

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, April 12, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/04/12

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the Hon. Tom Osborne, Member for St. John's South. Minister Osborne was recently appointed on January 19, 2007, as the Minister of Justice for Newfoundland and Labrador. However, he was first elected in the general election of 1996 and is very familiar with two of the members of the Assembly as a result of previous posts as minister of environment and minister of health. He did want me to acknowledge his friendship with the members for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and Sherwood Park. With the hon. Mr. Osborne in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, is his friend Don Tapper, who is also from Newfoundland. I would ask both of them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a delegation of members of the Provincial Legislature of Mpumalanga, South Africa, led by Ms Nomsa Mtsweni. The delegation represents almost one-third of the entire 30-member Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature. The purpose of their visit is to learn about how our province encourages and engages the public in policy development, Alberta programs and policies related to people with disabilities, and issues affecting women and children. Alberta and Mpumalanga have enjoyed a twin province relationship since 1996. Our close ties with Mpumalanga focus on legislative co-operation, governance, and building democratic institutions.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask our honoured guests as I introduce them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: the hon. Nomsa Sanny Mtsweni, leader of the delegation; the hon. Boy Johannes Nobunga, who is also the Deputy Speaker; the hon. Mr. David Sunnyboy Mkhwanazi; the hon. Ms Refilwe Caroline Mahlobogoane; the hon. Ms Gelani Sariana Sindane; the hon. Ms Phumuzile Catherine Ngwenya; the hon. Mr. Sidney Norman Sikhosana; the hon. Ms Tapelo Dorothy Chiloane; Ms Eggy Flora Thabane; Ms Nompumelelo Millicent Sibiya. The hon. members have now risen. I'd ask the members of this Assembly to kindly accord them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through to the Assembly members 21 folks from our communications departments of the various government departments. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker – and you

probably know – that the people in my department probably qualify for danger pay. But today they're here to tour the Legislature and watch question period. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm reception from the House.

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

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm interested and excited that members of my constituency have actually come in here today to observe the proceedings because they've enjoyed so much some of the media reports about all of our activities of late. May I take the opportunity to introduce Dave and Fiona Quest, Bob Preston, Rick MacDonald, John McLennon, Ingrid Piecha, Dianne Duke, Bill and Irma Chow, Allen Wells, Brian Wik, Veronica Pifko, Suzanne Taylor, and I believe that Leona and Vern Hartwell – Vern is no stranger to this Assembly – Noreen Robertson, Marcie Konkin, Maxine Kolodychuck, Ivy Walton, Rick Komarniski, Marcia Tyerman, Carol Lesniak, Joyce Perkins, Noreen Roberts, Dianne Balon, and Thomas Lo are with us. If they would please rise and we could give them a warm welcome as they observe our proceedings here today.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure if my guest has arrived yet or not, but I will take the opportunity to introduce him in any event and put it on the record. I would like to introduce a constituent of mine, a good friend who also heads up Boyden Global Executive Search, Mr. Brent Shervy. I'm not sure if he's in the gallery or not.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 21 bright students and seven teachers and parents from the Evansview school in Evansburg. Please join me in welcoming them to the Assembly.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour and a privilege for me to stand and introduce to you and through you to the Assembly over 60 concerned citizens from this region concerned with responsible land use and protection of our water and the preservation of all we have in Alberta for future generations. I would ask them to stand as I introduce their leaders, and then I'll have them all stand at the end.

Concerned citizens of Thorhild, represented by Cori Kuzyk; concerned citizens for responsible development in heartland, Sturgeon county, Anne Brown; concerned citizens of Round Hill and Beaver county, concerned about the Sherritt project, Clayton Maurer; concerned citizens of Onoway River Valley Conservation Association, Ian Skinner, Mike Northcott; and concerned citizens of Marie Lake, Chris Goss; Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Edmonton chapter, Richard Schneider; Toxics Watch Society of Alberta, Conrad Nobert; and Council of Canadians, Lyn Gorman. Could I have all the citizens stand up and be recognized by the Assembly.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly Leslie Clark. Leslie has successfully completed her first year of the social work program at

Grant MacEwan College. I've had the pleasure of Leslie joining my constituency team in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview as a practicum student this year. She has worked with youth at risk for the last five years. Her passions include travelling, and she hopes to one day focus her skills towards the area of international social work. It's been wonderful having Leslie in our office. Her enthusiasm and dedication to the constituents of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview are much appreciated. I would now ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure and I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 60 students from the grade 6 classes at Kildare elementary school in my riding of Edmonton-Manning. Now, Kildare is an excellent school, well established in the community. The professionals there believe that all students should experience success and become independent learners and responsible citizens. There are excellent Mandarin programs there. It's a school that is really tremendously successful. They are accompanied today by two teachers, Ms Shih and Mr. Butlin. They're seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: 1:10

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Tribute to the Hon. Ken Kowalski 10th Anniversary as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to rise because I have the privilege of acknowledging the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. This Saturday, April 14, 2007, will represent your 10th anniversary as Speaker of this House.

Your commitment to this province is exceptional. You have performed all of your duties with great diligence, class, and integrity, from your beginnings as a high school teacher advocating for the first French immersion program in Barrhead to serving your constituency as an elected member of this Assembly since 1979. Throughout your tenure you have had the honour of serving under four Premiers. You have held distinguished cabinet positions, served as Government House Leader and Deputy Premier. As Speaker of this House you have served as chairman of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, and you have been an integral part of many other committees, of which there are too many to list here this afternoon. At least, time would not permit.

You have worked on both the national and international stages. You are one of 12 Canadian signatories to the environmental and sustainable development documents that were ultimately endorsed by the United Nations Assembly. As well, you were Alberta's signatory to the volunteer exchange agreement between the province of Alberta and Hokkaido, Japan.

Mr. Speaker, you have set a very high standard for all of us to follow, and all of the members and staff appreciate the tremendous services you have carried out in this Legislature. You have had one of Alberta's most distinguished public careers, and you have received many accolades, but there is perhaps one honour that truly represents your personal character. That is the title of honorary chief bestowed upon you by the Alexis First Nation, Wa-she-zu-Chadao-sheqe-na, which means, if I pronounced it properly, White Man with a Kind Heart.

On behalf of all your colleagues, friends, family, and Albertans past and present, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and congratulations again on your 10th anniversary of being our 11th Speaker. With the unanimous consent of the Assembly, I would presume, I could finish by also saying: the longest serving Speaker in our nation. [applause]

The Speaker: Well, thank you very much. That was very kind. I would be remiss, though, if I didn't draw to the attention of all members of the Assembly that the hon. Deputy Speaker violated the Standing Orders by going beyond the length. Thank you all very much for your kindness and your support.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Community Development Master Agreement

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise today to make a very historic announcement on the signing yesterday at the Yellowhead county office in Edson of the community development master agreement by the town of Edson, the town of Hinton, and the Yellowhead county along with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

All three municipalities are under a lot of pressure to accommodate the unprecedented economic upswing caused by the oil and gas industry as well as other industries. The extra costs are felt in the following areas: increased policing; pressure on planning and development; demand for increased infrastructure to accommodate growth, be it roads, recreation, or water and sewer; in employment; and housing gaps.

Yellowhead county has benefited from Alberta's recent growth, and the county recognized the needs for all three municipalities to fully capitalize on the opportunity offered in the strong economic climate. For that reason the Yellowhead county unanimously agreed to contribute \$500,000 unconditional grants to Edson and Hinton for five years to help with some of the issues caused by the rapid growth economy. The amount is based on the county's 2007 industrial assessment and will be adjusted up or down, based on annual review. This does not include the county's recent cost-sharing agreement now in place.

According to the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability report "development in any municipality should not unduly impact neighbouring municipalities, either financially or from a quality of life perspective." Yellowhead county subscribes to this benefit, and I know that our Municipal Affairs and Housing minister was very pleased with this agreement as it met one of his conditions in the mandate letter. Our Municipal Affairs and Housing minister stated that we're all one big community.

Please join me in congratulating Reeve Jack Williams and his Yellowhead county council, Mayor Greg Pasychny, and the town of Edson . . .

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

Harold Gibson

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today before this Assembly to remember a friend of mine and a great Albertan. On April 9, 2007, Mr. Harold Gibson of Sangudo passed away.

Mr. Gibson was an active member of the community. Through service to organizations such as the Lac Ste. Anne county rec board and the Ste. Anne Natural Gas Co-op, Mr. Gibson vastly improved the lives of those around him. During his 26-year tenure on the Ste. Anne Natural Gas Co-op and nine-year term as a member of the Federation of Alberta Gas Co-ops, Mr. Gibson lent his expertise and good sense to many projects which directly benefited the community.

Throughout his life Harold was involved in many other projects in the community. He sat on the Safety Codes Council for eight years and was a presiding officer for the gas utility operator program at NAIT for the past four years.

