminal history and that he is so close to the age of 18 years."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: It was the hon. leader of the third party.

Dr. Taft: Oh, the third party. [interjections]

Mr. Mason: I love these moments, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] Patience, please.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to table copies of 10 different letters that my office has recently received. The signatories to these letters are all urging the government to provide funding for the cancer-fighting drug Avastin. A constituent of mine, Dr. Jerrard, and his family pay \$1,750 every two weeks for Avastin treatment. The drug is already covered by the cancer boards in B.C., Quebec, and Newfoundland. The following individuals have sent letters: Sandi Halliwell, Rod Layton, Omari Lewis, Sue Williams, Brooke Rothwell, Bob Lowry, Gerry Hunt, Colleen McLeod, Linette Smith, and Hans Van Ginhoven.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of e-mails from two very concerned Calgary citizens, Laurie Fuhr and

Alexander Kurth. On April 1 a temporary homeless shelter in Calgary was closed. Unfortunately, as we know, the temperatures in Calgary remain sub zero, leaving Calgary's homeless in a very dangerous position. Laurie and Alexander are urging the city and the province to consider the situation a state of emergency and to immediately provide a temporary shelter.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and table the following seven letters and the appropriate copies from Albertans concerned about the cancer drug Avastin's ineligibility for coverage by the Alberta Cancer Board. Letters were written by Norm Dyer, Cathy Thornell, Laura E. Lewis, Bob Lowry, Pat Stevenson, Maggie Bullen, and Doug Frend.

Thank you.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Sterilization Equipment for Hospitals

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week this government spent \$200,000 sending out a brochure listing its five priorities. They are painfully obvious, things like "improve Albertans' quality of life" – well, yeah – "build a stronger Alberta," and "provide safe and secure communities." As if anybody wants otherwise. My question is to the Premier. Which of his government's five priorities covers buying adequate sterilization equipment for Alberta's hospitals?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, all five priorities are important to Albertans. This is really part and parcel of what I heard on the campaign trail for the leadership. Given the kind of support that I've been receiving in terms of visiting communities, again members of communities, Albertans, reiterating those priorities, showing support for them, I know that in partnership with Albertans these are the priorities this government supports and Albertans as well.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is getting pretty predictable in dodging the questions. I'm sure, for example, that the people of Claresholm would like a better answer. Last weekend the people of Claresholm had to hold a fundraiser to get donations – donations – to buy something as important to their hospital as equipment to sterilize medical equipment. Probably the people of Vegreville would like a better answer too and the people of Canmore and of Didsbury and of who knows where else. To the Premier. Will the Premier tell us which is a bigger priority for his government: medical sterilization equipment or \$200,000 worth of meaningless brochures?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the confidence of Albertans in the public health system is very important to this government, and we will do whatever we can to restore that confidence in the health system, to ensure that we learn from what has happened in the community of Vegreville. But the \$200,000 that the member is talking about is 20 cents per household. That's less than half the price of a stamp, and it got to households right across this province, so over a million households. So it's one way of communicating with Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would cost about 3 cents a household to put in adequate sterilization equipment in hospitals. The old sterilization machine at the Claresholm hospital had broken down and was beyond repair. It had been out of service for over a month. A new one costs \$30,000, a tiny fraction of the cost of the Premier's mail-out. In an age of antibiotic-resistant bacteria sterilization equipment is not an option. To the Premier: will the Premier cancel subsequent propaganda mail-outs and put that money toward essential sterilization equipment in hospitals instead?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader is not giving us the correct information with respect to Claresholm. I'll have the minister of health respond.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It boggles the imagination that the hon. member would want to confuse and scare Albertans in that fashion. What happened at Claresholm was a business decision made by the regional health authority to regionalize their sterilization at the High River hospital. There was never any danger to anybody there. It was an operational decision appropriately made by the board. What the board has said to the foundation and to Claresholm is that if they would like to have sterilization, that's a nice to have but not a need to have, and if they want to raise the money for it, they will operate it. But sterilization equipment is operating in High River.

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

1:30 Monitoring of Health Delivery

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of health: sterilization equipment is a need to have.

A letter from the United Nurses of Alberta to the East Central health region raises serious concerns that residents lack confidence in the health care system and are afraid to use local health facilities. Leadership is about communications, and this Premier is failing to communicate. If residents with chest pains are too afraid of infection to go to the hospital, it is the Premier's responsibility to provide the community with the facts they need. The Premier claims that residents in this community aren't concerned. To the Premier: has the Premier considered the possibility that Albertans don't actually want this issue swept under the rug?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, actually, opposition scaremongering in this province undermines public confidence in the health system.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, leadership is about accountability. The Premier is failing to be accountable, as he demonstrates every day here. The Premier's only response about the government's role in providing infection control in the public health care system is "All we have to say: please wash your hands." Well, will the Premier be accountable to the residents of East Central health region and his own community and commit to holding a public information meeting where all the facts can be laid on the table?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I said that this is a medical issue, not a political issue. Quite frankly, I feel for the many thousands of health professionals in this province, professionals that work in the public health system, and this kind of continued attack by the opposition really undermines their confidence.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Leadership is about good management, and as we see, this Premier is failing to provide good management. Albertans are in this situation because of cuts to the health system spearheaded by this Premier as part of the Deep Six. These cuts included eliminating the government's own hospital monitoring and enforcement branch. The Premier refuses – refuses – to take responsibility for creating this mess. When it comes to protecting public health, the honour system is not good enough. Will the Premier restore the hospital monitoring and enforcement branch to the department of health?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition must be getting the questions from the third party. I think that's why he got mixed up earlier today in terms of who you called. This question was asked by the third-party opposition last week. I said that we're going to listen to the advice given to our minister by the Health Quality Council. We'll listen to their recommendations, and whatever follow-up they recommend, we will do.

Provincial Labour Supply

Dr. B. Miller: Alberta will reportedly face a shortfall of over 100,000 workers within the next 10 years, and by 2025 that number could grow to 330,000. It is clear that Alberta must catch up or get left behind. Now, Manitoba's provincial nominee program brought about 6,600 skilled immigrants into that province last year whereas Alberta's program brought in only 546. We could have a stronger program. My question is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Could she tell us why this government failed to make better use of the provincial nominee program in previous years?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to get a question about the provincial nominee program because we have been accelerating our efforts over this past year, and we will deliver more provincial nominees in the program this coming year. We will continue to work with the federal government on the temporary foreign worker program. The bottom line is that we have been working very aggressively for the past two years under our previous Premier's leadership, under previous ministers, to aggressively put together a made-in-Alberta solution that takes advantage of the federal government's supports in assessing public security but assures that we select the right worker for the right place and the right job at the right time. A great part of this is contingent on working with our partners at the university and college level.

In the case of Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, they aggressively were pursuing targeting provincial nominee candidates from the colleges and universities so that, in actual fact, if a college or university had not written in an agreement to keep that student for the benefit of the community that they came from, they could . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to statistics provided by the Department of Employment, Immigration and

Industry, only 48 per cent of Alberta's recent immigrants were able to find a job in their intended occupation. More than half do not find a job in their intended occupation. That's not good enough. What is the department doing to overcome barriers such as finding Canadian work experience and, more importantly, the transferring of foreign credentials?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with the member opposite that asked the question, that we haven't been doing as well as we are going to do. We have to do more because, in fact, we not only have immigrants that come to Alberta that need successful placements, but we have to unlock some of the barriers. The foreign credential program, a made-in-Alberta solution, will attempt to do that.

Further, Mr. Speaker, for the immigrants that come through other ports, like Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto, we have to make sure that there are settlement programs that help benefit them even though currently that isn't a part of the federal funding for our made-in-Alberta strategy.

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Speaker, between 25 and 30 per cent of immigrants coming to Alberta actually abandon this province after living here for a while, compared to only 10 per cent in B.C. No wonder, because when they come here, they can't find enough housing. There's no affordable housing. There are inadequate health services, child care. To the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry: will the minister admit that the failure to keep up with Alberta's growth in terms of services and infrastructure actually has a negative effect on our ability to address the labour shortages of Alberta?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we cost share the programming for integrated settlement services with the federal government. It's my understanding that they intend to increase those supports this year.

Quite frankly, a lot of the issues relate to the lack of preparation by the candidate coming to Alberta, not getting proper knowledge in the first instance. We're working on both web page tutorials and other means to make sure that people know that they're not likely to get a job placement and not likely to get services if they don't know what they're coming to or what they need to be prepared for. We're working to increase our supports here, but we're also working to increase the supports of . . .

Health Care Funding

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, even as the Premier and the health minister failed to take responsibility for not providing funding to Vegreville's St. Joseph's hospital, news was breaking of another hospital, this one in Claresholm, that has been asking for years to get funding in order to buy this essential equipment. This government's failure to take responsibility is being shifted to those who are not to blame. Alberta's nurses and other front-line workers are feeling the brunt of Albertans' anger because the government continually avoids taking responsibility for this mess. To the Premier: why is the government refusing to take responsibility for the health of Albertans in respect of hospitals and the sterilization procedures in those hospitals? Why are you letting the nurses take the blame?

Mr. Stelmach: Actually, Mr. Speaker, in an earlier question I supported all of the dedicated health professionals in terms of this unwarranted attack on health professionals in this province. When it comes to responsibility, I said that whatever recommendations come forward from the review in Vegreville and from working with

all health professionals in terms of how we can further improve the system, the minister of health will bring those recommendations forward to our caucus. If it requires legislation or whatever is required we will do in order to ensure that similar situations don't happen again in the province.

Mr. Mason: The Premier seems to believe that words in this Assembly are going to comfort the health care professionals who day after day after day have to put up with poor working conditions, antiquated equipment, huge waiting lines, patients that don't get seen in emergency rooms. When will this Premier commit to taking responsibility for improving our health care system and improving the lot not just of the people who need to use the health care system but the people who have to go to work every day in that system?

1:40

Mr. Stelmach: You know, Mr. Speaker, as I was listening to the leader of the third party, I was thinking: how is it that listening to him absolutely sounds like this is the worst place in the world, yet our Capital regional health authority is consistently recognized as the best health authority in the world, right here in the city of Edmonton? You're a representative of Edmonton.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, once again this Premier thinks that words are enough. What Albertans need and what the health care system needs is real action. Can the Premier, then, tell us how often code burgundies occur in Calgary? If our health care system is as fine as he thinks it is, how long do people have to wait in emergency rooms in Edmonton or in his own constituency? Can the Premier stand up and tell us the facts rather than just say that everything is great?

Mr. Stelmach: Again, the hon. member is trying to put words into my mouth. I didn't say that it's all great, great, great. It requires improvement. We are spending the most per capita here in Alberta, yet we know we can improve the system by encouraging all health care providers to work together with government to reduce, of course, the waiting lines, to look at other ways of how we can create a much less, you know, bureaucratic system, to create seamless access to health in this province.

On the other comment I heard from that side in terms of Saskatchewan, the hon. member should actually ask the Premier – it might be your Premier from Saskatchewan because you're on the same side – to come here and ask how many patients actually access service here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Trade, Investment, and Labour Mobility Agreement

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. British Columbia, our partner in the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, or the TILMA, has already tabled legislation to implement this important agreement. My question is to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. Can the minister tell us when Alberta will follow suit and table legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, yesterday a member in this House made a comment. The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview indicated that there was "no consultation." That is simply not true. I quote here from the *Hansard*. He did make reference to the fact that no one was

consulted. I find it interesting that the Association of Registered Nurses, who they're very familiar with, Mary-Anne Robinson, said that this is a model that other governments should follow. So it's very obvious to me, the hundreds that we've consulted with. We will continue to be consulting with them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. The minister just pointed out that yesterday there were claims by members opposite that the TILMA is a secret deal and that Albertans have been left in the dark about it. We know that's not true, but I'd like the minister to explain if and when the government consulted with stakeholders about this agreement.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, that's what we've been doing for the last three years. It just so happens that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is not aware of that. But even more interesting: it's so secretive that all of Canada knows about it. We have Premiers calling our Premier about it. You know what I find interesting? The hon. member made reference to April Fool's Day, and you know what I say to that: if the shoe fits.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is again to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. Companies on the border already doing business in the other provinces say that the TILMA won't affect them, so what's the real benefit of this agreement, and how will it help businesses, say, in my constituency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I want to once again say that both our governments, in British Columbia and in this province, have always agreed that this will be in the Legislature, and that is what is happening. Consequently, as we move forward: 7.7 million Canadians from both our provinces as customers. The NDP may want to have higher prices for their voters. We don't for all of Albertans.

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

Community Initiatives Program

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The community initiatives program, CIP, application guideline states very clearly that if a group cannot raise matching funds up to \$10,000, it will be considered on a nonmatching basis. However, documents tabled in this Assembly show that this government is breaking its own rules. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture: why has this government in three years awarded not one, not 10, not 20, but 43 nonmatching CIP grants over \$10,000, totalling over \$2 million? Why?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, with CIP we try as much as possible to provide equitable funding to all towns and all villages and rural areas, including the urban centres across Alberta. We recognize that at times there are

some organizations out there that are providing a great service that are having some financial difficulties. CIP has been built to respond to our volunteers to provide a one-time, nonmatchable funding of up to \$10,000 if the need is there, and that need comes across through our staff.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier, Minister of Finance, Minister of Health, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development all have secret donors to their leadership campaign. Can this minister assure this House that groups receiving this special treatment are not secret friends of top Tories?

The Speaker: We have a point of order that we'll deal with at the conclusion of the Routine.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I don't think the question is really worthy of a response. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again: given that FOIP documents show that a frat house blew a CIP grant on high-end furniture, how can Albertans be confident that they are receiving value for these specialties? Why are you not accountable?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, all of our applicants have to be registered societies, and all of our applicants have to provide financial statements as to how and when they've spent their money. I need to identify the fact that there are probably hundreds if not thousands of CIP applications going through, so when the hon. member talks about 40 applicants receiving some support, they're an extremely small percentage of the total amount of groups and organizations that we support.

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

Métis Hunting Rights

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta entered into interim harvesting agreements with the Métis Nation of Alberta and the Métis Settlements General Council in 2004. Those agreements were in response to a Supreme Court of Canada decision called Powley, and it gave the Métis a right to harvest food for subsistence. My question is for the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. What is the status of these agreements, and are there negotiations under way to replace them with long-term agreements?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's a very good question. Yes, the ultimate goal of this government, working with our stakeholders and all Albertans, is to in fact reach a long-term agreement. The Alberta government recognizes and respects the Métis right to harvest. The negotiations have been ongoing. We've made some very good progress since May of 2006. Now, I will say that negotiations have been working very closely with the principals of an MLA committee relative to protecting the interests of all Albertans and our important stakeholders. It is ongoing, and I'd like to say that we're making excellent progress and will continue to do

so in the spirit of good faith in working with these important Albertans.

Dr. Brown: To the same minister: can the minister advise the House what timelines have been put in place to ensure that these agreements do come to fruition?

1:50

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, in actual fact I'm meeting with Audrey Poitras, the president, and also Eldon Armstrong from the settlements. I want to say that we have an agreement, a 90-day timeline that has been established to negotiate a long-term agreement. The decision to set a timeline was based on, of course, the Alberta court ruling the hon. member has mentioned regarding the enforceability of the existing interim harvesting agreement. We are very optimistic. The expiry date is July 1. Working together and looking at our positive energy that we have had to date, we can protect the interests of all Albertans.

Dr. Brown: My further supplemental question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. In view of the imminent termination of the interim Métis harvesting agreement can the minister advise what the consequences are on the enforcement of your department's fish and game conservation laws?

Dr. Morton: The consequences are very good indeed, Mr. Speaker. It means the end of the current Métis harvesting agreement and the beginning of a new agreement, an agreement that strikes a better balance with protection of Alberta's fisheries and wildlife. Our caucus has said that the substance of the current agreement is not acceptable. The courts have said that the process used to create the current agreement is unacceptable. It's clear to all that this is a dog that cannot hunt and needs to be replaced, and that's what we'll have in 90 days: a new deal.

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

Foster Care Delivery

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The vast majority of Alberta's foster families are doing an incredible job, but occasionally there are exceptions. The shortage of foster families in this province means that sometimes children are being placed in homes that are not in the child's best interest. To the Minister of Children's Services: what background checks and monitoring practices are in place to make certain that children in foster homes are safe?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that the safety of the children is our number one priority here. I know that last week we had a similar question. I had shared some of the same information. But I can tell you that what we do have is a very vigorous screening process, and that does include home studies. It includes reference checks, criminal record and child intervention checks as well as medical references. We also have face-to-face interviews. I also mentioned last week that we have guidelines to specify how many children are appropriate for the experience of the foster parent.

Mrs. Mather: To the Minister of Children's Services. Social workers are doing the best job they can with the resources they have, but a number of the workers I have spoken to are afraid to go public

about this issue for fear of repercussions. These are conscientious people who want to do the right thing. What protocols does the department have in place to ensure that workers who blow the whistle on unsafe practices will be protected?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I guess what I would say there is that I also want to do the right thing. So if, in fact, this hon. member has some information that I should have or can encourage someone to come forward to me, I would appreciate that.

Mrs. Mather: This problem is largely due to the severe shortage of foster families that we face in Alberta. What is the minister doing now to ensure that Alberta has enough foster families to meet the needs of vulnerable children?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that we're always recruiting foster families, so those efforts never do stop. Just to point out something of interest, though, our ratio of foster children per foster parent is actually lower in this province than most other provinces in Canada. But that's not to take away from the fact that we are always looking for more foster families.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Holy Cross Care Centre

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, the Calgary health region has been moving residents out of the Holy Cross long-term care centre after learning that the building did not meet the fire and safety codes. Last week I heard from the family of a 90-year-old infirm lady who received a 48-hour notice to vacate the place and be transferred to a site that the family referred to as a dungeon. This stress had an adverse reaction about the health and well-being of an infirm lady. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What type of communication strategy was used to communicate the transition plan with the residents in the long-term care centre program at the Holy Cross site?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In early March the Calgary health region advised all residents and families that they would be moved as soon as a new facility could be found for them. The CHR's objective was to move residents as soon as possible to have all of them moved by the end of April. The region began working with families immediately, providing facility options and the opportunity to visit facilities so that they could make the best choice available for their loved ones. Families made decisions about their loved one's moves as soon as they viewed the facilities. Some families felt that they needed to see more options, and that request was respected. The goal was to move as many residents as possible to a facility of choice, and the region paid for moving residents' personal belongings. Some families chose to do this themselves and hired moving companies, but I'm assured by the region that everyone was given ample notice and no one was rushed into making a decision.

Mr. Shariff: My first supplemental is to the same minister. What assurances can the minister give this House that the move is being handled in a caring and compassionate manner?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious situation. I'm satisfied that the Calgary health authority has done everything

it can to do the move of these residents in an appropriate manner, to give them appropriate notice, to give them appropriate choice where possible, and to respect their decisions where possible, but they also wanted to make sure that the residents were moved on a timely basis. The goal was to move them by the end of April. In fact, the region moved the last two residents last Friday. But even prior to that, I want to make sure that Albertans know that the Calgary health region did the right thing by making sure that there was clinical care in place in the facility during that period of time and that there was a fire watch in place so that no one's health or safety was in danger in that process.

Mr. Shariff: My final supplemental is also to the same minister. Is the minister willing to make a commitment to this Assembly that he will review the policy pertaining to transferring Albertans in long-term care and make it humane, caring, and compassionate?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I'd be very happy to say to this House that I will work with the Calgary health authority. They've been keeping our department and this minister informed of the process, but we will be reviewing the process that they undertook to make sure that it was done in an appropriate manner, and we will be reviewing the protocols that we have in place with respect to long-term care residents and how they're treated in this province. There are good standards in place, there's good training coming, good things happening, but we can always benefit from experience and learn from those experiences, and we'll do so in this case.