Harold also served as a councillor in Lac Ste. Anne county for 12 years. He spent his time serving on many committees and working diligently to strengthen the communities within the county.

I will always remember Harold for his hard work as a dedicated individual. He was meticulous, thoughtful, and caring. The loss of Harold Gibson is truly a loss for the people of Whitecourt-St. Anne and, indeed, for the people of Alberta.

A service will be held tomorrow, Friday, April 13, at 2 p.m. at the Legion hall in Sangudo. Harold will be sadly missed by the members of his family and of his community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Bob Maskell

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are few things in life I do not like. The first is tofu. No matter what I do to it and no matter how much I try to like it, I just can't.

The second thing I do not like, Mr. Speaker, are people who besmirch other honest people hoping to gain petty political mileage. This is not even to mention the people who can stand up in this House and talk about Albertans, good Albertans, who cannot reply to them face to face.

Mr. Speaker, I believe a man's name and integrity are worth more than partisan politics. That is why today I want to talk about someone who I feel is an outstanding citizen, who cannot defend himself in this House.

When I asked Mr. Bob Maskell to carry out the duties of the chair of my past department's Aboriginal Festivities Committee in 2005, he indicated that he would accept this responsibility prior to the election of 2004. When he lost his seat in the election in November, I felt that he should continue with this role as he was the best candidate to further the work needed to ensure that aboriginal Albertans would be involved in Alberta's centennial activities.

The board needed continuity in its planning. Mr. Maskell offered valuable resources as someone who had history, prior commitment, and knowledge of aboriginal people, much as the people who sometimes speak about aboriginal people don't. More importantly, he showed his ability to truly connect with the aboriginal community.

Mr. Speaker, he was also a great planner, a great organizer, and an avid educator, with 30 years' experience in education, arts, and the public sector. He has done a variety of committee work developing education and cultural ties with Alberta's partners. These are qualities we needed; therefore, he was selected for this position. He not only raised the profile of aboriginal people with nonaboriginal people. He also corrected some historical wrongs according to many aboriginal elders, and he did everything with respect and grace, something we value. I believe his involvement with the committee was a great contribution to the overwhelming involvement of many aboriginal people in the province's centennial celebrations.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say thank you to Mr. Bob Maskell.

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

1:20 Environmental Sustainability

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These are exciting and dangerous times in Alberta. They bring to mind the ancient wisdom

of the Bible that without a vision, the people perish. The lack of vision, planning, and strong leadership in Alberta is coming home to roost in a growing environmental debt.

Approvals for all manner of developments have reached an all-time high in the face of a pitifully funded Department of Environment. There's also a growing public agitation based on good evidence that this government is willing to sacrifice the proverbial golden goose, our environment, for higher GDP.

Fort McMurray is the most glaring example of irresponsible development. Both its pace and scope disregard collateral damage to people in the ecosystem, threatening our collective future. When will we see cumulative impact assessment and recognition of limits in this beleaguered region? Other examples include unmonitored groundwater impacts from coal-bed methane in southern Alberta, an overstretched South Saskatchewan River basin pushing water transfers to Calgary from the Red Deer River, extensive loss of prime agricultural land in the Edmonton area, and growing threats along the eastern slopes to the water towers of the province, our lifeblood.

The implications of this unmanaged growth, particularly with the stark realities of climate change crashing down upon us, are extremely unsettling to conscious, moral Albertans. Regrettably, no climate change leadership is to be found in this government, and in denial our short-term course careens towards even greater dependence on fossil fuels. For the Alberta government the market is the unquestioned determinant of progress. If, as the Premier has stated, we cannot touch the brake, then it's time to change the government.

We believe on this side that the economy is there, rather, to support and sustain people and the environment. We understand the difference between responsible and irresponsible development. Without a land-use plan, objective science on environmental impacts, and meaningful public consultation, we cannot have genuine progress and healthy communities.

In this precarious time of short-term wealth lies the Alberta opportunity for a sustainable economy based fundamentally on environmental stewardship and human security. The Alberta Liberals have both the vision and a plan.

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

Vaisakhi 2007

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The festival of Vaisakhi is one of the most important in the Indian calendar. I want this House to know that the importance of Vaisakhi is recognized by not only the Sikhs but all Indians. It has cultural, historical, and religious significance.

Vaisakhi is culturally significant because it's the end of the winter harvest in north India and signals prosperity. Farmers are able to pay off their debts and pay for their children's education, weddings, et cetera. Folks celebrate their good fortune in festivals in every major community. Songs, good food, wine, and dance are the order of the day. Everyone gets together in their community to celebrate the fruits of their labour over the past year.

Vaisakhi, also known as Khalsa day, has the most significance for Sikhs. Akhand Path, a three-day nonstop reading of the Sikh scriptures, is held in Sikh temples in every Sikh community in the world. This was the day when the 10th prophet, guru Gobind Singh, transformed Sikhism into a militant fraternity dedicated to the path of righteousness and good to prevail over tyranny and evil.

Vaisakhi reminds us of our mission and responsibilities toward society: upholding the dignity, honour, and rights of all people. We pay tribute to our gurus and all the Sikh martyrs who laid down their

lives for the principle of Sikhism: truth, justice, equality, the fight against oppression and, of course, the evil caste system in India.

Thank you.

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

Betty Mardiros

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last month Alberta lost one of the pillars of its progressive community. On Friday, March 30, Betty Mardiros passed away at the age of 84. She was an active member of the CCF, attended the founding convention of the New Democratic Party in 1961, and was one of the founding members of the Woodsworth-Irvine Socialist Fellowship.

She and her husband, Tony, were close friends of Alberta CCF Member of Parliament Bill Irvine. She remained inspired and motivated by the original principles of the British Labour Party. Labour MP Tony Benn remained a constant inspiration for her.

I had the pleasure of knowing Betty through her involvement with the Edmonton Voters' Association. Some of my fondest times with Betty were after meetings at her home, when she'd invite some folks back to her library for a glass of red wine and a sometimes heated discussion of politics. Upstairs Betty and her husband, Tony, kept a gracious home, but down the stairs the family room was converted into a meeting room, with a table at the front and rows of chairs and posters from the British Labour Party on the walls. An old Gestetner machine for producing petitions and pamphlets was in the furnace room.

Betty was a tireless activist and a campaigner for a better world. She spent her entire life as an active participant, leader, and organizer of campaigns for peace, public medicare, women's rights, and democracy. She was a founder of Edmonton's Raging Grannies, a group well known to former Premier Klein and the members opposite. Betty left an indelible mark on our political landscape. It will not be the same without her, but her legacy will live on with the progressive groups she helped found, including organizations like the Raging Grannies, the Parkland Institute, and the Woodsworth-Irvine Socialist Fellowship.

Betty's last performance with the Grannies was at a tea at the palliative care unit of the Edmonton General hospital. She joined the group to sing one of their favourite songs, a version of *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* that included the lyrics: "Inch by inch, row by row, we want to see all grandkids grow. Day by day we'll never cease, till we have this world at peace."

Betty will be missed, but her dream of a better world will be carried forward by everyone who has been touched by her energy and her passion.

Thank you.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to a question raised in the House yesterday by the Member for Calgary-Varsity, I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of the collision history on highway 63 for the past five years. The document shows that the five-year collision rates on highway 63 from south of the city limits of Fort McMurray to the junction of highway 55 are significantly lower than the provincial average, yet one accident or one death on any road is one too many.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have eight letters to table today. The first is from Sarah Leete of Cochrane to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development urging him to stop the planned clear-cutting in Sibbald Flats and west Bragg Creek area because she has witnessed the results of the degradation caused some 20 years ago and feels that selective logging is the correct action to take.

The second is from Doug McKeague, again to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, also objecting to the planned clear-cutting in Kananaskis Country and urging the minister to consider the needs and desires of the people and communities as central to policy consideration, not industrial economics.

I have a letter from John Parkin of Calgary and one from Gerry McCuaig of Calgary, who both work in the oil and gas industry. Both are disturbed about proposed clear-cutting in Kananaskis Country and say that recreational economic value is very important to the proposed clear-cutting areas.

I also have a letter from Charles Northup. He writes to register his opposition to logging in the west Bragg Creek area.

Shawn Zwierzchowski, Vanessa Vallis, and Dale D'Silva also want their concerns about proposed clear-cutting registered, specifying impacts on water quality, habitat degradation, and damage to recreation and tourism industries among other concerns.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings here today. One is a letter from two constituents of Edmonton-Manning, Rick and JoAnn Gravestock, outlining how JoAnn lost her job at a restaurant to a temporary foreign worker.

The other is from a group of Albertans asking this Legislative Assembly to support that the accused killer of Joshua Hunt be tried as an adult due to the nature of his crime, his past criminal history, and that he is close to 18 years of age.

Thank you.

The Clerk: Oral Question Period.