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

Health System Pressures in Grande Prairie

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In order to support and encourage its growth, Grande Prairie needs an accessible, reliable health system, and the current system is under massive pressure. My questions are to the Premier. The health system in Grande Prairie has been operating at breaking point for months. The region will even be losing its last psychiatrist this month. Aren't the residents of Peace Country health region entitled to the same level of mental health care as residents in Edmonton, Calgary, or southern Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it builds on the priorities that we have established as a government that all Albertans should share in the same quality of life no matter where they live in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Grande Prairie is growing faster than Fort McMurray: 27 per cent since 2001. The increasing rate of growth in Grande Prairie was entirely predictable. My question is to the minister of health. Exactly what action was taken by the ministry over the last two years to prevent a health staffing and infrastructure crisis in Grande Prairie?

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's no secret that Alberta is growing, that all regions of this province are growing. Some regions are growing faster than others. Fort McMurray, of course, had a long-term sustainable growth at high levels, but areas like Grande Prairie are growing rapidly as well. It's a good problem to have, but it comes with its stresses. So we have a workforce strategy

coming to ensure that we can attract and retain the health workforce that we need. We're supporting the health regions with the support that they need, the financial support that they need, to make sure that they can deliver the services they have. I understand that the Peace health district is recruiting new psychiatrists.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the Premier: will the Premier take the advice of the Alberta Liberals and members of his own caucus who support the project and commit to funding a new hospital in Grande Prairie and the redevelopment of the QE II hospital into a community health centre? Your own caucus supports it.

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't have to take their advice.

In fact, we're a lot further ahead than where the Liberal caucus is today with respect to the hospitals. In fact, there has been a significant donation of land given for the hospital by a very good citizen of Grande Prairie. Work is under way to ensure that as the housing is developed around the hospital, there's proper drainage in the entrance to where the hospital will be located, the proper roads will be in place. All that work is currently being done, so we're a little ahead of where they are.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Climate Change

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like most Albertans I was shocked when the Environment minister mentioned a \$5 billion sticker price for the Tory carbon dioxide pipeline scheme. This pipeline is destined to divert massive public resources into a technology that even the Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, admits is unproven. My question is to the Premier. Why would the government even consider throwing away taxpayers' money on a multibillion dollar boondoggle that would even dwarf the Ottawa failed gun registry?

Mr. Stelmach: I think part of the gun registry was a lot of CO₂ or maybe methane.

However, this is an issue where here is the only jurisdiction in Canada to bring forward legislation to not only measure greenhouse gas emissions but also put limits. Those who cannot meet those targets will actually through regulation pay offsets to ensure that we do reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions in this province, about 100 or so major emitters.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, recently federal and provincial Conservatives announced a task force to kick off the carbon dioxide pipeline dream. Days later a task force member, David Keith, said that the pipeline is designed to allay political concerns about growing CO₂ emissions from all the new tar sand projects, and in fact there are more cost-effective technologies available. The government has not done its homework, just like with their intensity target approach, and they're trying to bamboozle the public into believing that something is being done. Why hasn't the Premier or his minister produced evidence that carbon capture is even going to work in the first place?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the facts are that the fund that the member refers to is a \$156 million eco trust fund. The same kind of

dollars went to Ontario, went to Quebec – of course, more than we received in Alberta, but \$156 million to start working together on options on how we can reduce the greenhouse gas emissions, deal with other contaminants in the air like methane, sulphur dioxide. Really, quite frankly, we're way ahead of other provinces in this area.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, carbon capture is very, very expensive. It requires massive amounts of energy and materials, and worst of all it's not even a proven technology to reduce climate change. With this same \$5 billion we could invest in conservation, public transport, sustainable energy and realize actual carbon savings and build a better quality of life for Albertans to boot. Why should we throw away \$5 billion or more on what amounts to CO₂ landfill when so many more common-sense alternatives are available?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I think I made it clear on a number of occasions when addressing this issue in the House that carbon sequestration is really just one of a number of alternatives that are available and that the government is exploring. This task force that the member refers to is going to be looking at the economics of sequestration, and it's going to be providing both the federal and the provincial government with some advice as to whether or not this is, in fact, something that is feasible.

I do need to correct the member when he talks about \$5 billion. Yes, I did bring that number forward, but that's not a number that creates expectation that the government is going to be involved. That's the estimated cost for not only the pipeline but the ability to actually capture the CO₂, much of it borne by . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. MRSA, or the superbug, is not new to Canada or to Alberta's hospitals. MRSA emerged soon after the invention of penicillin. It is usually considered a hospital-acquired organism, but now strains of MRSA are appearing in our community as well. It is clear that MRSA is here in Alberta, and it's here to stay. Since we now know that the bacteria is no longer just in hospitals, my questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the province doing to contain this bug?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is important to point out that MRSA is not localized to Alberta. It is an issue that's being dealt with right across North America and in other jurisdictions as well. We are not unique in this circumstance. With the advent of penicillin and other antibiotics some drugs have become resistant, so we have to take extra steps to make sure that they're not transferred. Those extra steps, Mr. Speaker, are very straightforward and very simple. It's washing hands, it's proper hygiene, so preventative measures. We need to educate Albertans about the necessity to do that. We have a provincial health office which is informing Albertans through their work with the Alberta hand hygiene strategy. There has been a Do Bugs Need Drugs? program, and they're working on . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental is to the

same minister. Should Albertans be concerned about the possible outbreaks of MRSA in their communities or their hospitals?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I can't say that you didn't warn me about the 45 seconds idea.

MRSA outbreaks are a potential issue for all jurisdictions. Albertans should be aware that infections can be prevented if they take effective and proactive measures to protect themselves. Twenty to 40 per cent of healthy Albertans carry a bacteria that can develop into MRSA in our noses without causing any health problems at all. It's spread by person-to-person contact. Washing hands is very important.

The Speaker: Well done.

The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: can you tell us how Alberta's cases compare to the rest of the country or the rest of the world?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the number of MRSA cases is increasing throughout Canada and internationally. A report that was developed by the Public Health Agency of Canada in 2005 indicated that the highest increase of MRSA since 1998 was in central Canada's hospitals. In the United States MRSA is also present in hospitals and the community, and it has been prevalent there for many years. Here in Alberta we saw the first case of community-associated MRSA in 2004 in Calgary. So it's both in the community and in hospitals. It's something that we know about, that we're dealing with. Again, I have to emphasize, even when the opposition makes light of it, that the most important thing we can suggest to both health care workers and to Albertans is that the way to prevent spreading is to wash your hands.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

St. Albert West Regional Road

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The provincial government needs to clarify its position on the west regional road with St. Albert constituents. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: is the minister committed to designating the west regional road as part of highway 2?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker – thank you for that question, by the way, hon. member – I've had a meeting with the mayor of St. Albert, and we've discussed that road. They're going ahead and doing some preliminary work on it. We're also waiting to see, when the report comes back, if it will meet all our specs, and we'll address it at that time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister provide a written funding commitment for the west regional road, please?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the mayor is happy with the situation that's going on there. We're doing an alignment study further to the north. We understand the traffic problems coming through the city of St. Albert, and we'll address it at the time when they finish the studies.

Mr. Flaherty: I was hoping for a yes, Mr. Speaker.

Can the minister give the St. Albert residents and businesses any indication when and how the road will be completed?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I said, it's actually the city of St. Albert building the road. We're going to look at a later date at whether or not we will assume it as a provincial highway.

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

2:10 Affordable Housing

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last few months in Red Deer residents of two large apartment buildings have received notification that their apartments are going to be converted into condominiums. Many of these residents are fixed-income seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income families. They are very concerned about where they will live when they are evicted. Affordable housing is a major concern throughout the province. One area that's having a significant impact on the supply of affordable housing has been the conversion of apartment complexes to condominiums. Can the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing tell us what this government is doing to help Albertans who can't afford to buy condos and want to continue to rent?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to say that we have had unprecedented growth in the province. With the rising cost of construction developers are finding it more profitable to convert rental units into condos. I also want to say that at the same time that those individuals sell the condos, a large percentage of them in return rent them back.

Mrs. Jablonski: Can the same minister advise if this government has plans to deal with this issue?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, on March 19 we did have a report presented to us. We had 1,400 presentations, whether they were in person or through a letter. Those recommendations have been brought forward to us, and we are going to respond to those recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. My final question is for the minister responsible for Service Alberta. What are the requirements of a landlord when they want to convert an apartment to a condominium?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is unfortunate that someone's loss is someone else's gain. In fact, the conversion of an apartment may become an affordable housing unit for someone else.

The fact is that 180 days' notice is required to do a conversion and, unfortunately, only 90 days for a rent increase or for a renovation. I think that with many landlords it would be naive to suggest that they're not using the 90-day opportunity to get people out. I look forward to the minister's housing task force to see if there isn't a way to align the days involved.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Calgary Northeast Ring Road

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the increase in Calgary's population, a ring road is absolutely essential to ensure traffic mobility. Visionary planning is equally necessary to avoid the problems which occur in trying to redesign or retrofit an existing major artery as has been the case with both the 16th Avenue portion of the Trans-Canada highway and Glenmore Trail. Planning involves consultation and collaboration which take into account both future needs and present stakeholders' reality. Provincial consultation on the ring road to date has been clearly substandard. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: what active consultation was undertaken before the northeast portion of the ring road P3 contract was signed?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's been a considerable amount of consultation on the northeast ring road. It started back in '04. We've had extensive consultations. We had a March open house. We had more in '05. We just had another open house the other day. We've worked together with all the different stakeholders. We've talked with the different municipalities. We've dealt with the municipality of Calgary and the municipality of Rocky View. There was lots of consultation.

Mr. Chase: Calgary residents, landowners, and local businesses have raised serious concerns about the redesign of the northeast ring road, which no longer provides access at McKnight or 32nd Avenue. With their access cut off, these people are effectively walled in, costing them millions. Again to the minister: what plan does the government have to compensate these groups, or will you commit to altering the project accordingly?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, after the consultations in '04 and '05 we made some minor adjustments and made some changes, and there will be an emergency access built at Chateau Estates to give EMS some quick access to the community. There'll be an alternate access at Country Hills Boulevard from 84th Street, that will be just east of the new interchange, 100th Street NE will be paved, and a new access will link 84th Street at 32nd Avenue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Considering that negotiations with the Tsuu T'ina First Nation regarding the Weaselhead crossing have been stalled for more than 40 years, what backup plan or alternate route for the ring road to cross the Elbow River does the government have under consideration?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as everyone knows, there are negotiations going on right now with the Tsuu T'ina nation. We have no reason to believe that we won't get a deal with Tsuu T'ina. In fact, the Tsuu T'ina are just getting some of their appraisals completed, and our negotiations will continue. That's a very important link for Alberta highways and for the city of Calgary.

The Speaker: That basically concludes question period. Yesterday there were 96 questions and answers; today there were 90.

Now we have to deal with a point of order. The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Reflections on Members

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During question period today in a series of questions brought forward by the Member for

Edmonton-Ellerslie, the hon. member, I would suggest, offended rules 23(h), (i), (j), and (l) of the Standing Orders in that he made allegations against another member, he imputed false and unavowed motives, he used abusive and insulting language likely to create disorder, and he introduced a matter into debate that offends the practice and procedures of the Assembly. But he did more than that, Mr. Speaker. What he did was tantamount to a breach of privilege. I would refer you to 24 of *Beauchesne*, at page 11, and to 64 of *Beauchesne*, at page 19.

The most important characteristic of a Member of this Legislative Assembly is their personal integrity: their honesty, their integrity. Whether the hon. member did it intentionally or whether he was just reckless makes no difference. In his second question, when he asked the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture about CIP grants, he impugned my integrity as a member of this House. He also impugned the integrity of at least two other members of this House: the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks and the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

The three of us were candidates in a leadership process last fall. The three of us did fundraising.

Mr. Martin: Did you win?

Mr. Hancock: No, I didn't win. Actually, I did win. I get to do a really great job, and I don't have to spend all my time travelling. But that's not the point.

The point is that when the hon. member raised a question about CIP grants, he asked the question about whether or not any of the CIP grants were used to fund election campaigns. In doing so, he insinuated that government money was improperly funnelled through CIP grants to my leadership campaign. There is nothing more important to me than my integrity, nothing. The hon. member may have had a point about CIP grants, but you don't make points about CIP grants by calling into question the integrity of hon. members of this House.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member is an honourable member, has honesty and integrity, and I know that he will, if prompted by you and perhaps on his own volition, get up and apologize to this hon. member and to the two other hon. members of this House that he maligned and to the members of this House.

2:20

The operation of the political process and governance in this province, Mr. Speaker, is something that we ought to hold dear. We engage in partisanship on a daily basis, and that's fine. We engage in banter. We sometimes call into question whether people are telling the whole truth all the time. We engage in a lot of this type of discourse. But we should be very cautious not to go to the point where you call into question the integrity and the honesty of another member. It ought never to be done without proof, without something to suggest it, other than just a drive-by smearing. It ought not to be raised in that fashion.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not asking for a breach of privilege in this matter. I think the hon. member didn't intend what he did. But he did do it, and I would ask him to rise and apologize to myself and to other members of this House who he maligned and to all members of the House because by raising questions in that manner, he drags all of us into disrepute.

The Speaker: Now, I take it that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre as the Opposition House Leader is going to speak to this point of order.

Ms Blakeman: Yes, if I may.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would argue that the allegations made by the Government House Leader are not in order and are not substantiated by the questions that were asked by the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. I understand the points that have been made with such enthusiasm and a great deal of heat by the hon. Government House Leader, but in fact the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie named individuals using their proper form in this House as members of a group that had an identifiable or common association; that is, they were members that are sitting in this House that were also all leadership candidates. They were not singled out, directed for them for . . . [interjections] They were referred to specifically as a group of people for which there is missing information for this House.

There are two facts that we're dealing with here, Mr. Speaker. One is that there were a number of donators to the leadership candidates who sit in this House who were not disclosed. This has been widely reported in the media and has been discussed in this House.

The second piece of that is that 43 grants . . .

The Speaker: Hold on here. Please, stop for a second. Political party activities have no business in this House. This is not a question of competence for a government. Now, the hon. Opposition House Leader may proceed, but we're not getting involved in something that already violates *Beauchesne*. Political contributions have nothing to do with the point of order as far as I can understand. We're dealing with a question. We're dealing with a response. Please stay on topic.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you for the advice, Mr. Speaker. The member was asking a question. He was asking a question directed for a group of people that are sitting in this House. The question was not, as the hon. Government House Leader put it, on the record. It is available in *Hansard*, and perhaps the Speaker already has a copy. I have a copy of what the member was reading from. He was asking if the groups that were receiving the grants – I'm paraphrasing here – were receiving this special treatment as being friends of top Tories. That was referring to the donators, not to the members.

So I understand that some offence was taken here, but it was not what's in the question, to be perfectly honest about it. An insinuation that has been put on the floor by the hon. Government House Leader simply wasn't made. A question was asked, however, and when we look at a number of the other citations that were made, 23(h), (i), and (j), no one was imputing anyone's motives. It wasn't even raised.

The other sections that were quoted as citations by the minister: there were no allegations made, particularly against a member. There was information sought about why these grants were being allocated outside of the criteria that the government had set forward. There were no motives talked about at all in the language of the questions, and I would argue that there was no abusive or insulting language used at all. The questions are pretty straightforward, Mr. Speaker, and there was no abusive language or descriptive language that was used. I'm referring to *Beauchesne* 484. Again, there were just no motives that were being imputed in this question.

So I would argue that although I regret it if the question was misheard, it certainly wasn't delivered that way. It was a pretty matter-of-fact question. I argue that the tests required for the citations that have been brought forward by the Government House Leader have not been met.

The Speaker: Are there others who wish to participate? Nobody else?

Well, you know, hon. members, we were actually making pretty good progress till today. The question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, the first one, which wasn't dealt with, basically says, "If a group cannot raise matching funds up to \$10,000, it will be considered on a nonmatching basis. However, documents tabled in this Assembly show that this government is breaking its own rules." Well, that wasn't even contested. There were no rules that were broken. This chair is very familiar with the rules of the community initiatives program and was an author of some of them in years gone by. It very clearly states that if a group does not have the matching portion, the \$10,000 can be allocated, so that's just a bunch of nonsense, hon. member.

Secondly, we come to the brunt of the whole business. "The . . . Minister of Finance" named, "minister of health" named, "Minister of Sustainable Resource Development" named, not part of a group as far as one can read this, named individually, "all have secret donors to their leadership campaign." Well, the chair has already pointed out that what that has to do with government business, the chair does not understand. *Beauchesne* clearly points out that political party matters are not the subject of the question period. Then the question: "Can this minister assure this House that groups receiving this special treatment" – now, the question is: what special treatment? – "are not secret friends of top Tories?" Boy, if that isn't innuendo, you know, I must have just arrived. I've been here 28 years, and this is blatant innuendo.

This is a point of order. This is not dealing with the integrity of members of this Assembly. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie can do better, and I expect him to do better, and I ask him to withdraw his words, please.

Mr. Agnihotri: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I don't want to apologize.

The Speaker: Well, hon. member, I'm going to point out the consequences of you not abiding by my request, and the consequences are not very nice. So I'm going to do this three times just so there's no misunderstanding, and the third time the hon. member will be named.

Now, this has happened before in the history of this Assembly when people have tried to make a point. Once they're named, they lose salary and everything else. Please remember that. People have done that to showboat in the past. This has happened. I was here once with one hon. member.

So I'm going to ask the hon. member to accept the ruling of the chair and withdraw his comments. That's my first request. I'm going to ask the hon. member to accept the ruling of the chair and withdraw his comments. First time.

Mr. Agnihotri: Mr. Speaker, as you said, the rules were not broken. If you read the guidelines . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, please sit down. I asked a few minutes ago if any other hon. member wanted to participate. I looked around. I waited. The hon. member did not move. The member was given a chance to participate. We've had under our process a submission provided by one, a submission provided by another. A ruling is then given. The chair has given the ruling.

Now, for the second time the chair is going to ask the hon. member to withdraw his comments. The hon. member can either withdraw his comments or not. If he would just put on the record that he doesn't want to, that's fine.

2:30

Mr. Agnihotri: I didn't do anything wrong, Mr. Speaker. I don't want to withdraw my comments.

The Speaker: Fine. The hon. member was given an opportunity to participate; the hon. member chose not to take an opportunity to participate. For the third time: will the hon. member withdraw his comments?

Mr. Agnihotri: Mr. Speaker, no.

The Speaker: That's perfectly fine, hon. member. I will now name you. This is the first time in nine years that I've actually done this. This is not a good day. It's not a good day for the member. I'm sorry, hon. member. Please leave.

Hon. members, the hon. member cannot return to the House until approval is given by the House.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Alberta Treasury Branches Act

14. Dr. Oberg moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur with the continuation of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly appreciate taking time for this very important motion after the ruling you just gave.

Mr. Speaker, section 35 of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act requires that once in every five years a motion be introduced to facilitate a debate on whether the Alberta Treasury Branches Act should be repealed. The purpose of this clause is to assure Albertans that the government will review their investment in the Alberta Treasury Branches to ensure that it continues to serve a valuable purpose. Prior to opening up this motion for debate, I would like to take this opportunity to discuss what the ATB has provided and continues to provide to Albertans.