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. [interjection] Well, the rules say 1:30, question period. We'll come back to this part of the Routine after.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

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

Poverty

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans care about each other. They recognize that we're all in this together. The Canada West Foundation last year found that 65 per cent of Albertans felt that reducing poverty should be a high government priority. The Alberta Liberals agree. Yet a report released today by the Edmonton planning council found that there are enough Edmontonians living in poverty to fill the entire cities of both Red Deer and Lethbridge combined. To the Premier: will the Premier admit that his government is out of step with the priorities of Albertans when it comes to addressing poverty?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government has listened very closely to Albertans. Our five priorities are built on what Albertans

have told us. One of the most important priorities, of course, is quality of life for all Albertans, and we're working very diligently on that priority.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's income support programs are failing. Only 30 per cent of low-income families on income support ever get out of poverty. This government's programs are a poverty trap. They are not a hand up, and they aren't even a tolerable handout. In the richest province in this country this government shows the least concern for single parents. To the Premier: what will it take for this government to finally take action and address its shockingly low levels of support for single parents and their children?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we took action in this area many years ago by increasing considerably the tax exemptions for low-income earners. I think we have the largest exemption of any province in Canada.

The other is that it's not only supporting families; it's also giving the skills and the opportunity to participate in the job opportunities available to them in this province. That's another goal of ours: to upgrade their skills so that they can feel positive about their contribution to the province.

Dr. Taft: Seventy per cent of those people never get out of poverty, Mr. Speaker.

Today's report from the Edmonton Social Planning Council shows that families with children living on social assistance today survive, if you can call it that, on government support worth half of what they received 25 years ago. This is shameful. Children don't deserve to be poor. Not one child in Alberta should live in poverty. While this government pays the contract of a defeated Tory MLA, it expects a single parent with a child to live on little more than a thousand dollars a month. To the Premier: how does this government tolerate thousands of children in Alberta living in such poverty?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister responsible will inform the House and, obviously, the opposition in terms of the size and the number of programs we have for those requiring assistance.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, you know, it's ludicrous that in a province that has a Ministry of Children's Services, that provides more for children in this country than any other place, the opposition, who know full well that we have subsidies – and if my colleague were here, relative to child benefits she would talk about it.

But I could also point out, Mr. Speaker, that in 2006-07 – and we share responsibility on health benefits for mothers and children – we spent \$637 million on program planning and delivery, employment and training, health benefits, and income supports.

Government Contracting Policies

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has dismissed the contract awarded to Bob Maskell as a problem of perception. It isn't perception at fault when Kelley Charlebois gets hundreds of thousands of dollars to chat with ministers, it isn't perception at fault when Rod Love gets similarly paid for no measurable results, and it isn't perception at fault when a minister personally interferes to find a job for a defeated Tory colleague and the contract is then back-dated two months. The problem is the culture of entitlement festering in this government. To the Premier: will the Premier

finally admit what everybody knows, that Mr. Maskell's appointment was a clear abuse of ministerial power?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I talked about privileges extended to members in this House. Clearly, this member again broke the rules yesterday by misleading this House in terms of the 50 hours' billing. That was of course explained yesterday and today, and I take exception to the constant innuendo raised by the Leader of the Opposition in this regard.

The Speaker: We have a notice of a point of order. I presume it's on the phraseology: clearly misled.

The second supplemental. The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One serious problem with these kinds of patronage contracts is that they place senior bureaucrats and civil servants in a bind. Should they speak out against this kind of ministerial request? Will they lose their jobs if they do so? Should they just give in to the minister's demands? What is a public-minded individual to do? To the Premier: will the Premier table whistle-blower legislation so that people can safely come forward when they witness wrongdoing without fear of losing their job?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I have a tremendous amount of respect for the civil servants of this province. In fact, in my inaugural speech I paid tribute to them. All government members respect the excellent service provided. And besides, you know, the hon. leader at one time was employed by the government.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, there is a wider concern here. This Conservative government with this Premier at the table has a clear history of handing out taxpayers' money in questionable contracts to friends and personal supporters. Mr. Maskell's case stood out because he had named his company after himself, but who knows how many more there are out there? Albertans need answers. They need to know how many of these special-favour contracts there are. The Conservative government in Ottawa has just appointed a special investigator to look into the troubled history of government contracts with polling firms. To the Premier: will the Premier commit to a similar investigation of this government's contracting practices?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of the substantial changes that this government brought forward very quickly is adding to the openness and transparency on a quarterly basis. All records of transactions will be available on the web so that every Albertan has an opportunity to see what taxpayer funds went to either companies or individuals. That will be fully public. It's the most transparent that this government has been ever in the province of Alberta, but they still fail to recognize that.

Mr. Bonko: Yesterday the Premier stated that the Auditor General has approved checks and balances regarding payments made under the government contracts. The Auditor General reported on another Tory patronage contract in 2004. He said, "The documentation did not support how the expenditure officer was able to obtain satisfaction that the disbursements were in accordance with the terms of the contract." What a surprise, yet we see the same thing again. The latest invoices do not support the claimed 50-hour days or day-long meetings, yet they were still approved. To the Premier: will he admit that while the checks and balances may be there, his government routinely ignores them for its friends?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I will admit that this government is

always looking forward, as opposed to the opposition always looking backward, and that's why we brought about the changes. Openness and transparency will continue to work. We're bringing forward additional legislation, and I hope that it's supported by the opposition. Or they may even find something else there that they'll oppose again and not support this government in passing very important legislation to deal with some of these issues.

Mr. Bonko: Kelley Charlebois, Rod Love, the community initiatives program, rule breaking for secret friends of top Tories, and now Bob Maskell. Taxpayers are getting disgusted. This government's patronage file is getting so thick that patronage will soon need its own department. Why does this government have one set of rules for its friends and one set for the rest of us, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the earlier comments, made yesterday, again say that this wasn't patronage, but of course they'll keep turning back and forth, back and forth, bringing this thing forward. I made my comments the other day. I made comments with respect to the contract to the media. We're going to be bringing forward legislation, and we're going to be looking at other ways of improving the trust and the confidence not only of government but of this institution so that we get more people interested in running for public office, not to constantly degrade each other in this facility.

1:40

Mr. Bonko: The Minister of Education stated yesterday that he didn't accept the questions that we raised as factual basis. He said that he hadn't seen the relevant documents. Well, they were from his own filing cabinets and stamped: education accounts. So I'm at a loss to know why he couldn't get his hands on them. They're probably in the drawers labelled patronage. To the Minister of Education: what value did the government get out of three \$600-a-day meetings between Mr. Maskell and the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs as approved by the minister's accounts?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I've done some extensive checking, and to the best of our knowledge we have not received any invoices from Maskell & Associates. We have not paid any invoices. So if the hon. member has some copies of some invoices, stand up and table them in the House, or quit smearing the member's name. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party. [interjections] The hon. leader of the third party has the floor.

Condominium Conversions

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to policy. [interjection] You won't like it when you hear it, though, Mr. Premier.

In this out-of-control economy affordable apartments are being sold left and right for condominium conversions. Over a thousand rental units were converted to condos last year in Calgary alone. It's a similar situation in Edmonton. Apartment owners eager to cash in on condo conversion jack up rents to get tenants out in 90 days rather than give the full 180 days' notice. To the Premier: given that this housing crisis is forcing regular families out into the street, will he impose a temporary moratorium on condominium conversions?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader of the third party raises an important issue. This is something that we have discussed around our caucus table, and we are looking at ways, with respect to the

minister of municipal affairs, to see what we can do in this critical situation. We understand the critical shortage of housing. We know that, and we want to address that issue. If there's another question, I'll ask the minister of municipal affairs to respond.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. But Albertans can't wait for this government to figure out what it's going to do or spin-doctor its housing report. The Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing projects a shortfall of 43,000 affordable units by 2009. CMHC says that Edmonton has 5,050 fewer rental units on the market than in 1987. The crisis is real, and condo conversions are making it worse. To the Premier: will he take action to stop condo conversions today?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the kind of information that the hon. leader gave means that more people are moving into their own accommodations, but there are those that can't afford to do that, and the minister has a plan to address that.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I have said in this House many times, there has been a task force that has been presented. We are looking at that task force, and we are going to reply to those very major concerns, as the member from the third party has illustrated.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, subject to the rules, the minister has now referred to a report. Will he please table it today in the House?

Mr. Speaker, there are 40,000 households in Edmonton that give over 30 per cent of their income to landlords. Contrary to what the Premier has just said, renters normally have to pay 30 per cent more for a unit that's been converted into a condominium. So, please, Mr. Premier, will you help these people who are being pushed out into the street by condo conversions and do something?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, we fully discussed the situation in Edmonton and Calgary, and there are other communities facing similar. We are going to take steps. With municipalities, of course, there are ways of handling some of these situations. But like I said, it's going to take co-operation between the province, municipalities, and the federal government to deal with the overall critical shortage of housing.

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

Vocational Education

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is booming, our labour market is stressed, hours are excessive, trained people are in short supply, and service and productivity are suffering. The costs for all projects increase because of this. It is good that the government is working with the trades and professions to create more training. Many Alberta occupations think that they are finally being taken seriously. But we do need more training. My question is to the Minister of Education. Will the minister increase support for vocational schooling beyond the registered apprenticeship program and call on our trades for assistance?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I guess if the hon. member is referring to the

high school industrial arts and CTS programs, that is something that we have recognized as a priority in the education system. I hate to keep referring back to my standard answer, but I'm going to wait for the minister's budget next week to see how successful I was.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you. A supplementary to the minister of advanced education. Building trades training schools provide vast amounts of critical training in occupations that are needed now and will be for decades. Will the minister ensure that the necessary support from government be in place for these schools to maximize opportunity for Albertans to train now and for the future?

Mr. Horner: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Backs: A supplementary to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. Regional labour market integration has worked well for the engineering profession in the Pacific Northwest. Will the minister work to ease the movement of trades and professions from and into the U.S. with a greater integrated labour market in the Pacific Northwest?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, yes, we will.

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

Physician Supply

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The sole family doctor serving the communities of Ogden and Lynnwood in my constituency is retiring. As he cannot find a doctor to take over his practice, he has to close his practice. The majority of my constituents have been his clients for 35 years, and they are very worried and upset. My question is to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. What is your plan to deal with the shortage of family doctors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is clearly a shortage of health care professionals, not just doctors. It's a more severe shortage in the health care area than in the general economy, so we do have to bring forward a plan with respect to the health workforce strategy. I'm working with the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry and the minister of advanced education on that workforce strategy. In fact, we'll be meeting with stakeholders tomorrow, I believe, to discuss the draft strategy and additional things that we can do. Specifically on the family doctors, the primary care networks have been very successful. In fact, members might have read today in the paper about a primary care network in Edmonton where you can get same-day access. That will be the way of the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the family doctor's practice is close to a seniors' residence in my constituency, the vulnerable constituents now have to travel farther, longer, and costlier to get to a doctor, if they are lucky to find one. To the same minister: what is the plan to help them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, I don't have a specific answer for this specific situation, obviously, but the process that we're taking is to encourage the development of these primary care networks to make the best use of the full range of health care professionals in the context of a primary care network. We could see in that context that in the future, in the very near future health care professionals would attend at the long-term care centre or even the seniors' residence. So those are the ways that we're using the full range of health care professionals in our community, and hopefully that will be able to address this particular situation in the near future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Calgary regional health authority has established a number of community health centres in other parts of the city of Calgary, to the minister: when can Calgaryans in the southeast side of the city expect such service?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, to the best of my knowledge, at present there is not a plan to build a new community health centre in that region of Calgary that I'm aware of. However, the south Calgary hospital project will be proceeding very shortly. I can say that with respect to the other health care facilities in Calgary, if any member visits any one of the health care facilities in Calgary, the hospitals and clinics, they'll see construction cranes around them. So there's more capacity being built, more service available, more accessibility available to Calgaryans in the very near future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

1:50

Environmental Sustainability

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Water for Life strategy and the 1999 commitment to sustainable resources and environmental management have one thing in common. Both talk about respecting the wishes of Albertans, consulting with Albertans, and enhancing environmental protection, yet these strategies continue to be ignored and the people's concerns dismissed. Look at the evidence: irresponsible oil sands development, plans for garbage dumps bigger than anything in North America, 10 upgraders in the next five years, five coal-fired plants to service these, and massive transmission lines. People are asking the obvious: Mr. Premier, is this responsible development?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of the government's priorities, of course, and a huge task assigned to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development is to put together a land-use framework. It's going to be a difficult task because there are so many different uses: agricultural, oil and gas, forestry, recreational, expansion of urban communities, obviously, encroaching on good agricultural land. These are all issues that we have to deal with.

One thing that I was pleased with, notwithstanding a lot of the criticism that we receive as a government, is that Alberta itself is recognized as doing the most in terms of environment, although 43 per cent but a heck of a lot higher than any other province with respect to this area. Do we have a lot of work to do? Yes, we do, and we'll do it. And that can only be done with the good help of all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we have many

Albertans in attendance in the House, Albertans who have serious problems with the lack of a due process for these development decisions affecting their way of life, their water, their future. Residents in the industrial heartland have raised concerns about the rate and scope of development in their area, concerns about the air they breathe, the water they drink, the future of their rural way of life. Plans for up to 10 upgraders in Sturgeon and Strathcona have people asking, independently wondering: Mr. Premier, what is the plan?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there is due process. I as a former municipal official, of course, lived through a number of applications for development. It rests with the municipality to deal with the application. Here are a few other things that we've done since then. With respect to the industrial heartland, I met with all of the people in 2004, discussed their issues, certainly sympathized with the change in their lives just with the number of plants being built. That's one of the reasons, then, that we put a program together where we could purchase the land from the owners.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Thorhild county the people have run up against a dead end in trying to address the massive garbage dump prepared for them, a dump bigger than any in North America despite a similar landfill just south in Ryley. Neither their own council nor this provincial government are listening to their real concerns about these projects and the impacts on their way of life, property values, and potentially their water. Can the Premier tell us what his government will do to help these concerned citizens of Thorhild county be heard?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I have met with at least three families, as I recall, with respect to this particular development. I know that there is a due process in place. It is a difficult situation. I lived through it personally as the former reeve for the county of Lamont, where a company had made an application. But we have to go through the process because if not, if either the applicant or those that may be living in the county establish that due process wasn't followed, they punt it to the courts, then the courts punt it right back to the municipality to follow the due process. It's one of those issues that if we can improve on it in terms of the Municipal Government Act, we'll listen to their ideas.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Winterkill of Fish Stock

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Utikuma and Winagami lakes in my constituency have always been known as the million dollar lakes for their fishery. The last time that we had any kind of winterkill, which is a devastating state of no oxygen going to the fish or to any species in the lakes, was 1989. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Why did it take so long for you to make a decision to allow salvage fishing of any sort to occur in those two lakes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that question. Winterkill occurs naturally in Alberta lakes, particularly the more shallow lakes. It occurs when oxygen levels fall below a

certain level because of the ice. These conditions are affected, of course, by the length of the winter, by the thickness of the ice and by the snow on top of the ice. Utikuma Lake has seen winterkills before, as the hon. member indicated. Our fish biologists monitor the oxygen levels in these lakes quite carefully, and they determine if and when it becomes appropriate to allow a salvage fishery.

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, so did my commercial fishermen monitor what was happening in those lakes. There were some concerns expressed to the biologist as well as to various officials, and there was no action taken. As a result there is going to be devastation amongst my commercial fishermen. Could you please tell me again, Mr. Minister: why was that recommendation by the commercial fishermen who wanted a salvage fishery earlier not followed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Of course, there are multiple stakeholders in these lakes. You have the commercial fishermen, you have aboriginal fishermen, and you also have your recreational sports fishermen. We were in communication with all of these different groups during the month of March as this situation evolved, but in the end I took the advice of our department fish biologists. I might add that in a meeting I recently had with Professor David Schindler, the water expert over at the University of Alberta, he said that our fish biologists in the government of Alberta are some of the best in Canada. I took their advice as to when it was time to allow the commercial fishery.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, there are times when we have to take the advice of those kinds of people, but we also have to take the advice of those individuals who do make a living off that specific fishery. My question is: what kind of management or policy will you bring forward to ensure that these people can also be listened to so that this kind of devastation does not occur again?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, of course, as I've mentioned already, this is a naturally reoccurring phenomenon in Alberta and northern Canadian lakes, so I can't guarantee that it will never happen again. I can guarantee, though, that we will listen, obviously, to the concerns of affected stakeholders, but often the stakeholders' concerns or interests are somewhat competing and have to be balanced against one another. In the end, again, I think most members would agree that listening to the advice of our fish biologists is the best way to manage this type of situation.

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

Steamfitter-pipefitter Red Seal Exams

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 28 the interprovincial red seal exam for the steamfitter-pipefitter trade was pulled shortly before it was to be administered, leaving a number of apprentices at loose ends. The cancellation of this exam suggests something went seriously wrong in the certification and quality control process for these much-needed tradespeople. My questions are for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Can the minister tell us why this exam was pulled?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, serious allegations were made, actually, in the Legislature during debate on Bill 7. There may have been some sale of exams was the allegation that was made, and that is very serious. We're not aware of any direct activity involving the exchange of money, but if the member has some evidence or some information to that, we'd certainly be interested in looking at it.