In 1938 the members of this Assembly made the unprecedented decision to create a financial institution headquartered in Alberta for Albertans. The government invested \$200,000 in the Treasury Branches, and the first Treasury Branch started taking deposits in September of 1938. While the Treasury Branch started as Alberta's piggy bank, its purpose was quickly expanded to promote a voucher system designed to also encourage Albertans to support Alberta-made products and services. Throughout its history Treasury Branches have been supported by Albertans all over the province, and today the Treasury Branches, now ATB Financial, provide full deposit-taking, lending, and wealth management services to all Albertans and throughout the province.

I'm proud to say, Mr. Speaker, that this initial investment of \$200,000 has grown considerably. At December 31, 2006, ATB's equity was \$1.6 billion. More importantly, ATB continues to serve over 600,000 Albertans who have chosen ATB to provide them with some or all of their financial services. It operates in 245 communities throughout Alberta through 154 branches and 134 agencies. It finances roughly \$16.5 billion in loans to Albertans and their businesses.

Albertans have indicated in the past that they would like the government to consult with them before any fundamental changes are made to the status of the Alberta Treasury Branches, and we will continue to honour that request. I have been and remain very confident in ATB's ability to continue to provide excellent service to Albertans, in their ability to ensure that access to core financial services will be available throughout the province, in their ability to

attract and retain highly skilled labour within Alberta, and most importantly, Mr. Speaker, to operate in a financially responsible manner.

Therefore, as per section 35 of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act I move that the Legislative Assembly concur with the continuance of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is debatable. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure this afternoon to rise in debate on Government Motion 14, the continuance of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act.

I was prepared, Mr. Speaker, to run through some of the highlights of the performance of the Alberta Treasury Branch recently, the number of branches and so forth, but the minister has done a fine job of encapsulating some of the good work that they do. I would, however, like to also point out what a great corporate citizen the Alberta Treasury Branches have been. I've just recently been reviewing their annual report, and there's a long list of community organizations and annual events that they contribute to either through sponsorships or donations. In particular, 11 different United Way associations across the province benefited from an annual corporate fundraising campaign last year, as did STARS air ambulance, the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation, and the Alberta Children's hospital. So, clearly, not just in terms of providing financial services but in many other ways as well, Alberta Treasury Branches contribute daily to the lives and success of citizens of Alberta.

Since 1997 the Alberta Treasury Branches have been a wholly owned government corporation. In preparing for today's debate, I went back to May of 2002, the last time that this Assembly debated this particular motion, that is required, as the minister said, under section 35 of the act. I suppose that there are a couple of things that come to mind immediately when you look at that. The first one is whether or not it's sufficient under the act to only have this discussion in this Assembly once every five years. Given the tremendous amount of flux in financial markets and the changes that take place, not just locally, but if you look at, as an example, the number of amalgamations of credit unions that have taken place over the last five years, if you look at the move towards consolidation of banking services nationally and globally, it's perhaps arguable that it would be good to have this debate more than once every five years.

I also note that the minister of the day, Mrs. Nelson – of course, to put this into context, Mr. Speaker, there was an awful lot of debate in 2002 as to whether or not the Treasury Branches should be privatized – indicated in her remarks: "Before we make any decisions with regard to this institution, we must have a thorough review of the financial services industry in Alberta." I don't know whether or not there'll be an opportunity to hear from the minister today, but I'm certainly wondering whether or not that review was ever undertaken by this government and, if it did take place, in fact, whether or not the results were made available to the public, or do they sit on a shelf somewhere, as, unfortunately, we know does happen more often than anybody would likely care to admit with reports that this government receives.

Mr. Speaker, also relevant, since we're discussing the continuation of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act today, is the Auditor General's most recent report, from last year, where he outlined some concerns, none of them major. To the credit of the Alberta Treasury Branches most of the concerns that have been identified by the Auditor General over the last several years have been addressed, but I think this is an appropriate time to point out that there are still some areas of concern for the Auditor General.

One of those that he identified was lending policy compliance. He indicates that, in fact, there has been satisfactory progress toward addressing his concerns although this is a concern that he's repeated in at least the last two if not, I believe, three annual reports. So this is an ongoing concern from the Auditor General. He indicates that improvements in the processes have been made but that improved compliance results will take time, and "ATB must continue to reduce breaches of key internal controls to meet its appropriate targets for acceptable performance."

The Auditor General also identified some concerns around the branch operations compliance. Again, he's indicated that while there has been progress made, there is still room for more improvement and that this would take time. To use his exact words, he says that "although significant improvements have been made in underlying processes, further positive results will take time."

2:40

Lastly, he had a concern around the enterprise risk management strategy and again indicates that he's made a recommendation to the Alberta Treasury Branches that they "implement an enterprise risk management (ERM) strategy to assist it in identifying and managing all significant risks." So the Auditor General has some minor concerns, not major ones but certainly, as I said, relevant to today's discussion, I believe.

Lastly, I think I'd just like to point out some comments that came from a very respected banker and a very well-respected Edmontonian, Mr. Harry Buddle, at his recent retirement. For those of you who aren't aware, Harry was the president and CEO of Servus Credit Union, which was formerly the Edmonton savings and credit union. He has been very public over the years arguing that Alberta Treasury Branches have an unfair competitive advantage against local credit unions. Larry Pollock from the Canadian Western Bank also has made similar comparisons.

The concerns always have been that Alberta Treasury Branches doesn't pay provincial taxes, being a fully owned Crown corporation, and the fact that they don't return their profits to their shareholders. In that case, of course, we're talking about, you know, the government of Alberta and specifically the taxpayers of Alberta. They do not have a need to participate in the Canadian Deposit Insurance Corporation because their risk management is held by the Alberta government. So those are concerns that have been well expressed in the public in the past.

Harry Buddle made a specific point of pointing out to MLAs in the audience on the night of his retirement – in fact, there were three of us in the audience, myself and two members from the Conservative caucus, so I'm hoping that the Finance minister may already have heard these comments from his caucus members – that he had complete confidence that the new Premier and the new Finance minister would be taking steps to address these inequities, as he and others see them. So we'll look forward to seeing some sort of a response from the minister in that regard.

It's interesting now that we're into April and the TILMA agreement is now into effect. It's been in the news a lot the last couple of days, and there has certainly been some discussion in this Legislature about TILMA. Mr. Buddle also commented that although there has been a grace period extended to financial institutions, which I believe goes until 2009, he believes that TILMA will affect the operations of the credit union. He said that they will be allowed to do business outside of Alberta, and other credit unions from other jurisdictions will then be allowed to be doing business inside Alberta. So there were some very profound comments made by Mr. Buddle on his retirement.

I think, as I've mentioned, that with TILMA now being in effect, even though there is a grace period, there may be some relevant

questions there as to the impact that TILMA will have on the operations of the Alberta Treasury Branches. Again, under the current legislation we would not be reviewing the Treasury Branches Act until the year 2012, which is at that point going to be three years following the full implementation of TILMA as it affects the operation of financial institutions. So I think that is a very relevant question for the minister to be considering today as he asks the House to support the continuance of the Treasury Branches Act.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat and look forward to hearing the comments of others. If there is an opportunity for the minister to respond prior to the calling of the vote, I would be interested to hear his comments. Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think all of us that grew up in rural Alberta know the reason why we have the Treasury Branch. It always seemed ironic in free-enterprise Alberta that we had an institution like the Alberta Treasury Branches, but clearly – I think the minister alluded to this – in 1938 there was no choice. Other banks were not serving rural Albertans particularly well during those times, so there was a need, and it's been a very successful institution ever since. Rather, when I looked at the facts, it's not a small institution anymore. I think – the minister can correct me – that they have about \$18.8 billion in assets, and that's very significant in this province to have that sort of money. That means, frankly, that they can at least compete with the banks because they have that sort of total number of assets.

I think the key thing is that always with the Treasury Branches there was some speculation that sometimes they weren't arm's length away from the government. That's been an accusation before. I'm not sure if the legislation, how that particularly works. You know, I know that that's how the Crown corporation legislation, say, in Saskatchewan works. But they have to be seen to have nothing to do within the government. I think the minister would agree with that, although there have been times in the past, whether they were right or wrong, where there was a feeling that that wasn't arm's length, the institution from the government, which the minister could tell us what actually makes that, in fact, the case now and if there have been some changes.

The member for Edmonton-Rutherford, though, I think did raise a fairly important point about TILMA. We're in the unknown here, and that's a point that I've been trying to raise: that we've signed into an agreement that has implications not only for private business. We understand trying to get rid of some of the red tape, but a lot of our public organizations, like I mentioned, AUMA and others, just don't know where it's taking us. This is probably a good example that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has mentioned: how does TILMA affect how ATB is going to be doing its business in the future? I think that's the concern that we have.

Probably, there are a lot of good things about TILMA, but it's a fear of the unknown, not knowing how it is really going to operate. I don't think the government, frankly, has done an adequate job. They're now going to set up consultations after we're into it, Mr. Speaker. I think that it would have been nice to have had these discussions before so that when we're talking about the ATB, for example, we'd have a better idea of just what the implications are. The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is correct that, you know, we won't be looking at this five years with a whole – everything could be changed by then, five years from now, because of TILMA.

So, again, as the member said, I would hope that the minister could at least give us some idea how he at this point sees TILMA and the ATB working. I know he'll say: well, they can compete in

B.C., and they can do all this and that. But I think we need to have a little better idea. Mr. Speaker, the ATB is an important institution in Alberta, and we're certainly quite pleased to participate and support Government Motion 14.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional members to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to speak to this motion. Actually, I found it quite interesting. Typically, when there is a statute or a law in the province of Alberta and it's time to review that statute or that law, there is usually some sort of a committee that is put together to go through it and see where improvements could be made or if changes are necessary or warranted. But, then, this is the first time after I became a member of this esteemed House that something of this nature is placed on the Order Paper, and I have to admit that this is the first time I see it.

A section in the act that established the Alberta Treasury Branches requires the Assembly to concur every five years to its continuation. So I thought this was quite unique and an interesting use of language, that, you know, we're basically saying: do you agree that this should be continued? And I ask myself: what should I base my decision on? How am I going to either concur or decline? Are people required to maybe ask their constituents or ask the people who use the services of ATB to rate the operations or basically evaluate the usefulness and the service levels of ATB?

2:50

ATB is a wonderful institution, Mr. Speaker. It started in the old days to help rural Albertans, to help people in smaller communities and in agricultural communities because other banks and other financial lenders were not willing to take those risks and were not willing to come to the aid of those smaller communities. So the ATB was conceived out of a need for, you know, help and assistance and also out of a vision that these smaller communities might actually simply wither and die and disappear if no assistance was afforded to them.

On the one hand, I have confidence and tremendous pride in the usefulness and the heritage of the Alberta Treasury Branches, but it's also a question of: how can members of this House either agree or disagree to the extension of the operations and the law that governs the Alberta Treasury Branches? So we need more information: if the government is hearing from Albertans whether, in fact, they're happy with the Alberta Treasury Branch network. If they're not, why not? What this government is hearing might actually persuade me to support this motion or might persuade me to decline and not concur.

The other thing which I was discussing very briefly with my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford is that it seems that the Alberta Treasury Branches are experiencing more growth in the urban centres now than they do in the rural centres. It's basically a shift or a change in the philosophy of the Alberta Treasury Branches. More new branches are being established in the bigger centres, which are already quite well served by the ATB and other institutions; they don't need any more. And more growth in terms of transactions and the work done is experienced in the urban centres. I am just concerned that this might signal a shift, where the ATB is going, basically, where the good buck is, and it might signal the start of maybe abandoning where everything started: the rural base. So that's one concern.

The other concern which I had is, basically, if there has been any review in the last five years since this Assembly concurred before,

or 10 years. Let's take two times when the Assembly was presented with the question to evaluate all of the financial services in this province. People are concerned, and quite legitimately, with service fees and, you know, banking charges and things like this. How does the ATB as a state-owned institution compare to other institutions that do the same transactions? Are they better? How about their service? How about their fees that they charge, the dividends that they give, and the interest that they afford, and so on and so forth.

If the hon. Minister of Finance can actually tell the House if, in fact, there was a study or an evaluation or an assessment of financial institutions and financial services in this province, that would be quite useful. If not, is he willing to undertake one in the near future? Again, this industry has grown, and it's an industry that affects everybody. Some people might argue that it's even an essential service. As an essential service, as we do education and health care and long-term care and things like this, everybody uses banking. Everybody needs a bank account. We all carry debit cards. We all have accounts. This is basically something that is not like the old days when it was sporadic and far between.

Just two simple things. I am inclined to support the extension of the ATB for the continuation of the excellent work they do. But, you know, minor things to really shed light on this issue, and I'm approaching it as a layman, as I always do: why do we need to do this every five years, and why can't it just be in legislation, that is reviewed in committee where people can ask more questions and seek more information?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll be brief. It's a privilege to stand up and speak to Government Motion 14 on the continuance of the Alberta Treasury Branches. I'm very much in favour of it. From rural Alberta and just to comment to the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung: it is very much alive and serving Albertans, especially in the small, rural areas where there are no other banks. That's where the roots are, where it started. It's still very much there.

I have to praise the management of the Treasury Branches that they are able to continue those services in rural Alberta and to expand and to give those benefits in the big cities as well. The banking business is very competitive in Alberta. There's lots of banking going on, and there have been lots of amalgamations, whether it's the credit unions or in other areas, but I'm very pleased to stand up in this Assembly and to concur with the Alberta Treasury Branches Act. It does benefit Albertans, especially rural Albertans. I appreciate the fact that it's brought here every five years to be addressed and to have the concurrence of this Assembly, and I very much support it.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance to close the debate.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to all the colleagues for the comments. A couple of the issues that were raised during this debate had to do with TILMA, had to do with the potential on the credit unions.

First of all, TILMA will essentially have no effect on the Alberta Treasury Branches as there is no similar entity in British Columbia. So it will have no effect. When it comes to the credit unions, there is some issue. For example, the credit unions in British Columbia and Saskatchewan potentially have other opportunities to sell insurance, to do several other things that our credit unions do not by statute, so that is something that we are working on. We do not want

other credit unions coming into Alberta and having services that ours are not mandated to give, so that is something that we are considering.

Mr. Speaker, more importantly, I do want to draw the Assembly's attention to exactly what this motion says. What this motion says is that if this motion is defeated, then the Treasury Branches Act will be repealed, and the Treasury Branches will be no more. So this is a very important vote that we have here today, and I would certainly urge all members to concur with this motion, that states: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur with the continuation of the Alberta Treasury Branches Act." If we vote this one down, that act is thereby repealed, and the Alberta Treasury Branch as an entity is finished. So I would certainly ask the Members of the Legislative Assembly to agree with this motion.

[Government Motion 14 carried]

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

Bill 3
Climate Change and Emissions Management
Amendment Act, 2007

[Adjourned debate March 22: Dr. B. Miller]

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to participate in debate on Bill 3, which is the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, as sponsored by the hon. Minister of Environment. The environment, of course, is the buzzword now. Everybody is talking about the environment, and everybody is trying to jump on the environment bandwagon. Why is the environment so important, and why do people worry about the future of the planet and what impact we are having on Earth?

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

People talk about climate change, Mr. Speaker, and they talk about things like global warming and things like that. Climate change is an array of things. It's a group of phenomena or a group of certain things that are happening right now that people are becoming more anxious about and more worried about, all related to the consumption and production of fossil fuels. It's not a new phenomenon. It has been occurring, but it's been intensifying and getting worse.

Now, as a layman myself, I did a little reading into climate change to see where I stand on this issue. I reached the conclusion that it means more than temperatures rising. It means more than global warming. When people talk about temperatures and they say, "You know, this has been one of the worst winters we've experienced; winter doesn't want to leave us, and we've had snow for six months," they're oversimplifying the issue. They say: where's global warming when we need it? The issue is not just rising temperatures, but that is a main thing as well. We're talking about ice caps melting, Mr. Speaker. We're talking about deforestation. We're talking about certain species that are going extinct and habitat changes or destruction.

3:00

Now, the argument that you hear again being oversimplified in certain news media is whether it's man-made or whether it's a natural cycle. What if it's both? Or what if it's only a natural cycle, but man is not helping? Man is contributing to the acceleration of

climate change either by being an active participant in causing climate change or being a passive bystander that is letting climate change happen. Either way, man has a responsibility to protect the planet. You can't really put a price tag on saving the Earth and ensuring that it's available for our children and our grandchildren in as pristine a status as possible. We're talking water, Mr. Speaker. We're talking air quality. We're talking soil, pollution, food production, and food safety. All of these things come to mind.

With this realization I also came to another realization, that anything we do is better than nothing at all. I know that this bill as presented doesn't achieve what myself and many of my colleagues in the Alberta Liberal caucus would hope it would. Again, do we agree with something that is a half measure, or do we not do anything at all? My approach is to offer conditional support, or offer qualified support, for this bill although my preference would be to implement what we in the Alberta Liberal caucus have advocated for quite a long period of time now with respect to absolute caps on emissions instead of intensity targets.

Now, if you allow me, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to walk through some of my arguments. Absolute emission is basically the term used to describe the total volume of emissions for a particular source, whether it's an exhaust system from a vehicle or a stack from an industrial facility. Emission intensity, on the other hand, which seems to be the preference of this government, is the amount of greenhouse gases released that are measured against another factor, such as GDP. It's actually a ratio or a proportion, so GDP or a barrel of oil or whatever other choice you make. A more fuel efficient car, for example, will have lower emission intensity than a less efficient model, but the two cars may still have the same absolute emissions if the more efficient one is driven further.

Let's talk about GDP, for example. One plant is spewing garbage into the atmosphere. If it's allowed to operate at three times the capacity or three times the volume that it used to before, now it's making a ton more money. In fact, its intensity targets are lowered, so basically it's either matching the requirement or even bettering it. Now we can give them an award for having reduced their intensity targets, but the end result is that they have actually caused more pollution. That's one example.

The other thing is the current rate of economic growth in Alberta. If it continues at this pace, then we are likely going to see a lot more pollution happening. We have to remember that the province's emissions actually rose by a large percentage. Analysts are saying that between 1990 and the year 2020 this could really amount to about a 72 per cent increase. So we can implement intensity targets all we want, but the end result is more garbage and more pollution.

It seems like this province is actually in a race against time to exploit every drop of oil and every tonne of bitumen that we can extract. Yes, it causes prosperity and, yes, it creates a lot of opportunities for Albertans, but we also have to be aware of the consequences.

Now, I am under the impression that my hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View might be contemplating moving some amendments to this piece of legislation, and I keenly await his ideas and thoughts on this subject.

The other thing, too, is that there's also a consumer protection angle. In the second week of this Assembly reconvening for the Third Session, Mr. Speaker, I introduced Bill 202, which was calling for strengthening consumer protection in this province. It was unfortunately defeated in a division.

I'm also concerned about, you know, asking industry to pay for having not met their intensity targets. They then are likely going to off-load that increased cost in their operations onto the consumer. If there is any way we can ascertain that no unfair price increases are

passed on to the consumer, that would be something I'm definitely going to be extremely interested in. There is no incentive for companies to do anything because if it costs them \$15 extra per tonne of waste, they're just going to quite easily pass the \$15 on to the consumers. The environment is no further ahead, and the consumers are no further ahead. The company is not really forced to do anything versus an actual hard cap that comes with penalties for failure to comply.

Alberta is also the reason behind 40 per cent or so of the total industrial emissions in this nation, the highest in Canada, Mr. Speaker, higher than any of the other provinces and territories. Being the worst culprit, if you will, I think it's the only responsible thing to do to be vanguards in environmental protection in this country. If we're causing the most damage, we should be taking the lead in trying to alleviate what we can and mitigate some of those negative effects. It just defies common sense that you're going to exploit and produce and create waste and create pollution, but then you're not really worried about the future. I think that if we are accused of being the worst polluters, we should also be commended, hopefully in five or six or 10 years, for being vanguards of environmental protection and being leaders in environmental reclamation and cleaning up, basically. We need to clean up what we have destroyed.