Mr. Tougas: Well, I didn't suggest that, Mr. Speaker. I just asked why the exam was pulled, and apparently the answer is that there are some suspicions that maybe somebody did get a hold of it ahead of time and distributed it. Can the minister comment on that? I mean, you brought it up. Is that the case? Has this been tainted or something? Is that the case?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it was recently reported both in Nova Scotia and Alberta that there may have been a compromise; therefore, the exam was pulled at that time, but it will be readministered.

Mr. Tougas: Well, the tradespeople who had planned to take this exam made considerable financial and time sacrifices to do so. They're now in limbo, waiting for months until they can write their exam. What is the minister doing to ensure that this test is administered as soon as possible and to compensate those affected?

Mr. Horner: Well, I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, that the members who were looking to take that exam would want to ensure that it is not compromised, and that's exactly what we're doing. Utilizing technology where we can, we will try to get this done as quickly as possible, recognizing their hardship.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

2:00 Softwood Lumber Trade Agreement

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Forest companies operating in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne are dealing with their U.S. customers under the new softwood lumber agreement. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Can you tell the Assembly what's happened in the past six months since this agreement was adopted?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the good fortune yesterday morning to attend a conference at the University of Alberta School of Business that was devoted to the softwood lumber agreement and how things have evolved since its formal coming into effect six months ago. Unfortunately, the agreement has not delivered the type of predictability and access that was hoped for. Lumber prices have fallen, and so have exports. It's too early at this point to tell whether the falling number of exports is caused by the agreement itself or by the slowdown in demand in the United States. Probably it's both. But, unfortunately, the lower the price becomes, this triggers an export tax, and that's hurting our industry at this point.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next supplemental is to the same minister. I've not heard much complimentary about the softwood lumber agreement and its benefits to our

producers. Has it benefited the Alberta softwood producers and our forest industry?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated already, we're disappointed with the results so far. But this has to be put into perspective. This is the third softwood lumber agreement in the last 20 years. These issues are recurring. One thing is very clear. Our lumber industries know what they want. What they want is free trade and open access to American markets, and unfortunately this has been slow in coming. We, of course, support full, free, fair trade with the United States, and we will support our industry in trying to work towards that but under the terms of the existing agreement.

Mr. VanderBurg: My next question is to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. What are the prospects for the softwood lumber agreement lasting more than the minimum of two years?

Mr. Boutillier: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. minister has also indicated, certainly it's not a deal that is perfect. With the attitude of our neighbours to the south, you know, this agreement has really ended a lot of past disputes and potential future litigations, so in many ways it has been positive. In Alberta as Albertans we have an attitude that we'll always work to make it better, to improve it, to share information with our neighbours. That's what we're doing. But industry plays a key role, working with this government as partners.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's becoming increasingly difficult for people to pay their rent in this province. Constituents are calling into my office unabated, and today a pensioner, Otto Fuernsinn, came in because his rent has gone up by \$150 in the last six months. Now, this is a huge burden for anyone on a fixed income. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Again I ask this minister: what should I tell this pensioner? Is it the government's policy that I should tell this pensioner that we've got a report and we're studying it, and don't worry? Is that the government's position on this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to say that presently we support the rental subsidies to the tune of 4,600 households. We also support the maintenance and operation to nearly 27,000 households in Alberta. Also, I want to say that as a result of support from the government we're building close to 3,700 complexes.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the minister brought up the subsidy program because another one of my constituents, Mrs. Arlene Henderson, found herself struggling to afford her rent after it increased by \$200 last year. She applied for and received a \$200 rent subsidy that the minister is talking about, but almost immediately her landlord, Boardwalk, raised the rent by another \$142. My question to the minister is simply this: does the minister see that without guidelines the subsidy program that's supposed to be helping these people is actually adding to the profits of corporations like Boardwalk?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do want to say that the extensive growth in Alberta is providing some challenges in housing in Alberta, and the Alberta government is trying to address those challenges. That is why we took those steps immediately after the election of the new leader to bring forward a housing task force that has reported to my ministry, which is currently looking at those recommendations and will be bringing forward responses very quickly.

Mr. Martin: So I guess when these people walk into my office with the problems that they're facing – and it's thousands of people across this province – this is what the minister is telling me: "Don't worry. Be happy. We've got a report, and we'll get around to it sometime." Mr. Speaker, the problem is now. I ask this minister: would he consider, report or no report, bringing in rent guidelines to stop this gouging?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I again suggest that the report responses will be here very quickly, and those responses will address some of the concerns that the hon. member from the third party has. I cannot tell you at this time if they're going to be positive or negative, but they will address the responses.

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

Northwest Anthony Henday Ring Road

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. St. Albert residents in the neighborhoods of Heritage Lakes, Grandin, and Akinsdale anxiously await this government's position on the alignment of the northwest leg of Anthony Henday Drive. The proposed route runs far too close to their homes, creating dangerous goods, noise, and child safety issues. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: will the minister listen to the St. Albert residents' concerns and feedback from the packed open house last summer and subsequent 1,916 petitions and move the northwest leg of the Anthony Henday Drive south of the current proposal?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the government will continue to listen closely to the concerns of residents of St. Albert. Government has been in negotiation with Newman college. Should the province acquire the college site, the road can be shifted further away from the homes in south St. Albert, and this may eliminate the need for noise mitigation also. But no decisions have been made about either the alignment or the purchasing of the college at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister confirm that the government is offering fair market value to acquire the property of Newman college to enable the road to be aligned further south?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to negotiate with the archdiocese. I have not had a chance to meet with their leadership since Archbishop Collins went to Toronto, and I don't think it would be prudent to discuss the details of our negotiations in public; however, both sides are negotiating in good faith. We are making progress, and I am hopeful that we can come to an agreement that is reasonable and fair to all involved.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, at the first open house last summer a subsequent open house was promised for the fall, but it still hasn't happened. When will the St. Albert residents be provided an open house to see the details of the new alignment if proposed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following the negotiations with Newman college the department plans to hold an open house in May to update the public, and we're not sure exactly when yet. But, again, no decisions have been made about either the alignment or the purchasing of the college at this time.

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

Land Titles Wait Times

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a former realtor I'm very aware that the land titles office plays a key role in concluding what can be a very stressful and expensive process for individuals, whether they're buying their first or their 10th home. North America's hottest real estate market, which exists right here in our province, has led to excessively long waits at Alberta's land titles office, some causing over a month's delay in closing transactions. My question is to the minister responsible for Service Alberta. Can the minister tell this House what his department is doing to remedy this situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:10

Mr. Snelgrove: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Last August in this House, when the question arose, the turnaround had reached 16 business days. By January it had reached 26. That was unacceptable to us. It was unacceptable to the business community. More importantly, it was unacceptable to the staff. Through several changes, including hiring more people, they now have the turnaround days down to 11. As Alberta knows, given the tremendous growth in the numbers of registrations, this is a tremendous tribute to the diligence and hard work of the staff at the land titles office.

Mr. Rogers: My supplemental is to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Well, if it's that simple, why has it taken his department so long to move to this step?

Mr. Snelgrove: I wish it were that simple, Mr. Speaker. Quite frankly, it is quite an elaborate and intensive training program that these interns go through because accuracy as well as timeliness in that department is paramount. Besides hiring more staff, they've worked evenings; they've worked Saturdays. This staff has taken the bull by the horns, I think, given that they have 5,000 a day, and in the month of March these people had over 120,000 business title transactions. So, once again, it shows you that when a department is focused and works together, they can achieve great things for Alberta and Service Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, since it's unlikely that this market is going to slow down any time soon, can the minister assure this House that these measures aren't just temporary, that they will last for the long term?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the ongoing training in the department and the priority in the personnel administration office of the Alberta government is to make sure that we have in place suitable trainees in business or experienced people coming through the ranks. So to maintain this level of excellence in all departments is truly a priority for this government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Security in Schools

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week an individual broke into the Victoria school of performing arts and set fire to parts of that building. While the matter is being resolved, the fact that it occurred at all is troubling. Another troubling incident happened a few months ago with an attempted assault on a young girl in an elementary school. Schools are expected to be safe places for our children, but when that safety is threatened, it raises real concerns within the community. To the Solicitor General: has the minister worked with the Minister of Education to develop a set of best practices to follow to ensure that our schools are secure?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These incidents that are happening in our public schools are certainly a concern to this government, and obviously the Minister of Education and myself have had discussions on how we can secure our schools to make sure that they are a safe environment for our children.

Mr. Elsalhy: Mr. Speaker, in corresponding with school administrators and educators, we have heard that additional security measures often have to take a back seat to other priorities such as programming, instruction, and maintenance. However, the safety of our children and the security of learning institutions cannot be put on the back burner. Will the Minister of Public Security commit to providing a source of dedicated funding designated only for school security such as video cameras or private security patrols, to be accessed if a school administrator decides to update their security? Basically, we're asking for a separate envelope.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, in regard to the security of our schools that is under the Minister of Education's budget. I know that this is a high priority for him, and I'm sure that any request to ensure that our children are safe in our schools will be adequately addressed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Guaranteeing the safety of children in our schools requires some action, and one of the easiest programs that we can strengthen is the presence of school resource officers, basically police officers working within the school. This is a fantastic program that is, unfortunately, not receiving the attention it deserves from this government. Can the minister commit to providing more funding to police services to hire more officers so that they can be deployed in our communities and within our schools as resource officers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to remind the hon. member that budgeting for policing in this province has increased by over 20 per cent this year. We will be shortly again discussing the budget for the next fiscal year, and I would certainly look for his support for an additional amount of monies to carry out the job. If the hon. Minister of Education would like to supplement, I would ask him for his comments.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member prefaced his question by saying "guaranteeing" safety in schools. We can't guarantee safety in schools; however, we are doing everything we can. But we also have to make schools accessible and friendly, and we can't have doors that have to be swiped to get in. So we're doing what we can, but it has . . .

The Speaker: And I have to continue with the question period. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Guardian Angels Security Organization

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Guardian Angels is a nonprofit group that uses unarmed volunteers to deter street crime. The Calgary Guardian Angels took their first street patrol on March 28, and reports indicate that an Edmonton chapter could hit the streets in months. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Will the Guardian Angels help or hinder crime prevention?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, that sounds like an opinion, but go forth.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll do my best to help with this opinion. First of all, safe neighbourhoods are definitely a concern, and we want to make sure that families have excellent, safe communities to work in. I want to mention that the entire community is required to be vigilant to help police reduce crime. Criminals do not like others to see them when they're committing their crimes, so we can always benefit from the involvement of community-based groups like the Guardian Angels who put more eyes and ears on the street.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question: are the Guardian Angels co-operating with police in regard to informing them of the areas they will patrol and reporting on illegal activities they come across?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again an excellent question. I want to reiterate that it is very important for the Guardian Angels to develop close relationships with the police services in the communities that they operate in. To be effective with their own protection, they are encouraged to keep police informed on not only their activities but their findings. Crime prevention is all about government, police, and the whole community working together to ensure safe communities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question: will the

Guardian Angels be in danger if they confront those breaking the laws?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, like any other citizens, we encourage Guardian Angels to report illegal activity to police and to be observers only. If a confrontation does occur, I understand that Guardian Angels' first approach is to try and diffuse a situation through dialogue and communication, and we encourage them to do that.

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

Electricity Transmission Regulation

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the government through an order in council produced their latest version of the transmission regulation to try to improve the damage that has been done by electricity deregulation. Now, my first question is to the Minister of Energy. Kellan Fluckiger is the California contractor that has been hired by this government to try to fix electricity deregulation. What role did this gentleman have in drafting this latest version of the transmission regulation issued yesterday through an order in council?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, initially I'll address the situation with respect to the transmission regulations and the assumption that some individuals make that somehow or another that part of the industry in the province of Alberta is or has been deregulated. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The fact of the matter is that transmission in the province of Alberta is now regulated, has been regulated, and will continue to be regulated into the future.

Thank you.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister thinks that transmission regulation is a car part. That's how little grasp he has of this issue.

Now, why is this government continuing to allow Kellan Fluckiger to undermine the regulatory authority of the EUB?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to you that the individual across the way will have to be around an awful lot longer than I am before he understands more about car parts than I do.

However, with respect to the authority of the EUB their authority is very clearly laid out in legislation and regulation in the province of Alberta. Nothing that we are doing now, nothing that we have done with respect to transmission regulation undermines any authority that they have.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Minister of Energy is right about one thing. I will never know as much about Rolls-Royces as he does.

Now, given that the Independent System Operator is accountable to no one, how much extra is this transfer of authority in this very regulation from the EUB to the Independent System Operator going to cost consumers on their already high monthly power bills? How much is this change going to cost consumers?

2:20

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would really like to address the situation with respect to Rolls-Royce. Not very many people in

this Legislature or, for that matter, in the province of Alberta would understand the tremendous role that Rolls-Royce plays with respect to the energy industry in the province of Alberta. They are a tremendous company. They provide tremendous machinery that helps us with our gas transmission systems in the province of Alberta. I might also add to that that the use of the equipment that Rolls-Royce has provided to industry over the years has decreased the cost of the industry to Albertans, and it does so on a daily basis.

The Speaker: That was 102 questions and answers today.

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

The Speaker: We're back to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is from Robert W. Parker, who is actually a Calgary resident who raises a number of concerns with health care. He is unhappy about having to pay for the blood tests for prostate cancer. His health care card was cancelled, and now he cannot see a doctor, so he's very concerned about that.

The second is from Denise Wood, and this is around the sterilization issue. It's noting that she attended a gastroenterologist's office in which the scope that was to be used was being cleaned in front of her with a brush and some solution. Although she questioned the nurse and the doctor at the time, they said that that was acceptable.

The final is from Jane Edgett, who was a respiratory therapist at the Red Deer regional hospital. She has raised a number of issues connected to sterilization, hospital errors, and infection resulting directly from staffing cutbacks, and she cites a number of studies that support that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is from Allan Laird, who wants to express his concern about the lack of support for school-aged kids in Alberta. As we experience the pain and problems of the boom, this is another area where we are creating the Alberta disadvantage.

The second is from Tammy Herbert. She is a single working mother of two children who has a full-time paying job. She's worried that she's going to be forced out of her home because she will no longer be able to pay the rent and utilities. The gap between the wealthy and poor is widening, and the middle class income earners are disappearing from the scale.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of an *Edmonton Journal* article from February 2000. The article announced Bob Maskell's intention to seek the nomination for the Highlands by-election in 2000 for the Liberal Party of Alberta.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table copies of 10 letters I've received regarding the need to change Alberta's employment standards to protect the jobs of workers who take compassionate care leave under the federal employment insurance

plan. No one should have to choose between their job and being with their loved one in their final days. I would point out that Alberta is the only province that does not have legislation to do this. The letters are from the following people: Sarah Schmidt, Val Millions, Paula Reedyk, Rita Patterson, Sheila Axten, Deanna Gabrielson, Melanee Thomas, Lisa Lambert, Janine Marshall, and Dayna Daniels.

Thank you.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Boutilier, Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations, response to Written Question 29, asked for by Dr. Swann on behalf of Mr. Bonko on April 24, 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Lindsay, Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, pursuant to the Gaming and Liquor Act of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, 2005-2006 annual report; pursuant to the Horse Racing Alberta Act Horse Racing Alberta 2005 annual report.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the Government House Leader please share with us the projected government business for the week commencing April 16.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There being no government business on Monday, April 16, we would go to Tuesday, April 17. Under Orders of the Day: the government motion with respect to the Standing Order changes; second reading on Bills 28, 19, and 22; Committee of the Whole on Bill 15, Bill 17, Bill 18, and Bill 22; third reading on Bills 3 and 15; and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday the 18th Committee of the Whole on Bills 28, 18, 19, 22; third reading on Bills 16, 21, 22, 17, 6, 12, and 10; and I'm going to assume a government motion that is not yet on notice with respect to populating policy field committees in the event that the government motion passes on Tuesday.

On Thursday, of course, we anticipate hearing from the Minister of Finance with respect to the budget and, of course, the government motions on supply and referral to supply before adjourning for our second constituency week.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order
Allegations against a Member

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During an exchange in question period between the Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition, there were some remarks made by the Premier in which he said that we were using innuendo and that the Leader of the Official Opposition had clearly misled.

The citations I would like to go over today include 23(h), which covers allegations, (i) imputing false motives, (j) using insulting language likely to create a disturbance. In addition to that there is *Beauchesne's* 484(3), which, again, is imputing to a member unworthy motives or speaking in abusive or disrespectful terms; 486, which is speaking to the tone of the language; 490, which, again,

clearly spells out "mislead" as one of the prohibited terms under unparliamentary language; and *Marleau and Montpetit* 522, that remarks: "which question that Member's integrity, honesty or character are not in order." These were contravened with the remarks from the Premier setting out that innuendo was somehow used and that we couldn't prove what we were saying.

Mr. Speaker, I'm looking at some of the sessional papers that have been tabled around this particular issue. I look at Sessional Paper 208/2007, specifically around the 50 hours that was billed with no explanation. The Premier claimed that he had explained. I've gone through Hansard: he had not. But we have supplied copies of the invoices for Mr. Maskell in which 50 hours was billed, so I don't know how we're impugning anything. We supplied the proof of it. There's no innuendo here, sir. It was on his letterhead, and it's clearly been stamped and received. This is a sessional paper that was tabled several days ago, I believe.

Also, Sessional Paper 199/2007 outlines a number of the cheques that were made to the individual being discussed. It shows also that we could find no associates that were listed that might explain a 50-hour billing. Perhaps if there had been other people that had been working, that might have accounted for it. No, indeed, there are no associates listed in the corporate search. Again, that information was supplied, was tabled in this House, Mr. Speaker.