Another argument, Mr. Speaker: are we here on a pilgrimage, basically just moving through, or are we custodians? I think we are custodians of our planet. We are allowed to use some of it, but we are also expected to save most of it. The Alberta Liberal caucus is actually advocating absolute emissions versus intensity targets, as I mentioned, and our plan, as sponsored by my friend from Calgary-Mountain View, calls for the introduction . . .

Mr. Eggen: You have friends?

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. He is actually my friend, and I'm proud to be his friend, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. He has what it takes, and he understands the implications of not acting on environmental issues now. He doesn't want to wait.

In his plan he's talking about hard caps by the year 2012, which are absolutely necessary to achieve any real reductions and to have a positive and lasting impact on climate change in the near future. That's one thing, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing is leaving things in regulations. Again, this is a trend with this government, that everything is not left where it should be, in the statute itself or the law itself or the act itself. It's moved into regulations. One of the regulations in this is the specified gas emitters regulation, which has set out some new emission intensity targets and three options to achieve them for the largest industrial emitters, for the worst polluters, basically.

3:10

Regulations change. Ministers change and department heads change and deputy ministers change. So those regulations, the list of 100 or the club of 100, might be changed later to the club of 50 or the club of 25 or the club of 10. What assurances can we get that instead of just focusing on 100 now because it's sexy and attractive and people are expecting it, five years from now with certain pressure and certain lobbying this club might be shrunk to only 10? I think it should grow, and I think it should not be limited to just the worst emitters. Everybody from intermediate and up should be included in here because they all have an equal responsibility to clean up their acts.

Working with industry. I think it's necessary that industry is on board, but industry has also indicated that they are willing and ready.

The government has to offer the incentives and the carrots and then potentially also show the stick and wave it for those industries to start to comply. Industries by far are good corporate citizens within the framework of the laws and the statutes of the jurisdiction they work in, so I think we should create the environment for them to be exemplary. We should really create the environment for them to take the lead and show other people and show other jurisdictions and show the world what can be done in Alberta and how Alberta is unique.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will retake my seat. I look forward to participating at the latter stages of debate. Thank you for your indulgence.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) any comments or questions?

There being none, the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in support of Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. Bill 3 builds on Alberta's leadership position on the management of greenhouse gases. I think we should be very proud that in 2002 Alberta was the first province to introduce climate change legislation. We were also first among the provinces to initiate the reporting of greenhouse gas emissions by large industrial emitters.

This act balances the growth of Alberta's economy with environmental sustainability by requiring industry through regulation to reduce their emissions by 12 per cent starting July 1 of this year. To achieve this target, industry can make improvements to their operations or buy an Alberta-based offset to apply against their total emissions or contribute to a new fund that will invest in technologies to reduce greenhouse gases in Alberta. These provisions were laid out in the specified gas emitters regulation. This is the right direction for an energy producing province, I believe. Alberta's overall emissions are obviously higher as a result of its energy production.

To push for an absolute cap or cut on emissions at this time would cause grave economic consequences. Cutting emissions intensity allows industry the capacity to invest in the development of technological solutions to climate change, and that is where the real solutions to the control of greenhouse gas emissions lie. The development of such technology will have the impact of getting long-term reductions in greenhouse gases as opposed to transferring wealth out of Alberta to purchase carbon credits in the world market.

Now, developing technology at home creates jobs in Alberta and uses Alberta expertise from universities and research facilities to its fullest potential. Alberta is in a very good position to move forward with new research and innovation. Innovation is a strong pillar in the government's 20-year plan, and we have research agencies such as ASRA, the Alberta Science and Research Authority, various research institutes, the Alberta Research Council, Alberta Ingenuity, and strong research programs at our universities. We are strategically organized to move ahead, and I will push for government and industry to invest more in developing new and better technology to control greenhouse gas emissions and, therefore, global warming. Without this emphasis, intensity reductions alone will not be enough to address greenhouse gas emissions and control of temperature.

Finding real solutions to greenhouse gas emissions was one of the goals of the COP 12. That is the committee of parties 12 environmental conference, that took place in Nairobi, Kenya, this past November. I had the opportunity to attend the conference on behalf of the government of Alberta. The conference was an excellent opportunity for Alberta's position on climate change to be promoted

on the world stage. That position was one of research and new technology to reduce greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere and capture and storage of carbon dioxide before it is released into the atmosphere.

During the conference I learned about the progress of other countries in handling climate change. In particular, Japan encouraged all countries to think about adding new tools to the Kyoto climate change tool box. Using new approaches allows the world to think beyond the Kyoto protocol of close to 10 years ago. One example is the Asia-Pacific partnership on clean development and climate change involving China, India, Australia, Japan, South Korea, and the United States. This agreement focuses on working with the private sector to develop ways of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions without destroying or severely impacting the economy. It also encourages investment in the development of clean energy technology. In that regard the direction of the Asia-Pacific partnership is similar to Alberta's approach to managing climate change as outlined in Bill 3.

The COP conference also showed that Alberta has an opportunity to develop technologies, such as carbon capture, that can be sold to other countries. I think that is why Bill 3 along with a specified gas emitters regulation will place Alberta at a real advantage. If we can develop climate change solutions in Alberta, it allows us to be in a leadership position here and abroad. It's rather interesting that the recent California climate change plan builds on the principle of technology export to other countries.

I was very pleased to attend the COP conference and, frankly, believe that Alberta's position on advancing technology options to mitigate or control the real impacts of climate change was well received and of interest to many delegates.

In closing, I believe that Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, and the specified gas emitters regulation build on Alberta's proud tradition of leadership on climate change. By embracing intensity reductions and increasing our investment in research and innovation relative to technology, we have the best chance of maintaining a strong economy and using the resources from it to attain in time absolute reductions.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I just have been hearing so often this same refrain of Alberta being the first province, la-di-da, to put in some legislation in regard to carbon dioxide emissions. You know, if you're putting together something that, in fact, is deliberately . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, are you rising under Standing Order 29(2)(a) for comments or questions?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. I was referring to the comments made.

The Acting Speaker: You were wanting to ask a question of the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. That's right.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. Proceed.

Mr. Eggen: If you're making intensity targets as the guide, I would like to ask the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, respectfully, if he,

in fact, expects that to be converted into absolute reductions and how? You know, my understanding is that as the intensity targets increase, the absolute emissions increase as well, so it becomes a difficult if not impossible thing to put those two together, and I would suggest that this, in fact, is deliberately deceptive.

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you. I think that if the hon. member was listening, and I assume that he was, my point was that the end result should be absolute reductions. I believe that to be the case, but to get there, I believe that we must embrace intensity reductions along with putting a lot of resources into technology research and new technologies in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. If we don't do that, we have no resources to put into research and technology.

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

3:20

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, respectfully, it's as though you want to go on a diet by eating more somehow. You know, you create the situation where you want the public to believe that they are getting reductions, but in fact you're getting intensity increase. You're getting absolute increase. So I would just expect and ask if we could have clarity from now on that this is only intensity reductions; it's not absolute reductions. I share the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose's desire to have absolute reductions, but then why don't we just do it?

Mr. Johnson: I believe that I've made my point. Once again, I believe that absolute reductions is the end result, but perhaps we would travel down different roads to get there.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, of course we're all interested in having an absolute reduction, but I wonder if the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose would agree that there should be some liability with the end user. What's currently happening is that the province of Alberta got the liability for the exploration, the drilling, all of the manufacturing of the gasoline and diesel fuel, yet it's exported to another location, and then a lot more emissions are produced. Wouldn't it be fairer if, in fact, the end user was taking a lot of the liability for the emissions, not just us in Alberta as we produce the product?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, that is a very good question. Frankly, I don't know why there hasn't been more attention drawn to what the member has just stated. I believe that there should be much more attention paid to the consumer in the end, and I don't think it's fair that Alberta should be penalized just because we are the producer. So I think you raise a very, very good point. I hope that there'll be more discussion around that very point as we move on to committee and third reading.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, did you want to rise on questions and comments?

Mr. Cao: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I just want to ask the member or maybe get some idea – let's say that I have a plant in production and

my emission is at this level, and now there is an intensity reduction because my production capacity is already at 100 per cent. Then when the law asks me to reduce intensity, that becomes absolute reduction for my plant. Is that perspective correct? Can you comment on that?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, you have about 30 seconds.

Mr. Johnson: Well, yes. I guess that would be the case if you were at the maximum, but I imagine that there would be opportunity to improve your plant or change your plant so that there would actually be ways of producing more. If that were the case, then I think that the intensity reductions would apply.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make a few comments about the rate of development. It seems to me that this is what the crux of this debate is about. I mean, clearly, when we're talking about intensity, I think that we would all agree, even the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, that for the time being if we're just controlling intensity, it's clear that the amount of CO₂ going out is going to be greater. I don't think there's any argument about that. He may think that down the way all this technology will come forward. It might not. We're talking about a long ways down, even if we do get the technology.

The one thing that we do control is the rate of development, and that's what's causing so many problems in the province today: the overheated economy and, as a result of the overheated economy, more oil and gas, more tar sands to get in the American market as quickly as we can. Obviously it has implications for the environment, but it also has implications for all of the other things that we've been talking about in the Legislature in the last few days while we've been here; i.e., housing, health care, you name it. It's all part of this overheated economy.

The only thing that we can control, that we have authority here to do – I believe and many others do that we need to slow down this pace of development for the time being. We've called in the short term for a moratorium on development so we can catch up with our social and physical infrastructure. If we control the pace of development, it certainly will have some impact on how much CO₂ we're putting out. I think the bill says about a 50 per cent intensity reduction based on 1991 emission levels. At a 4 per cent growth rate, say, the total emissions will rise by 66 to 83 per cent above 1990 levels in the next little while. I mean, that's the reality of what we're facing.

I don't think, you know, that overnight we can stop it all, but certainly we can take a look – and the Minister of Energy is over there – at the new projects coming on, not the ones that are there. We move ahead. People are beginning to ask: well, who is benefiting by this? We're hurting the environment. Our rents are going up. Health care is in trouble. We can't keep up with the social and physical infrastructure. So what's it all about? Clearly, the Americans want us to do this, and I expect the federal government does. But that's what we can control right now: that pace of development. I think that's the major thing that we should be looking at.

In terms of the intensity reduction – and I don't know if the minister is here – this bill may be redundant, depending on what happens federally, because we're aware that the parliamentary committee, much to the chagrin of the federal Conservatives, has passed a bill. We don't know what's going to happen with that,

whether it might trigger an election or not, or whatever, but if that bill came forward and was passed in the House of Commons, our bill would probably be redundant or superseded because of what they've done. So that'll be an interesting development as we go along in terms of debate on this particular bill that we're facing. If that bill is passed ahead of this one, this probably doesn't mean much, then, because federally they would be controlling it.

Again I would say, regardless of that, just to conclude, that I think that it's the pace of development that is a concern. It's a concern with the environment, as I said, with our social and physical infrastructure, making it very difficult for ordinary Albertans right now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to ask questions of the hon. member about where he thinks the government's role is in providing incentives and appropriate disincentives that would help move us more quickly along the line to absolute reduction in emissions.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a combination, I think, a combination of things. I'm talking, first of all, about the pace of development. We have to recognize that we have to do something there. Then if we're going to take the technology rather than some of the pipe dreams about pipelines and CO₂, I think alternate energy. We should be giving tax incentives. We've called for Alberta to maintain its role, if you like, as the energy capital but to start to move towards alternate energy as quickly as we can. So I think there are a lot of things that we can do, but as long as we're keeping this pace of development, even if we're giving the money for alternate energy, we'll still be falling behind with CO₂ emissions. So it's a combination of both things, I think, hon. member.

The Acting Speaker: Any others?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to join the debate on Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. I want to provide, first of all, some historic work that Alberta has done to show that Alberta is a leader across this country in trying to address climate change and greenhouse gas emissions. This bill in itself is another first for Alberta and for Canada, and I don't know if everybody really realizes that. Certainly, I've heard some comments that the federal government may be coming out with their own emissions and greenhouse gas legislation or targets or whatever might be coming from them. But, you know, Alberta has always been a bit of a leader, knowing full well that a lot of the emissions and our economy are based on the oil and gas industry and what we provide all across North America.

3:30

In view of this, 10 years ago, in February of 1998 Premier Klein, a former Premier of this province, named Canada's first cabinet committee on climate change, which consulted with stakeholders from the academic, environmental, industrial, and business commu-

nities about Alberta's response to global warming. In October of 1998 Alberta announced its strategy for action on climate change, a plan that was well received throughout Canada. Then in 2003 the Climate Change and Emissions Management Act passed by this government made Alberta the first province in Canada to set out a legislated framework to implement our climate change action plan. We were the first province to require large industrial emitters, who produced about 70 per cent of our industrial greenhouse gas emissions, to report those emissions. The bill that we are discussing today would not have been possible if we had not taken the initiative and led the country on this issue.

I commend the minister for his approach with this bill. It balances what is technologically and economically achievable for our large industry emitters with the need to protect our environment. This bill will allow all Albertans to enjoy both a clean, healthy, natural environment and the benefits of continued economic prosperity. Because of this government's planning and progressive legislation like Bill 3, I think we can all at least say a very good start is being made in Alberta's future.

I have another reason to be confident of that as well, and that is the government's record of environmental stewardship. As co-chair of Alberta's Climate Change Central I have seen first-hand how the government's leadership on this issue has already made a difference in our environment. I'd like to just point out a few of those programs that have been put in place by Climate Change Central that show that we have been leaders for quite a while.

Climate Change Central, or C3, is a uniquely Alberta way of responding to global climate change and its impacts. It's a public/private partnership of government, businesses, and other stakeholders who are interested in pursuing greenhouse gas reduction initiatives, that has been operating since 1999. C3 has financed feasibility studies for innovative projects like using waste heat from a new power plant to heat buildings in Grande Prairie. Projects like this one cut fuel consumption and ultimately greenhouse gas emissions.

In 2001 Climate Change Central hosted western Canada's first greenhouse gas emissions trading simulation, allowing industry, government, and environmental groups to experience a simulated greenhouse gas trading environment. Exercises like this have helped these groups prepare for initiatives like this bill that we are discussing today.

Since 2003 the ME First, a municipal energy efficiency program led by Climate Change Central, has invested \$30 million in interest-free loans to 60 municipalities. Projects like retrofitting traffic signs and recreation centres and upgrading heaters and furnaces in municipal facilities to energy efficient models have saved municipalities \$2.8 million annually but, more significantly, have reduced those municipal environmental footprints.

In a similar vein, Climate Change Central's Alberta Plus initiative gave over \$600,000 in grants to Alberta municipalities for pilot projects exemplifying energy efficient design and construction. From 2004 to 2014 these projects will pay for themselves five times over, saving municipalities more than \$3 million in energy costs and cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 24,000 tonnes.

In the past four years Climate Change Central has also partnered with the government of Canada to offer the pilot emission removals, reductions, and learnings initiative. This innovative program uses a competitive auction process to allow potential bidders to propose, for instance, reducing their greenhouse gas emissions by 100,000 tonnes between 2003 and 2007 at the price of a dollar per tonne. If this bid is successful, PERRL will pay the seller \$100,000 over the five-year period.

For a modest total investment of \$15 million, this program has explored ways to reward climate change action in sectors that may

not have a financial or regulatory reason to reduce their emissions. It has helped us test four strategies that Bill 3 will encourage on a much wider scale, including capturing and combusting gases from landfills, capturing CO₂ and storing it in geological formations and biological sinks, and developing renewable energy sources.

Climate Change Central has allowed Alberta to lead the way on climate change with innovative local projects as well, including a student/teacher initiative at Cochrane high school that has installed solar panels and a wind turbine at the school to provide electricity. The Mow Down Pollution event, that was sponsored in part by Climate Change Central, helped get polluting lawn mowers off our grass. This sounds like a small measure, Mr. Speaker, but in fact they have told me that a typical two-stroke, 3.5 horsepower gas mower produces as much pollution in one hour as is produced by a new car being driven 550 kilometres. Events like these have helped show Albertans how simple changes can make a significant contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality.

At Climate Change Central we've also carried out several education campaigns to raise Albertans' awareness of the emissions their vehicles produce. Vehicle emissions are one of the largest sources of greenhouse gases and smog. They have an effect not just on our planet but also on our health because at high levels they can cause asthma attacks, bronchitis, chest pain, and decreasing lung function.

In our homes Climate Change Central has offered rebates to people who upgrade to more efficient appliances. We have offered rebates of up to \$300 to homeowners who replace their furnaces with Energy Star qualified models, which are about 30 per cent more efficient and can save consumers about \$400 a year. We've also offered rebates of \$50 to upgrade washing machines to Energy Star qualified models. For an average family of four, these models will reduce the utility bill by about \$150 and water consumption by 33,000 litres and greenhouse gas emissions by up to one tonne.

Mr. Speaker, I think the record of Climate Change Central demonstrates how this government is committed to helping Albertans, our municipalities, and industries address greenhouse gas emissions. We clearly recognized years ago that greenhouse gas emissions were a problem, and because of this recognition, today we are well positioned to address it with initiatives like Bill 3.

Climate Change Central is also proof that public/private partnerships work. Our partners in industry, business, municipal governments, and the federal government have contributed funding and expertise that have made our projects a success. Individual Albertans have also been key partners, willing to try innovative solutions to the problem of greenhouse gas emissions.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, while Climate Change Central has done a lot to help address emissions across Alberta, this government is also making a number of efforts to ensure that its operations are energy efficient and sustainable. For the past two years 90 per cent of the electricity used in government facilities has come from green power sources, including local sources like wind power from Pincher Creek and biomass from Grande Prairie. New government buildings are constructed to the leadership in energy and environmental design, known as LEED, silver standard. When you go look at a LEED building, you know and understand that the construction has been done under certain standards. As a matter of fact, the MLAs from Lethbridge, both east and west, and myself were in the latest LEED building at the University of Lethbridge, where their aquatic centre and their physical education centre is now a LEED building. This is a widely recognized and highly regarded standard for sustainable

buildings. Other government-owned facilities have been retrofitted under the energy retrofit program, saving Albertans \$5.8 million and reducing our annual greenhouse emissions by 58,000 tonnes.

We're also finding a number of initiatives that have the potential to offer us huge payoffs both in money saved and in greenhouse gases not emitted. Last year Alberta Agriculture dedicated \$239 million in funding to help develop bioenergy in Alberta. Alberta Energy is now offering up to \$200 million in royalty adjustments to find innovation in energy technology. Alberta Environment and our pioneering Alberta Energy Research Institute are leading a \$25 million project to evaluate the long-term reliability of storing carbon dioxide in geological formations.

Mr. Speaker, addressing climate change requires strategies for emissions reductions, adaptation, energy efficiency, and conservation. This government and C3 are leading the country in all of these areas. I've seen the great work that they've done with Climate Change Central, and I'm so pleased to support Bill 3 today in second reading. This will help produce the next step in our climate change strategy.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) any comments or questions?

There being none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak for a few moments on Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. Mr. Speaker, I had a rather eye-opening conversation with one of my sons the other day on the topic of climate change. He asked me if I was at all concerned about all this climate change stuff. I was a little surprised and almost a little hurt by his question. Now, to my way of thinking, what he was saying was that by the time the full effects of climate change are felt, I'll just be a grumpy old man in a seniors' centre, running out the clock while the whole world crumbles around me.

An Hon. Member: If you're lucky.

Mr. Tougas: If I'm lucky. Thank you. To live in a seniors' centre?

An Hon. Member: To get to run out the clock.