2:30

We have done our very best to supply and back up every statement that we have made on this. I have just gone through a few of the sessional papers that have been tabled in support of the remarks we made, so in fact we were very factual, and we supplied proof of every statement that we made in this House. So I would like to have the Premier withdraw his accusation that the Leader of the Official Opposition was misleading this House on this particular issue and to also withdraw his statement that there was innuendo because there was not. We have supplied proof of every statement that we've made regarding this particular issue.

In addition, the tone and the choice of language that was used here were clearly meant to insult and, I would argue, clearly meant to provoke debate and to disturb the decorum of the House.

I would appreciate your being able to render a decision on this point of order today. Thank you.

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

Mr. Hancock: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess the best the hon. member has and the Liberal opposition has is just not good enough because, clearly, although they've tabled documents in the House, the questions that have been raised have been raised with an intent to besmirch the character of an individual who formerly served.

There are certainly, clearly, very appropriate questions raised from time to time in the House, and it's not inappropriate to ask questions with respect to contracts and, indeed, to ask some specific questions, although I would have to say, Mr. Speaker, that it is bordering on inappropriate, if not inappropriate, to table a specific document and then ask a question about that specific document as though a minister or the Premier might have read every document that's in every filing cabinet in the hands of the government. That is inappropriate.

With respect to the question of innuendo and misleading, when you do file a document and then raise a specific question relative to 50 hours and do that in context of another question on another contract, there are innuendos that occur, and we've dealt with this

from time to time. The inappropriate juxtaposition of those types of questions and comments can lead to besmirching the character in this case not of a member of the House but of a former member of the House. What the opposition clearly has been trying to do is to suggest that the government is engaged in patronage in the hiring of Mr. Maskell. In a member's statement today there was a clear definition of the talents and capabilities of the member of the House. I hope that the opposition is not suggesting by their questions that a former member of the House, regardless of what party, shouldn't put their talent to work on behalf of the people of Alberta in an appropriate way, clearly having had it cleared by the Ethics Commissioner with respect to conflicts of interest.

So there was very clearly innuendo in the context of all the questions that were raised by the opposition, as, I would suggest, there is always innuendo in the questions raised by the members of the opposition. Sometimes, as today and earlier in this session, that innuendo is inappropriate. I would suggest that today that innuendo was inappropriate.

With respect to the question of misleading the House, Mr. Speaker, specifically on page 147 of *Beauchesne*, 490, there is a list of expressions. "Since 1958, it has been ruled parliamentary to use the following expressions," and one of those expressions is "misleading," as you see on page 148, halfway down. So it's not always inappropriate to use the words "misleading the House" if, in fact, you are misleading the House. I would suggest that the proof is in the pudding in this particular case.

It is not inappropriate at all for the Premier today to point out that in the manner and context in which these questions were raised with respect to various contracts, obviously the point of the opposition was to try and suggest that there was somehow inappropriate patronage going on. The point of the Premier and others is to say that just because the person is hired to use their talent in the service of Albertans, it's not patronage if a job that needs doing is done by a person who is qualified to do it.

So there has been innuendo, inappropriate in my view, on the other side. In fact, in the way in which the questions were posed, they have been misleading the House.

The Speaker: Are there others who would choose to participate?

The chair recognizes at the outset that it is Thursday and would like to read several paragraphs from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 525.

The proceedings of the House are based on a long-standing tradition of respect for the integrity of all Members. Thus, the use of offensive, provocative or threatening language in the House is strictly forbidden. Personal attacks, insults and obscene language or words are not in order. A direct charge or accusation against a Member may be made only by way of a substantive motion for which notice is required.

On page 526:

In dealing with unparliamentary language, the Speaker takes into account the tone, manner and intention of the Member speaking; the person to whom the words were directed; the degree of provocation; and, most importantly, whether or not the remarks created disorder in the Chamber. Thus, language deemed unparliamentary one day may not necessarily be deemed unparliamentary the following day. The codification of unparliamentary language has proven impractical as it is the context in which words or phrases are used that the Chair must consider when deciding whether or not they should be withdrawn. Although an expression may be found to be acceptable, the Speaker has cautioned that any language which leads to disorder in the House should not be used. Expressions which are considered unparliamentary when applied to an individual Member have not always been considered so when applied "in a generic sense" or to a party.

There's one additional paragraph on page 527 about the usage of this and the review of this by the Chamber. This refers again to the House of Commons.

In 1991, following several incidents of unparliamentary language, a government motion respecting decorum and civility was brought before the House. The motion was debated on three occasions but never came to a vote.

It seems that the members themselves sort of enjoyed at various times the give-and-take that goes on in the House and, when confronted with an opportunity to actually come down with codification of certain utilization of words, have always backed away. We have, of course, in the situation here today with respect to the word "misleading" two interpretations, both quoted correctly: the Leader of the Official Opposition saying that it is unparliamentary, the Government House Leader saying that on certain occasions it is parliamentary.

This is really a wonderful position to be in here, to stand here. So one will view all of this and take all of this in the context of it being Thursday, a warm day, the fourth day of the week. The chair does not like the utilization of words like "innuendo," "misleading," does not like provocative statements. It's cautioned the House before. The members enjoy what they do, and the members have 45 seconds to frame questions and 45 seconds to frame answers, and that gives a lot of leverage.

As I've said before on numerous occasions, we can do better. I call on everybody to try and do better. Less provocative leads to less provocation to the other side. Harmony and love bring forth the very best in us all. But do we really want to be loved is the question.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 28

Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, please.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move for second reading the Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2007.

The Provincial Court Act deals with matters relating to the Provincial Court of Alberta, and I might at this time indicate to the House that the amendments that I'm about to outline have the encouragement of the court, and they are supportive of all of these changes.

Bill 28, Mr. Speaker, amends the Provincial Court Act to permit a judge who is more than 70 years of age and working full-time to be appointed a part-time judge if he or she wishes. Currently the act permits part-time judges to be reappointed after age 70 but only if they started part-time service on or before their 70th birthday. Extending the option of part-time service to full-time judges over 70 years of age will benefit Albertans because more highly experienced and competent judges will be retained to continue serving Albertans on a part-time basis. Judges who want a guaranteed amount of judicial service after retirement will have this option. Furthermore, there is a financial benefit to the government with these amendments because contributions to the part-time judges' pension plan would not be required.

2:40

The amendments will also change how sittings for part-time

judges can be scheduled. The act now requires part-time judges to sit full-time for two three-month periods in each year of their term. The amendments will require part-time judges to sit for the equivalent of six months on a full-time basis in each year of their term, providing more flexibility in scheduling for the courts.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Justice and Attorney General strives to promote a fair and accessible civil and criminal justice system. The Provincial Court Amendment Act will help further this goal by retaining the knowledge and experience of judges with many years of service on the bench.

As such, I would encourage all members of the Assembly to support this good piece of legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader, the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise and speak in support of the principles that are set forth in Bill 28, the Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2007. As I said yesterday, we're benefiting from having a minister stay in place for some time because the legislation that is coming forward, I know, has been through the appropriate stakeholder groups and consultations. It's being driven by an identified need, and the appropriate amount of background work has in fact happened to bring this bill before us.

It is essentially dealing with our employment or labour pool that we currently have available, and we can end up with labour shortages even on the bench, I think. So it's nice to be able to have this legislation clearing the way for individuals to be serving as part-time judges. I know that we will appreciate their continued service on the bench, and it does work out some of the slight quirks that were in the existing legislation. I think that having them serve the equivalent of six months on a full-time basis in each year of their term is a more flexible way of dealing with the scheduling of their time. As an administrator or someone who would be responsible for scheduling them, I'd say that I would certainly appreciate that flexibility. Previously what it was was serving two three-month periods, and that just can be difficult to work around when you don't have the kind of flexibility that you need.

So we are able to retain experienced judges for a longer period of time, and I think that we are going to need that as the baby boomers increasingly move towards retirement. Some of them will just retire and would not be available. We, I'm sure, can make use of those experienced people who are willing to serve on a part-time basis. It's more attractive to them because they get to do the work they love and that they're good at, frankly, but they may not wish to do it full-time, and this does allow them to continue to serve.

I note that one of the arguments is that it's cost-effective. Usually I would argue against that because I've been really disturbed by the number of choices that I've seen the government make where they dismiss a full-time paid individual and contract it out because they don't have to pay the benefits that go along with it. But in this case the benefits that would usually be paid were contributions to pensions, which, frankly, is not an issue in this case, so I'm willing to support that.