Mr. Tougas: To get to run out the clock. Okay.

So I told him that despite my obviously advanced age – and when you're 22, everybody over 30 looks very old – climate change is a great concern to me. It's his primary concern, not health care, not the economy, not crime but climate change, as it is with a lot of people his age. He knows, as I know, that everything we do today – everything – will have an impact on the Earth. I'd like to leave this Earth in robust good health. After years of heated argument over whether or not climate change is caused by human activity, even the most stubborn flat-earth types now admit that climate change is happening and that human activity is most certainly the cause.

Now, a landmark United Nations report released a couple of months ago reported that it is very likely that global warming can be directly blamed on the increase in greenhouse gas concentrations and that it is extremely likely that climate change over the past 50 years can't be blamed on anything else. That's very compelling evidence, and except for a handful of far right wing media types who see some sort of shadowy conspiracy to rob us of our SUVs, climate change has become the issue of the 20th century. That was for you, Dave.

Mr. Taylor: No. That was for the other Dave.

Mr. Tougas: Yes. Somebody named Dave will appreciate that.

With that in mind, I must compliment the government on actually addressing this vital issue. Despite the government's official statements I have no doubt that the ruling party harbours a number of climate change doubters, so I'm glad that they have actually tackled this issue.

Am I wrong on that?

Mr. MacDonald: Which party?

Mr. Tougas: The ruling party.

Now that we've all agreed that climate change must be addressed, the question becomes: how do we best approach this crisis? Clearly, real reductions are the route to go, as my friend and colleague from Edmonton-McClung has already so capably pointed out.

Albertans are blessed to live on one of the wealthiest pieces of real estate in the world. Our wealth comes from the earth, whether it is farmed for food or drained of its natural resources. Our economy is based on hydrocarbons, which when used as fuel, release carbon dioxide, which is the leading contributor to climate change. Clearly, there is a lot at stake for Alberta, more so than for any other province in Canada.

Now, does Bill 3 address this problem? Well, no single piece of legislation will address the single most important issue of our time, but clearly we have to start somewhere. The people of Alberta want to see strong leadership on this issue, because it has truly exceeded health care in public concern right across the country, but I don't think Bill 3 is going to calm the fears of Albertans.

I do appreciate hearing from the Member for Livingstone-Macleod his rundown on Climate Change Central and what's been going on there. That was quite informative, although how much the public knows about Climate Change Central is an interesting point. A lot of what he was saying was news to me, and I've been paying attention to this. So perhaps the government should start putting more effort into letting people know what is available for the Marthas and Henrys of Alberta to get out there and help on the climate change problem.

Now, as I said earlier, I'm happy that the government has chosen to address this issue. Now that the truth about global warming has been accepted, which is in itself a giant step forward for this government, it is up to all members of this Legislature and the public to help put in place the best possible plan to address this problem. At heart, however, is our view that genuine reductions are the only correct way to go. Clearly, we cannot hold steady. We have to see real reductions in greenhouse gases, not a lot of paper shuffling that makes everyone feel good, as if they're doing something worthwhile.

As we've heard from previous speakers, we need to become aggressive on this issue. The climate change issue did not arrive fully formed overnight. Concerns have been raised about climate change for many, many years, and unfortunately those years are now lost to us. It's time to get aggressive on climate change, not passive. In the United States, for instance, the Democrats in Congress are bringing forward a bill calling for an 80 per cent cut in emissions by 2050. Now, the United States, which is the largest economy in the world, has the courage to consider real targets with real goals. We're talking reductions, not an emissions intensity approach, which is the emphasis of this bill.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Bill 3 calls for emissions intensity with a staged-in approach and the ability of companies to buy offsets from other industries and so

on. Well, frankly, I'm a little suspicious of offsets, Mr. Speaker. It's a little like going to confession. You can commit your sins, but as long as you confess them, the slate is wiped clean. Now, the bottom line on Bill 3 is that there is nothing here that is going to lead to real reductions in emissions.

I think that overall the government is actually playing catch-up with the public and industry. Industry is ready to go with aggressive strategies to reduce greenhouse gases. The public is most certainly on board. The only player in this scenario who is not fully on board is the government. Alberta has to be the nation's leader in greenhouse gas reduction because Alberta, among all the provinces, is producing the most greenhouse gas emissions. So surely it's here in Alberta that we have to make the most creative and aggressive position to deal with greenhouse gases.

3:50

Now I'll admit, Mr. Speaker, that I'm not a scientist, and a lot of this is very difficult to grasp, but I have to ask the one question that we have to ask ourselves: is this the best we can do? Is this bill the absolute best that can be offered up to this House?

Now, during the coming weeks there will be a lot of debate about this bill, and it will no doubt be intense and genuine and, hopefully, civil. But, Mr. Speaker, simply put, this is probably the most important bill that we'll see in our time in the Legislature, and we have to get it right.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any questions or comments. The hon. member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate very much the remarks of my colleague and especially his comments about his son and the future. I wonder if his son had any suggestions. What would he consider to be responsible action from this generation to protect the environment and his future?

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member wish to respond?

Mr. Tougas: If I could come up with a good answer, I would, yes. I haven't talked to him at any great length about his plans for it or what he sees as the possible solutions to climate change. I'm sure, though, that like a lot of young people he's looking at just about everything he does in daily life, as are a lot of people in this building right now. We start thinking about whether we should be driving the car to the store or whether we can walk, whether we can ride a bike, whether we can do a lot of the little things and start cutting back.

It's important, as I mentioned earlier, that we start to engage the public in this debate. Industry, of course, is a major contributor, but everyone in this building today and everyone in this city makes a contribution to global warming. I think we really have to push further, not so much just the industry angle and the legislation, but we have to get the public more involved in this issue. I hope that the government will push that a little bit further. As we've heard earlier, there are some very good programs in place. We just have to let people know that they are actually happening.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill on 29(2)(a).

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark's comments, I wonder whether he's aware, first of all, that Ontario, in fact, is by a considerable

margin the largest emitter of carbon dioxide in the country, not Alberta as he had proposed.

Secondly, he spoke about the question of absolute reductions. I'm wondering what sort of a decrease in our living standards here in Alberta he would be prepared to tolerate if we were to shut down the oil sands or to cap them off and stop producing greenhouse gases. What sort of decline in living standards would be acceptable in order to achieve a zero increase in emissions?

Mr. Tougas: Well, first of all, if I got the information wrong regarding Alberta's emission rates or something, I apologize. [interjections] Yeah. If I'm wrong, I'll apologize.

I don't think that we have to look at it as shutting down all industry in Alberta in order to bring about real change. I mean, industry is clearly prepared to do a lot of things. They're very knowledgeable, and they have ideas that they can do things too. I don't think we have to shut down the province. For every action there's another reaction, so to speak, and if we can make some positive changes here slowly – I'm not saying we have to do this overnight. We do not have to shut down industry in this province to bring about real change in real climate change problems.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Others wishing to participate in the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've not yet had the chance to speak on Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, in second reading. I know that many of my colleagues on all sides of the House have already spoken to it, and they have covered off a number of important points. I don't intend to go on at great length about this today. I think we will have ample opportunity to do that later on in committee. I understand that there will be some amendments coming forward, and I'm sure that they will be subjected to full and rigorous debate.

There is, of course, a great deal in this bill that we could debate. But I do need to speak to this concept of intensity targets as opposed to absolute emissions. Emissions intensities need to be spoken about regardless of who puts the most greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, whether it's Alberta, whether it's Ontario, whether it's the oil sands, whether it's coal-fired generating plants, whether it's consumers spending too much time in their automobiles, whether it's the cows in the field, although that theory has certainly been somewhat discredited, I think. Regardless, it's a shared responsibility, and we share a responsibility as legislators, as citizens, as consumers, as Albertans, as Canadians to do something real about reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Emission intensities really aren't real. Emission intensity targets are really illusory. Emission intensity is the amount of greenhouse gases released measured against some other factor. It could be GDP. It could be a barrel of oil. It could probably be anything you wanted to pick, actually, although you'd have to have some general consensus, I guess, from economists, which in itself, we're told, is an impossibility to get.

There's a good analogy to be drawn here, I think, between emission intensity targets versus absolute emissions and the automobile, which is the source of a significant amount of greenhouse gases across this country, across this continent. The automobile, for all its problems, all its sins, is a considerably cleaner, more efficient, less polluting critter than it was 30 years ago. We've made great strides in the automobile industry in energy efficiency, emissions of all sorts out of the tailpipe, that sort of thing, so that if

you were to take the car that you're driving today, Mr. Speaker, and compare it to the car that you drove in 1977 or, certainly, 1967, there would be no comparison. The car you're driving today is much cleaner, has much less negative effect on the environment. Even the SUV you drive today, I would submit, has less of an impact on the environment than a big gas-guzzling V8 Ford LTD or Chrysler Newport or something like that from a generation ago.

The problem is not, though, that that individual vehicle that you drive today is so much cleaner and so much more efficient than the vehicle you drove a generation ago or the vehicle your father drove. The problem is that there are so many more vehicles on the road today than there were in 1977 or 1967. Especially here in Alberta, there are so many more vehicles on the road today than there were in 1997 or 2002. Every day more people and more vehicles move into this province. So many of us now own two or three vehicles or, in the case of some, perhaps many, perhaps whole fleets, as opposed to a generation ago.

A generation ago cities like Edmonton and Calgary took up a lot less real estate, a lot less space. Their ecological footprints, the actual footprints that they make on the land, were much smaller, so it wasn't as difficult to get around. In many cases you could actually get around on public transit if you lived close enough to the core. You still can. The problem is that so many of our citizens in both Edmonton and Calgary live so far from the core, and they come into downtown every day to go to work and turn around every evening and go home.

4:00

You all saw, I'm sure, on the front page of the *Edmonton Journal* or the *Calgary Herald*, or perhaps both if you looked at both papers the day after the latest national census figures came out, the coloured maps that both papers did to show how populations have grown in metro Edmonton and Calgary since the last census. You would have noticed that in the inner city, in the core communities, populations have increased substantially in the last five years. In the extreme fringe communities, the absolute suburbs – we joke down in Calgary: the places where you need Montana or B.C. plates, they're so far from the core – populations have gone through the roof. Of course, you're measuring a brand new community of 10,000 people against a field that was there a year or so ago. Interestingly, in between the two there's this ring of mature suburbs, mature suburban communities, not quite inner city yet but getting there, where populations had been decreasing.

It's those new communities on the fringes that are so far away from the core that we haven't yet figured out a way to make public transit work in a sustainable, predictable, reliable fashion for those people. We haven't yet been able to figure out how to get the jobs to where the people live when the people live out in the fringes. They're the ones who need the two and three and four cars to get every member of their family who has a driver's licence back and forth from where they live to where they need to be. So we put a lot more vehicles on the road, burning collectively a lot more fossil fuel, emitting individually a lot less, whether it's in terms of harmful air pollutants or greenhouse gases, than their counterparts of a generation ago, but because there are so many more cars, emitting collectively a good deal more than the total fleet in Alberta or Canada or North America used to.

It's a bit like emissions intensities. You can even make an absolute emission in one of your plants or in one area of your plant, but as the plant has grown, as the company has grown, as the industry has grown, as the economy has grown, especially if you're going to measure your greenhouse gas releases against GDPs or a barrel of oil, then suddenly while you've achieved this illusory kind

of artificial kind of made up Alice-in-Wonderland emissions intensity target, you're actually in absolute terms making things far worse.

You know, if the current rate of economic growth in Alberta continues from now right through 2020 – and, of course, we know that it won't. This is for example purposes, okay? That's kind of like saying in 1979, based on the number of people who had become Elvis impersonators since Elvis died, that by 1985 the entire population of North America was going to be Elvis impersonators. Okay? We know that that didn't happen. But let's just say for a moment hypothetically that we stay on a steady rate of economic growth in this province right through 2020. The province's emissions could rise to 70 per cent or higher above our 1990 levels by then even though we could still achieve the target of a 50 per cent reduction in emissions intensity. So we need to think in this House very seriously about that.

I'm sensitive to what members on the government side have said about the need to proceed on climate change legislation in such a way that we don't grind the economy to a halt or we don't even slow it down dramatically. It needs to be done with care and consideration and a lot of thoughtfulness. It needs to be done carefully, but it needs to be done. The rest of the world is starting to do it.

Industry always responds, I won't say better but I'll say less badly, to clear regulations imposed by government and imposed on all than it does if government says: well, you know, you've got the technology, so why don't you just volunteer to do this? Company A may be led by a CEO with a real social conscience who really would like to do that, but if he does that, if he uses his technology or the best available technology to meet voluntary targets, and the CEO of company B, who has no social conscience whatsoever, says, "Voluntary; I don't have to do it," then the CEO of company A has caused his company to pay a financial penalty, a voluntary carbon tax, if you will, for doing the right thing.

You shouldn't have to pay taxes for doing the right thing. You should have to pay taxes for doing the wrong thing if the nature of the tax, as I think we would probably all agree in this House a carbon tax would be, is essentially punitive to incent people to do something so that they don't have to pay the tax or to tax them if they don't.

So I'm sensitive to what members opposite are saying about the need to be careful not to throw the economy of this province into a tailspin by imposing restrictions or requirements that are too onerous on it, but it doesn't change the fact that we need to pursue absolute emissions. We believe on this side of the House that we need to be pursuing those absolute emissions by 2012, and emissions intensities are not going to get us there, not that I can tell.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, again Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder under Standing Order 29(2).

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I appreciate the member's comments in regard to the pressing necessity to deal with carbon emissions in absolute terms. The bottom line is, of course, as the hon. Environment minister has pointed out and yourself as well, that we're looking at perhaps a third increase in our carbon dioxide emissions within the next 10 years, and then you could see a 65 to 70 per cent increase with these intensity targets even imposed. The underlying reason for this is that we have a fivefold increase projected for the tar sands projects in Fort McMurray. So I would just ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie if he would be willing to support a moratorium on approval of new

oil sands development to try to realize the absolute reductions that he would like to see.

Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time, no, not an absolute moratorium. I do think that we need to consider very carefully all the things that need to be in place before additional large-scale oil sands developments are approved. That is certainly something that the residents of Wood Buffalo and their municipal government have made very clear in the last several EUB hearings in calling for a moratorium or in calling for that particular development up for consideration not to be allowed to go ahead until this government puts in place the environmental, social, and infrastructure requirements to support that kind of development.

4:10

I guess, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, that I see this almost over the short term as more of a capacity issue around what Wood Buffalo, what Fort McMurray, what other oil sands producing regions of the province can absorb in terms of the growth pressure. Ultimately, I do tend to support the notion that oil sands development should go ahead in what I would call a responsible, sustainable way. We probably don't have time right now to debate what that means necessarily, and I'm not sure that we all would agree or necessarily know exactly how to define that right now.

Another thing that we very definitely need to seriously consider is that as we develop the oil sands because there is a demand for that product world-wide now, and I am suggesting that we not continue to go flat out, gold rush mentality like we have, we need to be taking some of the proceeds, I think, from oil sands development – financial, economic, and otherwise, knowledge-based – and channelling that into the development of a renewable resource industry, a renewable energy industry, renewable alternative forms of energy not only for our own benefit and for the good of the planet but, you know, there's money in that, too, quite frankly. And I don't mind making a buck from time to time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just wondering if the Member for Calgary-Currie could tell us. He has referred to the move to absolute emissions reductions, I presume is what he meant. What is his plan, and how do we achieve that? It's a laudable goal, I would certainly admit, but are we going to turn off all the coal-fired generating plants? Are we going to park all the cars and trucks? Are we going to turn off all the gas heating to our homes? Are we going to shut down the oil sands? Those four things together make up the vast majority of where these emissions are coming from, so which one of these four things are we going to do to reduce our emissions?

The Deputy Speaker: In 20 seconds or less, hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, and the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill – sounds to me a bit like one of my former callers – no, we're not going to do those things, and we're not going to be alarmist either. A very short answer: best available technology should be three words that drive us going forward. So we're not going to shut down . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry, hon. member. The time for Standing

Order 29(2)(a) has elapsed.

Are there any others who wish to participate in the debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

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

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate March 22: Mrs. Mather]

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege to rise today to respond to this year's Speech from the Throne. The Speech from the Throne typically tells us where the administration wants to take us and which plans it has to achieve the outcomes it desires. This year's speech was titled *The Future Is Now: A Plan for Alberta*. Nice try. Albertans know that this government did not have a plan for at least the last decade, and it still doesn't. It may want to have a plan, it's likely scrambling to develop what looks like a plan, but so far it doesn't actually have one.

There is no plan to manage growth and ensure sustainability, there is no plan to save for the future, there is no plan to protect Alberta consumers, there is no comprehensive land-use strategy, and there is, certainly, no plan to protect our planet or to minimize damage to the environment. This government has ideas or projects, but they're all loose pieces with no glue holding them together. Former Premiers Lougheed and Klein even confirmed and admitted this openly.

The Future Is Now: well, at least that's a start, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully, this administration is finally getting its head around the notion that good governments plan and that they plan more than a year ahead. They actually plan for 10, 15, 20, and even 30 years or more. The speech tells us that

the government will act thoughtfully and decisively on behalf of Albertans. The government of Alberta will govern with integrity and transparency, manage growth pressures, improve Albertans' quality of life, provide safe and secure communities, and build a stronger Alberta.

So let's see now: integrity and transparency. Mr. Speaker, that's a joke, except that it's not a funny one, and people can see right through this. This is the same government which just less than one year ago in this House forcefully passed its outrageous and disgusting secrecy and opacity piece of legislation called Bill 20.

This is the same government which stuffs potentially damaging or embarrassing documents and other things into what they loosely call a "ministerial briefing binder" to hide things from Albertans. This is the same government that hides these things for five years. Even our Privacy Commissioner didn't like this and commented on it.

This is the very government which now conceals the findings of internal audits for 15 years, which, I have argued previously, is like three or four government changes. So, yeah, some openness.

This is the same government which invoked time allocation twice last year during debate on Bill 20 when they felt that the public was starting to question their motives. Closure, or time allocation, Mr.

Speaker, is a sign of despair, and this government was desperate in its need to stop the criticism and kill the debate. It was particularly frustrating that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, who was himself an opposition member at one point, volunteered or was 'volun-told' to defend the government's position and try to explain away its embarrassing decision.

You know, thinking about this, the current Premier, his Minister of Finance, his minister of health, his Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, all of whom talked the talk about openness and transparency as PC leadership candidates during the latest Tory race, chose not to walk the walk. They all voted to shove Bill 20 down our throats and pretended that it was business as usual. Actually, this entire cabinet, with its 18 ministers, either stayed quiet or spoke in favour of Bill 20 last year.

This is not a surprise to me, Mr. Speaker. This is a government which wins cloak of secrecy awards. The audacity is unbelievable. So spare me the that was then and this is now argument, and please don't refer to yourselves as Alberta's new government because there is nothing new about you. The only thing that is new is new letterhead and business cards advertising who does what. Otherwise, it's the same old deal.

What about patronage, Mr. Speaker? Didn't we Alberta Liberals ask to have an appointments commission or a board to oversee public appointments and to offer the transparency and the safeguards required? Why did this very government – and there's nothing new about them – reject this idea? I will tell you why: because they think they can get away with it.

What about the lack of accountability? What about refusing to share with the voters, you know, who voted for whom during that race? It was mentioned in this House that this is a party matter and it shouldn't be brought up, but in the essence and in the true definition of accountability and openness this is something that people are asking about.

What about the trend to prefer verbal over written, from paying for verbal advice from people like Kelley Charlebois and Rod Love to making verbal promises to break environmental law and to carry on interbasin water transfers just because a megamall and a racetrack asked the right government person at the right time? What about the exorbitant and outrageous access to information fees and the unnecessary blacking out of information so that once citizens or the media or the opposition get back what they asked for, little of it makes sense?

Mr. Speaker, my advice to the government members is: please don't kid yourselves. Please know that Albertans are not going to buy this brand that you're trying to sell us. You had your chance, and you blew it, so move on.

Managing growth pressures. Yeah, like getting 12-year-olds to work in restaurants and bars. Now, to be fair, kudos to the Premier for killing this idea dead in its tracks, but the fact of the matter is that the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing. The Alberta Liquor and Gaming Commission was, in fact, contemplating and planning, and you know they were really surprised that the government didn't go along. I find this quite puzzling and alarming.

Like importing temporary foreign workers to work here without first trying to find employment for Albertans and other Canadians. Even with those foreign workers, they're not true immigrants. Most of them come alone and leave their families behind. Most send the bulk of their paycheques back to their home countries, and they're sometimes mistreated or taken advantage of. When the employers are done with them, they're shipped back where they came from.

4:20

Also, I am really annoyed at the fact that the government's so-called plan seems to be, in essence, a make-work scheme to appease

some government backbenchers, former ministers in particular, by giving them stuff to do and creating committee or task force opportunities for them to make some more money on the side. Take the Treasury Capital Planning Committee announced on March 22, 2007, to be chaired by the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Creek and with at least four ministers on it. Don't you guys sit in the same caucus room? Do you need another committee to be talking to each other, a committee that meets and has expenses and has staff? How much extra taxpayers' money will this translate into to compensate the former Minister of Education, who lost his cabinet post in the latest shuffle?

Improve Albertans' quality of life, the number two thing. What does it really mean, exactly: more consumerism, higher inflation, more pollution? What about social assistance programs and minimum wage? Ontario just this last week announced that their minimum wage was going up to \$10.25. My question is: are we planning a similar move in this province?

Mr. Liepert: No.

Mr. Elsalhy: The Minister of Education is saying no. So he probably has inside information that we're not privy to.

This government talks about intensity targets, as was discussed earlier in the debate on Bill 3, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but the fact is, as we mentioned, that intensity ratios are based on GDP or other factors. So if these companies make more money and profit, they can match or exceed their intensity targets. The end result would be that more garbage is spewed into the air and lasting damage to the environment would ensue. Is this better quality of life for our children?

How about better quality of health care services? We have come to discuss many instances where less than adequate health services are talked about and incidents where the opposition and the public are defining what's happening as a crisis and the government is denying that it is and saying that everything is fine. How does that reconcile the government's claim to be trying to improve the quality of life for Albertans?

Typically, I would try to look for positive elements in any throne speech to try to not be completely critical, but today I'm finding this extremely difficult. It's a speech full of clichés and platitudes. You know, it might have been appropriate, it might have been something that was suitable for the '60s or the '70s, but this is the 21st century, Mr. Speaker, and it's time that we show leadership and offer better government. Albertans deserve nothing less.

Now, another example. Another make-work committee was announced on March 27, 2007: the community spirit fund committee, to be chaired by the MLA for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, who was formerly the minister of gaming and lost his cabinet position when the new Premier picked his team, and with seven Tory MLAs on it. Wasn't he the minister just a few months ago? Does he need to be recruited to a new committee to chair it to tell the new minister of gaming, which is now under recreation, parks, and culture, that he needs to do A or B or C? He can give that advice free of charge, and I don't think he should get paid to unseal his lips. Again, a prime example of waste and redundancy.

Providing safe and secure communities. The answer is simple in my mind, Mr. Speaker: more resources and better funding for our police officers to do their job and to start thinking about things like community asset building, which is something that the police chiefs are talking about, particularly in cities like Edmonton and Calgary. If we're only funding police services at about \$16 per capita and everyone tells us that this figure needs to be at least doubled, then something needs to be done.

However, this government – and you probably agree – has a trend, and the trend is growing. It decides instead to strike a Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force, as announced on March 21, which will cost taxpayers \$1.5 million and – surprise, surprise – will be chaired by the MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek, who was formerly the Minister of Children's Services and, again, lost her cabinet post in the latest shuffle. But she was also the Solicitor General at one point in the past, so she can offer this advice to the minister for free, I think.

We all know about drugs. We all know about alcohol, prostitution, domestic violence, gangs, knife crimes, et cetera. I don't think that this task force is likely to hear anything new, and I think that instead of saving this MLA and some of those committee or task force members money, we should have instead invested this in the recruitment and training and paying of the salaries of up to 15 more police officers to patrol our streets. It's priorities, Mr. Speaker. We don't need any more task forces.

Lastly, to "build a stronger Alberta." I don't know. It's a vague statement, sort of motherhood and apple pie. On March 20 the government announced the creation of the Alberta Investment Management Corporation and told us that it will give us improved organizational governance, increased flexibility, and opportunities for greater investment returns for Alberta savings, for public-sector pensions, endowments, and other funds. Now, isn't that already the work that is being done under the Minister of Finance? Is it needed? How much extra will this cost taxpayers? Who will be appointed to the board of directors? Will they be patronage appointments? How will these directors be recruited? Mr. Speaker, it's either common sense or the lack thereof.

My concerns and comments reflect a growing sentiment that this government has grown to be too bureaucratic and big on make-work task forces and committees instead of actually taking action and showing leadership. It's a government that's all out of ideas and tired.

Communications and propaganda arms of this government are currently the busiest of all agencies and departments. They're the only organs showing residual activity in this ailing, failing body. The Alberta Liberal caucus has a plan for this province, Mr. Speaker, and it does not involve the Public Affairs Bureau. Instead of spin and trying to explain to Albertans that we have a plan to have a plan, as demonstrated by the Premier's latest and first of three \$200,000 brochures, we would instead implement our policies one by one, and people can see for themselves the kind of work ethic that the Alberta Liberals have.

Our first 100 days in office, Mr. Speaker, are going to set the stage for this province to have a sustainable, rewarding, and environmentally and people-friendly future, a future where homelessness is eradicated, dignity for the disabled is restored, social assistance and minimum living wages are indexed, taxes are kept permanently competitive, and public services are delivered at the best level in Canada. Albertans can have it all, and the Alberta Liberal caucus has the map to chart this future for them. From affordable housing to health, from quality child care to top-notch seniors' and long-term care, from superb K to 12 education to state-of-the-art postsecondary, from airtight consumer protection to real environment stewardship, we have a plan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a) any questions or comments? The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: I just would like to ask the hon. member. This new,

big Liberal machine that's going to sweep Alberta: at their convention in Calgary how many people attended?

An Hon. Member: They couldn't count.

Mr. Snelgrove: I can believe that.

Mr. Elsalhy: I thank the hon. minister of the treasury – President of the Treasury. You see, you guys have many names now, and nobody knows what exactly he does versus the Minister of Finance, for example.

Anyways, that's an interesting question, Mr. Speaker, because this is the same, you know, front bench that argued that party business is not to be discussed in this House. But I'm going to make the hon. minister extremely pleased to know that we had 29 incumbents and declared candidates who were there.

An Hon. Member: That's all?

Mr. Elsalhy: Well, we're better than the Tories. We're better than the NDPs. You guys are scrambling to find candidates. We have contested nominations. We have had the pleasure of the company of political scientists, people from all corners of the province, rural and urban, who were there to cheer us on and to wish us luck, some of whom were long-term Tories.

4:30

An Hon. Member: How many?

Mr. Elsalhy: We have had 200-plus, yes, and it's a force to be reckoned with. Stay tuned.

An Hon. Member: Did you count the children too?

Mr. Elsalhy: There were no children.

Mr. Snelgrove: I just want to apologize for even bringing up their party in the House, Mr. Speaker. Sincerely apologize.

Mr. Taylor: We didn't even move a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister wishes to rise on (29)(2)(a)?

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. The hon. President of the Treasury Board is obviously so far ahead of his time, a visionary, that he had already anticipated that a point of order probably would have been raised, so he was able to counter that beforehand. That's why he's looking out the windshield rather than looking in a rearview mirror. We're moving ahead, this government, with our plan.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no other participants, we'll move on to the next speaker. The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure today to rise and respond to the Speech from the Throne. I'd like to begin by thanking the hon. Lieutenant Governor for his commendable work this year since the last Speech from the Throne. I'm always impressed by his constant humour, style, and charm despite what must be a very taxing job. He is truly an example of the best that Alberta has to offer.

I would also like to offer my heartfelt thanks to everyone in my constituency, West Yellowhead. The past year has been a good one,

though we had been tested by many challenges. The patient and hard work and community spirit of my constituents have done wonders for West Yellowhead. A thousand heartfelt thanks are due to the staff and the volunteers who have helped me with my work and to the many constituents who approached me with their concerns and their feedback. I look forward to another year serving with you and for you.

One more acknowledgement is due to our new Premier of Alberta. I'd like to join everyone in the House in offering my congratulations on his new role, and I wish him the best of luck in the coming years.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne set out a new direction for this government and for this province. It is an exciting direction that will ensure that our province continues to be a clean, safe, attractive, and prosperous place in which to live. The government's five priorities reflect the determination of all Albertans not to squander the opportunities we have today. I'm happy to see that many of the initiatives promised in this year's Speech from the Throne will have significant beneficial effects for all Albertans, especially those in West Yellowhead.

While we face many of the challenges as other areas of the province, we also have distinct challenges of our own. I believe the Speech from the Throne demonstrates this government's resolve to address these problems while also promoting local solutions to local problems. By committing to govern with integrity and transparency, this government has committed both to listening to Albertans' concerns and to improving the operations of government for all Albertans. This will in turn make government more responsive to Albertans' current and emerging needs, allowing our province to be prosperous in a sustainable manner for years to come.

The government has also committed to managing growth pressures. This is a particularly significant commitment for my constituency, West Yellowhead, where we are enjoying the benefits of our current prosperity while doing our best to ensure that no one falls behind. An excellent example of how this government is managing growth pressures is the Affordable Housing Task Force, which recently commenced its work. This task force held a session in my constituency in the town of Hinton. An impressive 70 people turned out to give their input, with 11 presentations being made to the task force. A turnout like this shows how much Albertans welcome this government's commitment to operating transparently and consulting with them. I'm looking forward to the release of the task force recommendations so that the affordable housing problem can be addressed as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

Hinton, like other communities, has faced difficulties in acquiring Crown land for expansion, but like other towns in West Yellowhead it's facing many greater difficulties because of their location in Alberta's green zone. Similarly, in Grande Cache high demand and fast growth has led to a shortage of industrial land. I've been working with both towns to obtain more land for expansion.

I'm also pleased to hear in the Speech from the Throne that this government recognizes how our current economic growth is placing great pressure on our infrastructure. Having a long-term capital plan to address infrastructure needs and inflation costs will help our province expand in a prudent manner. However, while a long-term capital plan will be most welcome, the government is already doing much to help build and maintain our infrastructure. Just recently \$13 million of funding was dedicated for development of the Edson health care centre. The government of Alberta also gave \$3 million to the town of Hinton to upgrade three kilometres of town water mains, a grant that was matched by the federal government through the Canada/Alberta municipal infrastructure fund.

Reflecting Albertans' desire to develop their province in an ecologically sensitive manner, the Speech from the Throne has

committed the government to an unprecedented set of environmental policies. Given that my constituency, West Yellowhead, is located in an area of the province that is particularly environmentally sensitive, I am happy to hear that Water for Life and the land use framework will be updated and completed.

My constituents are already working hard to protect the environment. Elk Valley Coal recently received the Alberta Chamber of Resources major reclamation award for its effort to reclaim the Sphinx Creek mining area. Those hundred reclaimed hectares will allow the channel to permanently sustain native rainbow trout while providing year-round habitat for grizzlies, elk, sheep, mule deer, and wolves.

Similarly, the Hardisty Creek restoration project was just awarded a forest stewardship recognition award from Wildlife Habitat Canada for its four years of effort to restore a fish passage from the Athabasca upstream to the Hardisty Creek. The Alberta government was one of the major financial contributors to this initiative through the community facility enhancement program.

Another priority the government identified in the Speech from the Throne is improving Alberta's quality of life. I'm glad that the government of Alberta is going to work hard to improve high school completion rates and increase access to secondary education programs. This will be beneficial to the students of West Yellowhead, where graduation rates have risen in recent years but are still below the provincial average.

Initiatives like registered apprentice programs will allow students to complete their academic education while working on their apprenticeship training and make a real difference in keeping some students in school until graduation. Having apprentices in training while they are completing their academic education also helps alleviate the shortage of skilled labour that is presently being felt across the province.

[The Speaker in the chair]

In my constituency, one company in particular has done an exemplary job of embracing apprenticeship training. A few weeks ago Edson's own Daniel's Welding Ltd. received the Alberta apprenticeship employees of the year award, sponsored by the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board and Alberta Advanced Education. Daniel's Welding received this award for its exemplary support of apprenticeship programs. Since 1986 this company has employed between five and 12 active apprentices while including two special-needs apprentices. It is companies like Daniel's Welding that will help make Alberta's education program a success.

4:40

Our economic success is not to be taken for granted, so government has committed to building a stronger Alberta. That we cannot take our prosperity for granted is clear in many areas of West Yellowhead where the mountain pine beetle has had a profound effect on our forest. The infestation hurts more than the lumber industry. Tourism draws thousands of people a year to my constituency, particularly to the town of Jasper. Should our beautiful forests be devastated by this blight, many businesses that rely on tourists will suffer. Within the Foothills area around Hinton, there's an estimate of almost 100,000 infested trees. The establishment of the institutes of agriculture, forestry, and the environment will help develop solutions to environmental sustainability challenges such as the mountain pine beetle and, therefore, are most welcome.

The Speech from the Throne also recognizes that we can improve our natural resources. Our coal is a serious business in West

Yellowhead and, as part of Alberta's coal, is some of the cleanest in the world. Coal generation produces half of Alberta's electricity. I'm delighted that the Speech from the Throne committed the government to further address climate change, in part by developing a comprehensive energy strategy that will make full use of innovations such as near zero emission coal. Developing technologies like near zero emission coal will allow us to continue to develop our natural resources while protecting the environment.

The Speech from the Throne states that the "government will build on Alberta's traditional strengths, which include energy, agriculture, forestry, tourism, and the people of this province." West Yellowhead exemplifies all of these strengths. Coal mining, natural gas, timber, cattle, beautiful scenery, and hard-working people all make the region prosperous. My constituency is an excellent example of prosperity despite the challenges we have in Alberta today. With the plan for our province set out in this year's Speech from the Throne, I'm confident that we will succeed in addressing those challenges and continue to prosper for many years to come.

I look forward to the hard work with my government colleagues and my constituents to fulfill the promises made in the Speech from the Throne. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments from the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. I appreciate the commitment of that area to coal and its support for that region over the years. I guess that given the government's commitment to improving our impact on the environment and the climate change initiatives, I would like to hear from the hon. member how he views the approval of a new coal facility without carbon capture capacities. Is that appropriate given what we know about the future?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, first of all, the coal in West Yellowhead, especially at Coal Valley Resources Inc., has some of the lowest carbon in the country, very little. The main reason it was built was because we used to ship it to Ontario Hydro. Since then Ontario Hydro has built mines in Pennsylvania that produce coal with a high sulfur content. Of course, there's lots of emission there. Then when you look at the property of the Cardinal River Coals operation, the other aspect with them, they had some of the highest coal content that they could ship across the world to all the coking plants in Japan and Korea. They were at a high level all the time with very low sulfur content.

Now with the new laws that the previous Minister of Environment in the last regime had brought in, we're doing that out in the area of Genesee and that, so we have very low content of CO₂. We've got scrubbers in there, so a lot of it right now the way we have it has less CO₂ emissions or the same as natural gas.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's once more an honour to rise in this Assembly on behalf of the citizens of the Calgary-Nose Hill communities of Beddington Heights, Huntington Hills, Thorncliffe, Greenview, and North Haven. I thank them for entrusting me to be their voice in this House.

I wish to begin my remarks this afternoon by acknowledging the retirement since our last session of the former Premier. The government of Premier Klein over a period of 14 years accomplished much for the people of Alberta by eliminating the deficit and the provincial debt, by having the lowest personal taxes in the country, and by creating a business climate which has attracted people from far and wide to our province.

Mr. Speaker, on December 2, 2006, members of my party chose a new leader, who was sworn in as Premier on December 14, 2006. I congratulate the hon. Premier on his victory and on his government's first Speech from the Throne. The Premier has already demonstrated tremendous energy in giving Albertans and government members and, indeed, all members of this House an enhanced role in determining Alberta's future. He has also been accessible and available to Albertans in all parts of the province and engaged them in renewing our government's vision for the future.

Mr. Speaker, many challenges remain for us in the coming year. We need to preserve and improve the quality of our public health care, to improve education and training for our young people, to address the needs of our senior citizens and of those less fortunate, to sustain and enhance our environment and wildlife resources, and to manage the challenges of a rapidly expanding population and economy.

Just as public expectations of what public health care can and should do are increasing, so are the costs of providing those services. Changes in delivery of health care are necessary. We should continue to innovate in order to optimize both value for taxpayer money and health and wellness outcomes. However, we must ensure that whatever changes are made, we continue to ensure that timely access to quality health care is never dependent on financial means. Changes in the way we fund public health care are also inevitable. We need to reform a system of health care premiums which, despite the exemption of low-income earners and seniors, continues to be a regressive form of taxation.

Mr. Speaker, this government's priorities include managing growth pressures, improving Albertans' quality of life, and building a stronger Alberta. The key to these three priorities is to invest in education. To quote Aristotle, the fate of nations depends on the education of youth. Aristotle was right. If we build on our excellent education system now by recruiting and retaining excellent teachers and by ensuring that our students succeed to the fullest of their ability, we will help create a society and a heritage of which we can all be proud.

I urge the government to implement legislation already passed by this House, but which remains unproclaimed, making school attendance mandatory until the age of 17 years. This is one of many measures to ensure that young Albertans have the basic skills required for success in our knowledge-based economy. At the same time we can help young people who are at risk of failing through programs which support them and through providing enhanced learning and career choices appropriate to diverse individual aptitudes.

Mr. Speaker, in the field of postsecondary education and training we must continue to work towards the ambitious goals of increased access, which the government set out in its Speech from the Throne two years ago, of 60,000 new spaces by 2020. We also need to meet the demands of the workforce for educational capacity in certain critical fields, including health care providers, engineering, and skilled trades.

However, despite the immediate needs of industry we should not focus narrowly on those fields of endeavour which are only of immediate economic benefit. Our government should continue to support research and education in pure sciences, social sciences, the

arts, and humanities, all of which make important contributions to our society.

Adequate and affordable housing for seniors and lower income Albertans is emerging as a priority for our government. In a tight marketplace some landlords have given tenants unreasonable increases in rents. Other constituents of Calgary-Nose Hill, faced with market values increasing on their homes, face steep increases in their property taxes.

Mr. Speaker, given inflationary pressures of over 5 per cent year over year in the city of Calgary we need to ensure that our health care and support systems respond to the needs of our aging population and allow seniors to live an independent lifestyle where possible. We must assist those who require home medical care and those who provide in-home care for spouses or other family members who are unable to care for themselves.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, Albertans rightly expect us to ensure that our natural environment is preserved and enhanced. What better way to serve the people of Alberta than by ensuring that public lands of our province are protected for the benefit and enjoyment of their children and future generations. By keeping our inventory of natural public lands intact, we preserve the beauty and splendour of our province. Resource exploitation from public lands must be done in ways that minimize long-term damage to ecological integrity inside and outside of our provincial boundaries. Land use and forestry plans and headwaters of our river systems must take into account the cumulative effects on forest ecosystems which help to retain water, reduce flooding, enhance water quality, support diverse biological systems, and provide esthetic and recreational values. Resource extraction should be restricted in some areas of special ecological value, including the Suffield national wildlife refuge.

Our water resources should be protected through a comprehensive, integrated policy of sustainable watershed management within the proposed land use framework. Such a policy must build on the Water for Life strategy. It must also recognize the cumulative effects of all land uses in the riparian, adjacent zones of our major watersheds from which we draw our drinking and irrigation waters. These integrated policies must regulate agriculture, forestry, industry, and development. These changes will not be without opposition because they will affect the rights of landowners regarding many aspects of land use.

New policies must recognize that the effects of land use may extend far beyond our provincial boundaries. Of special concern is the necessity to ensure that oil sands developments do not cause deleterious effects on downstream waters of the Athabasca River, the Slave River, the Great Slave Lake and the Mackenzie River. Future generations of Canadians will not forgive us if we do not preserve for them these irreplaceable natural treasures.

Mr. Speaker, I wish now to address some issues regarding the growth pressures which face us in the province of Alberta. While it is generally conceded that growth and population increases are good things, there may be limits upon which we are constrained, and therefore it may be reasonable to ask not whether we should be putting the brakes on increased development but whether we should perhaps take our foot off the accelerator. I would like to propose a few ideas which may help to sustain the prosperity of the province in the longer term.

First, I would suggest that the government should exercise restraint in infrastructure capital spending and set priorities in areas where bidding is competitive while maintaining the priority for building urgently needed hospitals and other health facilities.

Second, the government should restrain sales of Crown mineral rights and regulate the timing of further oil sands megaprojects in

order to spread out and sustain oil and gas exploration, drilling, and oil sands construction activity in the province over the longer term.

Third, tax cuts may be deferred until such time as the economy has slowed to a more manageable pace.

Fourth, Alberta should not attempt to meet its shortage of professionals and skill trades by simply increasing salaries and recruiting workers from other jurisdictions. Those who are newly arrived in our province do not bring roads, bridges, hospitals, and schools with them. Increasing education and training opportunities for Albertans will provide long-term benefits to the province without the added infrastructure burden resulting from immigration.

Fifth, a major portion of nonrenewable resource revenue should be invested into the heritage fund. This endowment will ensure that the children of Alberta have a bright future.

Finally, Alberta must encourage growth and diversified economic development in the rural areas of the province. Expansion of industries such as tourism, alternative energy, and value-added agriculture would enhance the sustainability of rural Alberta and help relieve the pressures on our large cities.

Mr. Speaker, a combination of these solutions would reduce inflation, provide greater value for taxpayer money, and create more stable employment and industrial capacity, thus creating longer term prosperity for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the economic prosperity and resulting growth pressures which we face will continue to provide great challenges to Alberta, but despite these challenges we have a beautiful province blessed with natural resources and a standard of living, infrastructure, and systems of education, health care, and social services which are among the best in the world. By managing growth wisely, we will build a stronger Alberta, and I'm confident that from Wood Buffalo to Waterton, from Zama City to Etzikom, from the blue Canadian Rockies to the prairie grasslands Alberta will indeed continue to live up to its motto and be strong and free.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, it is my hope that all of us in this House may have the purpose and the will to work together for the benefit of the people of Alberta now and in the future.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate very much the comments of the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill. He mentioned the idea, rather than putting on the breaks, of taking your foot off the accelerator. Would he like to comment on what he means by that in relation to the oil sands?

Dr. Brown: Well, I had no specific comments to make with respect to the oil sands. My comments were generally that we should perhaps look at staging some of the developments that are happening over a longer period of time.

The Speaker: Additional questions?

The last speaker I have on my list is the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Twenty-eight days ago we were summoned into this House to hear His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor read the Speech from the Throne. Of course, His Honour didn't actually write the speech. It is a long-standing British parliamentary tradition that the Queen or her representative merely read word for word the speech that the head of that particular government, in this case the Premier of Alberta, puts in front of them. I'm sure you've heard His Honour the

Honourable the Lieutenant Governor speak many times at many events, and you can tell that he had no part in the writing of the throne speech because His Honour's speeches are not only vastly more entertaining than this one was; they also have a good deal more substance.

So what did we take away from that throne speech 28 days ago? Well, that the Premier has five priorities, and as you sift through and drill down and boil them down to their essence, I understand them to be these: mom, apple pie, baseball, sunshine, and puppies. Mr. Speaker, the people of Calgary-Currie love puppies too. In fact, I'd be surprised if there's another constituency in all Alberta with as many pet pooches per square kilometre as my constituency has. Last time I checked, most of my constituents and most Calgaryans, in fact, are pretty fond of sunshine too. We've got a preference for hockey over baseball. You might get some debate over apple pie versus strawberry-rhubarb versus pumpkin, I suppose. And most people do love their mothers. But they want and they expect and they are entitled to more from their government than this.

Mr. Speaker, Calgary-Currie is a vibrant, growing, and generally prosperous inner-city constituency. It's probably safe to say that generally my constituents are more prosperous than they were when I was elected although that is due in part to the number of poorer constituents who have been forced out of Calgary-Currie by the housing boom, the real estate boom, and I'll talk about that more in a moment. So if you were a Conservative, I assume hypothetically, never having been one myself, you'd probably look around my constituency and say, "These people are doing great; they're doing fine; they've got nothing to complain about," which probably goes a long way towards explaining why my constituents chose a Liberal as their MLA. While the majority of people in my constituency may be doing pretty well financially – and some are doing fantastically well, beyond my wildest fantasies – they also recognize that there is more to life than money. They know that he who dies with the most toys still dies and that he is more likely to die if he is sick and cannot get into the hospital or be seen by a doctor.

My constituents don't understand and cannot condone a government that in the richest province in the best country on Earth makes us make do with a health care system that has the capacity for roughly three-quarters the population it now serves. My constituents don't understand why there was no commitment in this throne speech around the south health campus in Calgary. They don't understand why this government has dragged its heels on that commitment to the point that construction costs have now escalated hundreds of millions of dollars beyond the original budget estimate, and the opening date has now been pushed back from 2010 to 2011.

5:00

Heck, they don't understand why the south health campus wasn't built years ago. We needed it years ago. You could tell that we were going to need it years ago. You could tell we were going to need it when they blew up the General, and that was 10 years ago. You know, they're going to have an even harder time understanding why, when it does open, the south health campus will initially be 100 beds smaller than originally planned, why it'll have to open initially with just 250 beds rather than 350 and then keep adding 100 beds a year until at least 2014. They're going to have a hard time understanding why it has to be done that way: because we don't train enough doctors and nurses and lab technologists and other hospital workers, either in the city of Calgary or the province of Alberta generally, to staff more than a 250-bed facility initially when it opens in 2011, some six months late. They're going to have a hard time understanding that. They're going to have a hard time understanding why we couldn't see that one coming.

My constituents, who care passionately about postsecondary education, as they do about health care, as they do about many things, are pleased that at long last the government has approved the baccalaureate of nursing program at Mount Royal College. But they understand that more, much more, must be done to increase our capacity to educate the health care professionals that we need. The Calgary health region alone will need 37,000 staff, including 10,000 nurses and over 3,000 doctors, over the next 10 years to meet the demands of growth in the Calgary health region and to replace the retiring baby boomers who work for the region today.

My constituents do understand what's going on in Vegreville with the closing of most of St. Joseph's hospital because in 2007 and 2006 and 2005 and 2004 and 2003, apparently, a hospital in Alberta, in the richest province in the best country on earth, has failed repeatedly to properly clean and sterilize its surgical instruments. They understand that this sort of health care scandal is brought about by a lack of oversight directly attributable – directly attributable – to budget cuts and an ideological bent that money spent on oversight is money spent on frills. This is a government that has spent the last decade or more playing the actuarial odds. My constituents understand that. They don't condone it, but they understand it. I don't know if the Premier's constituents understand why he has thus far refused to meet with them face to face to answer their questions about this crisis in his constituency. St. Joseph's hospital is in the Premier's constituency.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents would like to know the government's plan on education, both K to 12 and postsecondary. They would like to know when Mount Royal College is going to become Mount Royal University. They would like to know when the communities that don't have schools in Calgary are going to get them and the communities that do have schools are going to get them fixed. You know, none of that was evident in the throne speech. Like most Calgarians they'd like to know why there are 40 communities in Calgary without an elementary school.

Of even more direct concern to my constituents is the plan, if any, for inner-city schools. Some of my constituents believe the poor physical quality of the school buildings we still have open in Calgary-Currie is affecting their children's health. Others worry about the notion of self-fulfilling prophecy because they've seen a number of schools close already. You know, the government won't properly fund school maintenance. Without the necessary maintenance the school gets run down. Parents see the sorry state of the school and figure: well, it won't be long before they close that one down too, just like they have so many others in the constituency, so I guess I'd better put my children someplace else. Eventually community leaders worry – and, Mr. Speaker, they do worry about this a lot in my constituency – because you need a school to attract young families, and you need young families and, in fact, people of all ages to keep a community vibrant and truly livable. But that school, the last one left in the neighbourhood, will close too.

I've spoken in this House before of Western Canada high school, an absolutely legendary high school not only in Alberta but right across the west. This great institution is falling apart around its students' ears. It desperately needs to be rebuilt, has needed to be for the last seven or eight years, and could have been done back then for a fraction of what it will cost today. For that matter, I guess it could be done today for a fraction of what it will cost by the time this government finally gets around to doing something about it. But, you know, it needs doing. The west block of Western Canada high school is literally pulling away from the centre block, and there's a crack about an inch wide that runs from ceiling to floor on the lobby wall next to the school auditorium. You stand there. You look at that. You don't think you're in a high school in Calgary.

You think you're in a high school in San Francisco or Los Angeles or someplace right after an earthquake. This needs doing, like so many other things in this province that need doing.

Still on education, this one crosses ministries from Education to Advanced Education. A constituent of mine wonders why Alberta's universities continue to insist on pure math 30 as a required course even for admission into arts and social sciences programs, where once admitted, students will never have to take another math class for the rest of their natural lives, when Alberta Education some years ago designed applied math 30 for that purpose.

Now the whole math curriculum is being redesigned. Alberta Education is trying to get buy-in from math professors to, you know, review the curriculum and make sure it works, and they're not even bothering to show up for that review because they know that it doesn't make any difference. I mean, the administrations are just going to do what the administrations are going to do.

They went through the whole dog-and-pony act of reviewing the math curriculum that we have today 10 years or so ago, when it was brought in, and it didn't make any difference. They said: yeah, applied math 30 will work just fine for arts and social sciences and humanities. And still the universities require pure math 30. Sure, pure math 30 is needed for degree programs that require the university student to do a lot of math, but you don't need pure math 30 to understand Shakespeare or to get the strategic concepts behind World War II or for much else in the nonmath, nonscience realm of postsecondary study.

No, the only ones who need pure math 30, other than those in those courses of study, the math and science heavy ones, are the universities themselves. They need pure math 30 as a gatekeeper course, a way to ration limited space, a way to ration access, a way to deny admission to otherwise qualified students for whom there is no room in our postsecondary schools in this province because the government doesn't take education seriously and hasn't done so for years.

While we're on the topic of strategic concepts around World War II, Mr. Speaker, I should mention an ongoing sore point at the Military Museums, formerly known as the Museum of the Regiments, in my constituency. It is currently undergoing, really, a pretty fantastic expansion that when finished will make it, in my view, the finest military museum in this country outside of Ottawa. But about the sore point. The Military Museums does a lot of outreach to school-age children, and they're wondering why our kids are receiving less and less education about this nation's military history. The history of both world wars has been removed from the Alberta curriculum in some of the younger grades where it was previously taught. The teaching of Canada's military history should be, they argue, and I would tend to agree, part and parcel of a broader heritage, citizenship, and social responsibility package. We can't possibly expect ourselves or our children to know where we're going if we hide where we've been.

Oh, and about the housing boom that I mentioned earlier, the average price of a house in my constituency is \$635,000, or was last month. It's probably more now, because I know that the average price of a home across Calgary is now more than it was last month. It's now over \$400,000 right across the city. Edmonton is not far behind. Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray: we know that they're right up there, probably even ahead of Calgary and Edmonton. Indeed, there's an affordable housing crisis in cities and towns all over this province.

In Calgary-Currie we used to have two kinds of constituents. We had homeowners, and we had renters. Increasingly, the two kinds of constituents we have these days are homeowners and the dispossessed, people forced out of their rental accommodations by

skyrocketing rents twice, three times what they were paying before they got their notice. Or condo conversions: they're being forced out of their accommodations into a rental market with about a .2 per cent vacancy rate.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents simply want to know when we're going to get serious about creating affordable housing. By the way, that's not just my dispossessed constituents; that's my constituents who own those, in many cases, \$635,000 and up houses, because they see what's going on around them. They see that we are not making the best possible use that we could of the fantastic wealth that we enjoy right now. So they want to know when we're going to get serious about creating affordable housing, because everybody needs a home. There's no excuse not to be doing it, even as we speak.

I wrote the Alberta Liberal policy on affordable housing, and it contains the solutions. I know that because we've run this policy past the people who know affordable housing, and they've told us time and time again that it hits the mark. I know that it was used as a template by the all-party Affordable Housing Task Force the government set up after the Alberta Liberals showed the political will to move the affordable housing crisis to the top of the provincial agenda.

5:10

Now the minister is sitting on the task force report, a report prepared by an all-party committee that also included a dozen non-MLAs, members of the public, a report that should be public, a report that should have been presented on the floor of the Legislature the day it was presented to the minister. Then let the minister go off and study it all he wants, till the cows come home if they can find a home to come to, you know, and he can say: "I like this and this clause. I think that idea is terrible, and I won't support it. I want to amend this and this and this." That's fine. That's how it works in a democracy, or at least that's how it's supposed to. But no. He's sitting on the task force report, having it threaten to disappear into that black hole where the Conservatives put good ideas that they want to have go to die as if he's waiting for this to slip back down the provincial agenda.

We need to get on with the task. We need to get on with the task of building and creating affordable housing. We need to get on with the task of building and fixing our schools. We need to get on with the task of building hospitals and training doctors and nurses and so many other people. We need to get on with the task of building a knowledge economy. We need to get on with the task of having a plan and a plan of action. Mr. Speaker, those plans and those action plans are not in this throne speech. As I said at the outset, the people of Calgary-Currie, of Alberta, want and expect and are entitled to more from their government.

Mr. Speaker, you opened the Legislature 28 days ago – and I don't get to say it, unless someone wants to ask me.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: I'm very curious to know what he was going to say.

Mr. Taylor: The President of the Treasury Board might be.

Mr. Speaker, you opened the Legislature 28 days ago with a prayer that began, "Almighty God, author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding . . ." It is a prayer you use from time to time in this House to begin the day's proceedings. From those words, though, as compared to the words in the Speech from the Throne, I can only conclude that the Almighty had no part at all in the authorship of this throne speech.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope that answered the minister's question.

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

[Motion carried]

head: **Government Motions**
(continued)

Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

13. Mr. Stelmach moved:

Be it resolved that the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

[Government Motion 13 carried]

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

Bill 4 Child Care Licensing Act

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move Bill 4, the Child Care Licensing Act, for third reading.

I think that we've had a good discussion about the proposed legislation and what it will do to strengthen child care in Alberta. I've heard a lot of positive feedback about the act, and for me that confirms that we're definitely moving in the right direction. Good questions have also been raised, which I would quickly like to address.

There has been some discussion around how the act will ensure parental involvement and whether our government plans to develop a provincial child care advisory council. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to clarify. Legislating a requirement for a provincial child care advisory council in the act limits the ability to have informal and varied forms of consultations. By encouraging ongoing dialogue with Alberta parents, child care operators, and stakeholders, we will ensure that this legislation and the programs and services we provide continue to meet the needs of children and families.

I've also been asked if the Child Care Licensing Act will ensure that parents have access to inspection reports, staff qualifications, compliance regulations, and other continuous improvement efforts. The answer is yes. I agree that parents should have access to all relevant information regarding the program so that they can make informed decisions about their child's care and can be an active partner to support the program's continuous improvement efforts.

Operators will be required to prominently post their licence, including any conditions on the licence, monitoring and enforcement documents, and the certification levels of staff. An annual report was an initial suggestion and was replaced with a timelier process of posting relevant and up-to-date information for parents to review.

During our discussions I've stated that the Child Care Licensing Act will allow operators to be innovative and make better use of the spaces that they already have. In some cases this might mean using a space that is licensed for out-of-school care to care for a preschool child when the other child is in school. Will this create potentially unmanageable situations? No. The act is intended to help operators think outside the box and come up with innovative and creative ideas that will ensure that they make the best use of their child care spaces.

Through the consultations on the standards for a new child care regulation, we look forward to hearing from operators and other Albertans to determine what standards need to be in place to support safe, quality programs.

There has also been discussion about the government's plan to monitor family day homes. Family day home standards are set out in policy and included in the contracts between the agency and the child and family service authority. Family day homes are monitored by the agency on a monthly basis.

Questions have also been raised around monitoring programs. To clarify, licensing officers are required to monitor by on-site visits a minimum of four times per year but have the authority to visit programs at any time. If an operator fails to meet the minimum standards set out in the act and regulation, the licensing officer will have a range of enforcement actions available depending on the history, frequency, and severity of the noncompliance. The intent is, where possible, to bring the operation into compliance by providing information on the expectations and helping the operator develop a plan to meet the requirements. However, it is essential to ensure that children are safe, and if necessary licensing officers need the ability to suspend or cancel a licence as a last resort. If children are at risk, a stop order would be issued, which would require the program to close its doors immediately.

When we think of monitoring, we immediately think: what happens if the program does not comply with the act and the regulation? As you know, Alberta is the only province in Canada to offer a province-wide accreditation program for licensed day care centres and contracted family day homes. Child care programs must meet quality standards of excellence to be accredited, and I'm pleased to note that since the accreditation program began in 2004, 30 per cent, or 161, of Alberta's eligible child care programs have achieved this standard of excellence, with many more programs working toward the same goal.

During discussions I've been asked whether I know the current supply and demand for child care in Alberta. We know the number of licensed day care spaces we have in Alberta and how many children are enrolled in these programs, but we need to identify which communities are under the greatest pressure. We are collecting that information right now. Children's Services is surveying all child care operators to find out how many spaces they have, how many are available, and how many are needed to meet the demand.

I've also been asked how the government plans to deal with a determined child care shortage. Our government continues to play a strong leadership role and is working with key stakeholders to identify workable solutions that will best meet the needs of the children and their families. We've just announced increased funding to address staff recruitment and retention issues. This funding is benefiting more than 7,000 child care professionals, and since the introduction of the five-point plan in the fall of 2005, we have seen a 5 per cent reduction in the staff turnover rates in accredited programs.

Increases have also been made to the professional development funding we provide to staff working in licensed day care programs, which is contributing to a skilled workforce. Once we have the information we need to determine the actual demand, we will be in a much better position to plan our next steps. Bill 4 is a step forward when dealing with the shortage of child care spaces because it introduces new categories of programs to increase parental choice and helps existing approved licence holders to have greater flexibility in providing quality child care in both urban and rural settings.

Mr. Speaker, it has also been suggested that government needs to educate families on how best to choose child care. I agree, and in

fact the need to enhance supports for parents is part of Alberta's five-point plan. We recently developed the Choosing Child Care booklet, which I tabled earlier today. This booklet is proving to be a useful tool. We have a parent information line, 1-866-714-KIDS, which is available to answer questions, as well as 45 parent link centres, which are effectively helping parents in many parts of the province.

The Child Care Licensing Act is the first legislation in Alberta to focus solely on child care and provide the framework we need to develop program policies, standards, and procedures that will ensure children and families have access to quality child care in Alberta. I'd ask the entire Assembly to support this important piece of legislation.

Thank you.

5:20

The Speaker: On third reading, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Congratulations to the minister on a progressive bill that I think there are many positive elements to. Essentially, a good bill with a new emphasis on program quality and staff recruitment and retention is very positive news for Albertans given that we are really under the gun in Alberta to find spaces and ensure quality through good monitoring and enforcement of those standards.

I was interested to hear her comments about the existing analysis showing about 30 per cent excellence, and I wondered if she wanted to make any further comments about that. I'm wondering if I heard correctly, what that means, and how soon we'll achieve the standards that we all want.

Some of the questions that have been raised by constituents have to do with that potential conflict where we're having both older children and younger children trying to converge on the same spaces and whether there have been any specific, concrete ideas about how to deal with an overflow at certain times of the day. I'm sure there are some good suggestions there.

I'm also pleased to see the organization of a standing appeal panel. Clearly, parents and in some cases staff and owners need to be able to hash out differences in a way that's constructive and moves the bar upward.

The posting of enforcement measures is also a positive measure, I think, that will help build confidence in Alberta among all stakeholders.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. If the minister wants to comment a little more on the 30 per cent excellence rate, I would be pleased to hear further comments.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 4, Child Care Licensing Act, in its third reading. While speaking on the bill in an earlier state of debate in the House, I did express broad support for the bill. The bill has some very good features. I raised several questions that I thought needed addressing by the minister. The minister in the remarks she just made tried to address some of those questions. I'm certainly pleased with the fact that the minister is quite focused in this legislation and in her attempt to respond to questions and inquiries from this side of the House related to various features and provisions of this bill. That, I think, is encouraging, and I want to certainly express our appreciation to the minister for taking the questions seriously and responding to them.

Mr. Speaker, child care, the quality of child care and the provision of child care, is exceedingly important given the labour market situation in the province, given the desire of parents of young children to enter the labour market, and given the research information that we have available, which speaks strongly about the importance of early childhood experiences focused on development of children in child care facilities, how it contributes to their growth, development, and developmental competencies that later become very critical with respect to the degree of success that they have in educational experiences and, subsequent to that, as they become adults and move toward becoming full participants in the affairs of our society, be they political, economic, social, community related, what have you. It is, I think, a bill that does to a degree draw attention to the need for changing the quality of daycare and the scope of daycare to include developmental needs of very young children. That's one of the most positive features of it.

It also provides for experiment with some innovative programs that may be created, particularly, I think, in rural communities where the numbers are relatively small. It's very difficult for parents to drive these very young children to daycare facilities that may be in neighbouring towns or whatever, to develop programs that are innovative and address the needs of children growing up in smaller and rural communities in a situation where parents of such children may want to take advantage of the employment opportunities and labour market entry that they may desire for themselves. It remains to be seen, I think, what kind of innovative programs do arise. I think they will need some direction and, certainly, close monitoring to see that these innovative programs do in fact innovate in a way that best serves the needs of the children as defined in terms of the importance of developmental experiences, their security and safety in these facilities and programs.

The bill does pay, I think, more attention than was previously the case on both compliance and monitoring of the daycare facilities, monitoring of the quality of daycare, the compliance with standards. The minister does concede, of course, that we have a long way to go with respect to making sure that all the daycare facilities in the province, at least the vast majority of them, are fully accredited facilities and that the parents who choose to send their children to daycare do in fact have the assurance that the facilities that they're sending their children to are indeed accredited, and therefore they can expect quality daycare for their children once they enter these institutions or enterprises.

We have only about 31 per cent of daycare facilities that currently are accredited. There are close to 70 per cent that have some way to go before they will meet the accreditation standards and requirements that the daycare legislation and regulations will expect these facilities to meet, so we have a long way to go. We have a lot hanging in the balance with respect to making sure that the quality of daycare that's provided to our children is up to par. It is the quality of experience at this stage in the lives of our children that will I think mean a great deal in later years with respect to the extent to which our children grow up as healthy and competent individuals.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments I'm happy to extend our support to the bill. I thank the minister for the questions that I had raised that she has tried to answer. We will wait and see as the budget comes down, on April 19 to be exact, if the provisions in this bill with respect to ensuring quality daycare are in fact supported by resources and commitment of resources on the part of this government.

With that, I close my comments on Bill 4 in its third reading. Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if there are questions.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, then, to participate in third reading.

5:30

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to take a few minutes to speak to Bill 4, Child Care Licensing Act, in third reading. I would like to first thank the Minister of Children's Services, the Member for Banff-Cochrane, for bringing this remarkable legislation forward. I would also like to thank the Member for Calgary-Fort for the work that he and his committee did during the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act review. Bill 4 will ensure that parents have access to quality, affordable child care options.

Child care facilities are currently licensed under the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act. This act covers all facilities, including those for adults and children, and being more than 20 years old, it needs to be updated. Rather than amending outdated legislation that licenses programs focused on its facilities, Bill 4 is designed specifically for Alberta's children. It is the first legislation in Alberta to focus solely on child care. This innovative legislation builds on our government's commitment to continue to support and create quality child care programs and will help respond to the rather complex child care needs of modern-day families.

Mr. Speaker, the child care needs of modern-day families have changed significantly. There was a time when families had the privilege of having one parent stay home to perform the most important job a parent has, which is to raise their children.

In today's world there are many reasons why a family needs to have access to quality, affordable, child care options. My daughter, a single parent, is completing her education in the bachelor of nursing program at Red Deer College, and the choice of placing her child, my granddaughter, in a day home was a difficult decision for all of us. I would however like to express my deepest and sincerest thanks to the three day home providers who looked after my granddaughter in the past five years. The love and care that she received was exceptional. If this kind of care is an example of the care that Alberta's children are receiving in daycare and day homes, then our children are in good hands. Bill 4, the Child Care Licensing Act, increases the opportunities for this kind of quality, affordable care.

When passed, the Child Care Licensing Act would encourage innovative approaches to create new child care programs while placing a priority on the safety of the children. Bill 4 will also provide for effective monitoring to ensure that operations comply with the act.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, this is very good legislation. I ask that all members support Bill 4, which demonstrates our government's commitment to building a quality child care system that will lead to better outcomes for our children.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will just be brief. I wanted to add my support to the passing of this bill and, again, as my other colleague has mentioned, congratulations to the minister for bringing this forward. It is absolutely imperative that we look after the children in this province because, from a very selfish point of view,

they're the ones that are going to be looking after me when I'm in the nursing home. So I want them well educated.

Another thing that I would like to point out is: thank you to the minister for working with our very hard-working shadow minister from Mill Woods. She is a very, very passionate advocate for children and has worked with the other side to put her voice into the things that she believes are necessary.

One of the things that I think is truly most important is the fact that we need the spaces. I'm thrilled with the accreditation, and I'm even more thrilled with the fact that you're using the word "enforcement." It's like music to my ears because coming out of the long-term care, where I want enforcement, it's wonderful to hear that sort of thinking coming forward.

The area that I'm concerned about, too, is the low economic strata. There are many parents working two and three jobs, and it's these children that we have to worry about, that they manage to get into good child development spaces because often they do miss out. They miss out on sports, they miss out on arts, and they certainly miss out on that extra little academic advantage that they take into kindergarten or grade 1 with them.

We were speaking about the rural spaces and how difficult it is to get them. One of the things that I would like to perhaps see is some sort of distance learning development program that could go into rural areas. That would help perhaps not someone that necessarily had a degree in education but certainly somebody that would have enough education that they could work with a long-distance development program.

Again, I would just like to say thank you to the minister. We'll see how far this is going to go with the budget, but I have some very good hopes. So thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

There being none, the minister to close debate.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to all of the hon. members, including the Official Opposition, for both your understanding and overwhelming support for Bill 4.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a third time]

head:

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading
(continued)

Bill 16
Police Amendment Act, 2007

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand this afternoon to move second reading of Bill 16, Police Amendment Act, 2007.

This proposed legislation will allow the establishment of a provincial body to investigate police when someone has been seriously injured or dies as a direct result of the actions of police officers. This team would also investigate highly sensitive or serious matters involving police. The director of this team will be a civilian.

Mr. Speaker, there is no question that police officers in our province do an outstanding job every day protecting Albertans and keeping our communities safe. Maintaining transparency, account-

ability, and the public trust are key to the work done on a daily basis by our men and women in uniform. The proposed investigative body would help ensure that those factors are also part of investigations into allegations of police misconduct. They will continue to consult with police agencies and police governance bodies to establish the mandate and operational model for this new team.

This isn't a new concept in many jurisdictions. We have reviewed similar agencies across the country and around the world and have taken their best practices to develop a model we think will work for Albertans.

The other proposed amendment will give the province the option to take over responsibility for lock-up facilities from municipal police forces. Alberta correctional officers or Alberta sheriffs could be used to operate these facilities. The transfer of responsibility could be an opportunity to make more police officers available for front-line duties.

Mr. Speaker, a key mandate of our new government is to be open, accountable, and transparent. This proposed legislation will supplement that mandate and ensure that Alberta remains the best place to live, work, and visit.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 16.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 7

Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007

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

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and move second reading of Bill 7, Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007.

I'd like to point out that all vocational training programs offered in the province by private institutions are required to be licensed under the Private Vocational Schools Act, and Bill 7 deals with amendments to this act. As such, all licensees were consulted regarding the amendments included in this bill.

These changes to the Private Vocational Schools Act are designed to enhance consumer protection and update the act so that it is more reflective of the current environment surrounding the licensing of vocational training.

5:40

To begin, the amendments included in Bill 7 change the name of the Private Vocational Schools Act to Private Vocational Training Act, and the title of the director is changed from the director of private vocational schools to director of private vocational training. This is being done to reflect that it is vocational training programs and not institutions that are licensed. Amendments included in the bill remove the provision for licences to be categorized as class A or class B based on the program's performance outcomes. From a consumer point of view, students will be better protected if programs are either licensed or not licensed rather than designating a program as class B when performance outcomes are problematic.

Today it is common for licensees to request cancellation of vocational training program licences, but there is no mechanism in the Private Vocational Schools Act to accommodate these requests at present. A licence can only be cancelled under certain circumstances upon giving the licensee 30 days' notice. Amendments included in Bill 7 provide a mechanism whereby licences can be cancelled upon the request of a licensee, subject of course to all of the licensee's obligations to students being fulfilled.

Amendments also included in Bill 7 remove the requirement that licences be renewed every two years. Removal of the administrative burden of renewing licences for over 700 programs every two years will improve administration. Programs will continue to be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure compliance.

Finally, Bill 7 also includes changes that update the act through the revision of wording used in reference to the information that is set out on licences, the manner in which notices of licence, cancellations, or suspensions are provided to students, and the manner in which notices under the act are served.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to make a few brief comments about Bill 7, the Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007. This bill impacts some 140 private vocational schools in this province offering hundreds of training programs from accountancy to hairdressing. Bill 7 changes the licensing procedure for private vocational programs, eliminating different classes of licence and switching from biennial renewals of licences to ongoing monitoring.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, I believe this bill is worthy of support. However, some clarification of the government's intentions over the new regulations is required. I expect that we will get some answers for our questions when the bill enters the committee stage. The message we had from the minister was that this was a housekeeping bill changing the wording of the legislation to reflect current practices. That does indeed seem to be the case, but those of us in opposition are always a little suspicious when a bill is pawned off as being housekeeping. Sometimes that's just another term for sweeping things under the rug, so we always have to be alert to these things.

An Hon. Member: Oh, no. Say it isn't so.

Mr. Tougas: It could happen. It's been known to happen.

The intent of Bill 7 appears to be quite straightforward. It is aimed at the removal of the licence classes, which eliminates the current situation of what you might call the second-class institutions. It also, from what we can see, slightly weakens what private institutions must do if a program is found to be unsatisfactory by the ministry.

As it stands, the legislation limits licences to two years in duration. The renewal process for these licences means, at least in theory, that every two years the program is re-evaluated by the director or minister, and this should ensure that standards do not slip. The proposed change suggests a rolling, constant evaluation.

The mechanics of this are somewhat unclear. It places more control in the director's hands, and they are no longer mandated to issue any extension. It appears that once they get their licence, they can go for some time without a formal review of any sort, just a rolling review. I'm not sure if this is exactly the case, but when we get to committee, I will be asking the sponsor of this bill for some clarification on this matter.

With regard to the areas changed by this legislation, currently there are two classes of licence for private vocational schools. A class A licence means a licence that authorizes the licensee to provide the vocational training specified on the licence and signifies that the programs are new or the programs have a student graduation rate and employment placement rate that are satisfactory to the director. A class B licence means a licence that authorizes the

licensee to provide the vocational training specified on the licence and signifies that the programs do not have a student graduation rate and employment placement rate that are satisfactory to the director or the director is unable to form an opinion about the student graduation rate or the employment placement rate in respect of these programs. At this point a program can have, as I understand it, an unsatisfactory graduation and employment placement rate yet still have a licence to provide vocational training. This bill would remove that distinction and put all the vocational schools on equal footing. My one concern is the process of evaluating these institutions, and hopefully in committee we can get into some depth regarding that process.

Also currently in place is a term limit for licences of two years. After that time they need to be renewed in the current system. This provides some impetus for oversight by the director, but it doesn't guarantee it. The renewal process is not at all complex. As long as the director is satisfied that the licensee is in accordance with the act and regulations, then the licence is renewed. Yet again it appears that the bill is simply putting into law what has already been done in practice.

My concerns are that students who are paying for these classes get maximum value for their education dollar. While it makes sense that there will no longer be a class A or class B school, we need to be vigilant that very strict standards are being applied to all institutions and that the government is adequately watching over these institutions.

So until we meet again in committee, that's all I have at this time.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) any comments or questions?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 7, Private Vocational Schools Amendment Act, 2007. Let me say at the very outset that the private vocational schools in this province, most of them, happen to be not only private but private, for-profit. In my experience with this particular segment of our postsecondary system this segment is highly problematic from the point of student experience, the standards to be maintained, monitoring of the quality of the programs that may be available. So this bill, really, in my view, doesn't address the core issues that need to be addressed, and I was hoping that any initiative in the form of a piece of legislation dealing with these private vocational schools would in fact address the core issues.

In my view the major problems with our private vocational school sector – the problems are systemic to this sector – include: no independent oversight, nonexistent enforcement, payment and refund policies heavily slanted against the student and towards the institution, complete lack of transparency around tuition and other fees for instructional materials, poor quality of instruction, substandard equipment and facilities, almost laughable complaint and appeal procedures, and routine violation and denial of students' individual and collective rights.

These being, in my view, the core problems, the bill really skirts all of these issues and simply engages in some sort of minor definitional tinkering. The bill amends the Private Vocational Schools Act in three ways: by changing the name to Private Vocational Training Act, by reducing the number of licence categories from two to one – and I'll speak to this later – and finally by taking away the two-year time restrictions of any issued licences.

The category A licences are new programs or they have graduation rates deemed satisfactory. Category B licences are ones with below satisfactory graduation rates or programs where the gradua

tion rate is deemed irrelevant. The new act for some reason merges the two categories into a single licence. Additionally, licences under the old act were valid for two years. Bill 7 takes off the two-year restriction.

5:50

Considering that the government has not put a set of quality criteria on private vocational schools' education, this suspension of the two-year licence requirement in my view is a loosening of the already very poor enforcement standards. If the two-year licence is to be removed, then the ministry has to ensure that the private vocational schools are inspected regularly to ensure that education standards are being met on a continuing basis. So not only are inspections needed, but before that the standards have to be established, Mr. Speaker.

The merging of class A and class B licences combined with the removal of a two-year limitation on licences represents a downgrading of enforcement and oversight at private vocational schools. Although the ministry promises continued oversight of the sector, the current changes fly in the face of the argument. That is so because graduation rates – that is what separates class A from class B licences – and regular relicensing, which ensures that standards are maintained, represent a part of the oversight procedure. They also happen to be two criteria being removed from the act and its regulations. So there's no clear indication of what sort of oversight will take place.

Additionally, certainly, our caucus and I personally, representing the caucus, have had to deal with complaints stemming from poor management of vocational schools. In 2005 the ministry had to deal with a complaint about the private school CCII that dealt with excessive grant funding from the government, falsification of attendance records, course quality dilution, and misrepresenting course hours, et cetera. The school was assessed for penalties in excess of \$50,000, but the ministry was not able to collect more than \$29,000 from the school.

The questions that I think need to be addressed by this House really are: what kind of oversight is taking place right now within the ministry to ensure that these problems do not pop up regularly? How many private vocational schools have been audited/investigated by the ministry in the last four years? How often does the ministry review the 140-odd private vocational schools to ensure compliance of regulations?

The 2005-2006 report stated that – I'll make a reference to the exact nature of this report, Mr. Speaker, in a moment, but let me complete this observation. This particular statement, which I think is the department annual financial statement on this, stated that \$87,000 had been granted to Columbia College. That is a private vocational school. We don't know how much money has been given to private vocational schools in the 2006-2007 year. Will the hon. member check into this and maybe address the question of how these funds got allocated to the private, for-profit schools?

Will the director of the private institutions branch – is that what it is? – be checking vocational schools on an annual basis within the regulations to ensure that the minimum licensing criteria are being fulfilled?

Mr. Speaker, a few other observations here. I have before me a document which was a formal complaint lodged by a group of students who went to the Canadian College International Institute,

presumably a private, not-for-profit school for adult students, accredited by Alberta Learning and funded by the former department of Alberta human resources and employment. The sort of internal audit that was ordered by the then department of Alberta human resources and employment came up with all kinds of very serious problems with this particular institution and corroborated the substance of the complaint that was lodged with the department by the aggrieved students.

Yet it seems that there is no intention in the proposed legislation or in changes in regulations that would suggest that the government takes these problems very seriously in this private, for-profit sector and is willing and able to deal with them by way of changes in policy, by changes in regulations, or by, in fact, putting some of these changes in firm legislative language so that enforcement and monitoring of standards are addressed in a way satisfactory to all of us and, certainly, to protect the interests of students who go to these private institutions.

Mr. Speaker, the annual report from which I made a reference to Columbia College and the money that was received was an Alberta advanced education annual report, 2005-06. There's no explanation of what this money is about.

Mr. Speaker, having two categories of licences was in some ways an escape clause. You know, if an institution didn't perform up to some minimum standards with respect to graduation rates or employment placement rates, it was downgraded to B, sort of a conditional licence. It still didn't really solve the problem because much of the reporting that was done to PIB on the meeting of the standards was done exclusively by the institutions themselves, institutions against which we have heard complaints from students with respect to how unsatisfactory they found both their educational experience and the quality of the physical infrastructure and the lab facilities that they were supposed to use in order to learn the skills and competencies based on which they were going to be later on licensed.

With no independent oversight to determine the veracity or accuracy of these reports on graduation and employment placement rates, it was a joke. There was no way that the PIB, which is the private institution branch, could really have an independent source of assessing claims made by these institutions.

I think this bill really does not in my view deal with the real issues pertaining to what needs to be done to ensure that this private sector in the postsecondary education system is accountable in a transparent way both to the students who use these facilities and to the private institution branch of the department of advanced education, that has the formal responsibility of ensuring that these institutions meet licensing and standards requirements.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to close by simply saying that I have very serious reservations about the ways in which this proposed bill falls short of meeting even halfway the kind of things that need to be done in order to fix the problems in this system. Certainly, as we proceed through the various stages of debate on this bill, we'll have the opportunity to . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, from the chair's vantage point it is 6 o'clock. The House stands adjourned until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