This is not a complex bill. It's really two pages long, and it's just essentially inserting two sections. I have looked at it. I have looked at the three-column document, which I appreciate receiving. It was very helpful. Given that I was able to look at the three-column document, I'm very happy to support this bill. I urge my colleagues in the Assembly to support it in second reading.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly have no objections to the bill. I take it that there is probably a need. We hear about the courts being clogged up. I would like to get, when the minister is around, a little fuller explanation about what the situation is there and why he felt a need to move to part-time at 70. Are there other things that we can do? We hear and read about it – I don't know if it's true or not – that it seems to be part of the problem again with an overheated, booming economy that the courts are very busy. So when the Minister of Justice comes back on this.

As I say, the bill probably makes sense. I don't see anything that I couldn't support, but I would like to get some idea when he has the chance, either in committee or third reading or at the end of second reading, to give us sort of an update about what is happening and why the need is there for this particular bill at this particular time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have this opportunity to rise and participate in the debate this afternoon on Bill 28, the Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2007. Certainly, when one looks at this – and I heard the comments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre – it is certainly worthy of support.

I'm pleased to see that this is the sort of amendment that the government is doing to the Provincial Court Act and that they're not following in the footsteps of their federal cousins and initiating a wholesale change to how judges or justices are selected and appointed to the courts. Certainly, all hon. members of this Assembly have been reading recently about some of the controversy around the changes that have been proposed by the federal government. I don't think these changes will increase the public's confidence in the judiciary. The judiciary, as the hon. members of this Assembly know, must be fully independent, and we must maintain and guard that independence.

This is why, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage support of this bill and remind all hon. members of this Assembly to please be mindful of the total independence of the judiciary from the legislative process.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few brief comments in response to the comments by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in an attempt, perhaps, to provide some clarity.

There are a number of ways in which you can retain the talent of people who have served Albertans as a member of the Provincial Court as they get a little older and a little bit more experienced. They can retire, in which case you lose their talent entirely. They can be appointed as supernumerary judges, in which case they could be called upon to serve from time to time as needed.

A number of years ago there was also a provision made for part-time judges. The benefit of a part-time judge over a supernumerary judge was that you could actually have the service of a part-time judge on a consistent basis over a consistent period of time and schedule it more appropriately as opposed to calling in a supernumerary judge on a periodic basis. The other benefit of a part-time judge over a supernumerary judge would be that the part-time judge would continue to keep up with professional development, if you will, and the goings-on of the court, as opposed to a supernumerary judge who really did just come in when called.

2:50

The provision of part-time service was made available at the request of the court as a very good adjunct to the ability to keep judges who had put in considerable service, who were prepared to continue to put in service, but who no longer wished to put it in on a full-time basis or had otherwise come to the end of their term, so to speak.

So that's what happened, and the amendments that are here today just enhance the ability to retain the services of qualified, competent judges who have capacity, who have ability, and whose service can continue to be provided to the courts and to Albertans but in a more structured way than, perhaps, would have been available through supernumerary status.

The Speaker: Additional members?

Shall we call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading
Bill 21
Securities Amendment Act, 2007

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

Mr. Pham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate being able to speak to Bill 21, the Securities Amendment Act, 2007, again. I also appreciate the thoughtful comments and questions from the hon. members who spoke to the bill during second reading and Committee of the Whole. Before I move third reading, I would like to use this opportunity to answer questions and clarify some of the comments.

The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford referred to comments by the Minister of Finance regarding a single securities regulator. I cannot speak for the minister, but I can respond to the hon. member's implication that a passport system would be a waste if the province one day agreed to a single regulator. Alberta has been one of the top provinces and territories that have been actively committed since 2004 to working together to improve investor protection and enhance the competitiveness of Canada's capital markets. We are doing that through the passport system and the harmonization initiative, which this legislation helps us achieve.

The first phase of the passport system was implemented in 2005 and gave participants certain exemptions when dealing with different securities jurisdictions, with the only exception of Ontario. The second phase of the passport system will significantly expand the single window of access concept of securities regulation by allowing participants to access capital markets across Canada by dealing only with the regulator in one jurisdiction.

The harmonization of securities laws produced by the passport system would be necessary even if there was agreement to move to a single regulator at some point in the future. In fact, the high degree of commitment and co-operation demonstrated by regulators and governments in developing the passport system would be needed to create a single securities regulatory structure. Accordingly, there has been nothing lost in terms of time, money, or human resources in harmonizing securities laws as part of the passport initiative.

Some of the hon. members also raised questions about the effectiveness of the Alberta Securities Commission. Although that

is not directly related to the legislation at hand, I don't want to leave these comments without a response.

The Auditor General conducted an independent review of the ASC's enforcement system in the fall of 2005 and concluded that there was no substance to allegations of illegal enforcement activities at the commission. The Auditor General's report did identify areas where improvement could strengthen the ASC's enforcement system and made 10 recommendations. The Auditor General made two recommendations to strengthen the ASC's conflict-of-interest policies. In his 2005-06 annual report the Auditor General stated that he is "satisfied that the [ASC] has responded effectively to our 2005 recommendations – out of 10 recommendations, 5 have been implemented and 5 are rated as having satisfactory progress." The Auditor General will follow up to see how the designated changes operate in practice. The Minister of Finance will also continue to monitor the Auditor General's reviews of the ASC and will respond accordingly.

I would also like to reply to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview's characterization of the harmonization initiative as a race to the bottom. The provinces and territories are not lowering their standards to the lowest common denominator, as he stated. There is no race to the bottom. Provincial and territorial governments are committed to making improvements to the Canadian securities regulatory framework.

In 2004 all the provinces and territories except Ontario signed the memorandum of understanding regarding securities regulation. The agreement committed Alberta and other provinces and territories to harmonize and streamline securities regulation across Canada. This involved repealing significant portions of the Securities Act so that it acts as platform legislation designed to support national uniform rules implemented by the Canadian Securities Administrators. Platform legislation contains basic and general requirements which rarely change. The detailed requirements will continually evolve to meet the changing market conditions as set out in the rules. The repeals and amendments in Bill 21 will allow us to adopt a single set of enhanced requirements applicable across Canada in most key areas of securities regulation.

Again, I thank the hon. members for their comments and questions and hope that I have clarified matters for them.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if I may just recap the importance of Bill 21. This legislation includes amendments to enhance the securities passport system and further harmonize and streamline Alberta's securities laws with other Canadian jurisdictions. We have also included some enhanced enforcement and housekeeping amendments. The legislation will support a new national registration rule being developed by the Canadian Securities Administrators, and that is expected to be implemented in 2008. These amendments will ensure that Alberta continues to meet its commitments under the 2004 provincial/territorial memorandum of understanding regarding securities regulation.

I urge all members to support Bill 21 as it is key in our ongoing efforts to improve securities regulation across Canada. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and speak to Bill 21, Securities Amendment Act, 2007. Bill 21 attempts to harmonize securities legislation among the provinces without abolishing the regulators. This process extends back several years, involving several meetings among provincial and federal finance ministers as well as several meetings among provincial regulators.

Canada already has 13 securities market regulators. All other major industrial countries have one central securities market enforcer such as the United States Securities and Exchange Commission, SEC. The Alberta Liberals are on the record as supporting, as a first choice, a strong and effective Alberta Securities Commission.

Having multiple securities regulators has advantages and disadvantages. The benefits of having several market regulators are, number one, local companies have faster access to public equity; number two, Alberta companies are less likely to fall by the wayside to central Canadian companies; and number three, increased local control.

On the other hand, existing in the multiregulator environment causes a number of challenges. For example, a number of companies operate in several provinces. They must deal with different rules in different jurisdictions. What works in one province might not work in another. Companies express frustrations dealing with often conflicting and confusing regulations. Moreover, others suggest that the multiregulatory environment increases fees and reduces enforcement.

3:00

Two reasons for supporting Bill 21: investor protection and business accessibility. First, Mr. Speaker, Bill 21 permits companies and stakeholders the legal means to sue public companies that issue false or misleading information. This new law will follow Ontario's lead, which has recently enacted similar legislation. Second, stakeholders – security lawyers, investors, advocates, and particularly businesses – cite that there is some value in having harmonized security legislation. Each provincial jurisdiction has different rules for security regulations. Thus, if an Alberta-based company wants to do work in another province, it must comply with cumbersome security legislation. Businesses express frustration with having to deal with the different rules in different provinces. This bill attempts to mitigate this problem.

While this bill does attempt to improve investor protection, it fails to address a number of concerns raised by the Official Opposition in regard to the Alberta Securities Commission. I have a few concerns, Mr. Speaker: the first one, rules preventing Alberta Securities Commission employees and board members from trading in companies that are being investigated; the second one, regulation prohibiting ASC employees and board members from trading in companies listed with ASC; the third one, rules restricting MLAs from nominating ASC commissioners.

Moving toward a passport system. Harmonizing legislation fails to provide a single enforcement regulator or investor advocate. We need to ensure investor protection at all stages of the harmonizing process. We are also concerned that a passport system will allow market regulators to pass the buck on enforcement files. For example, the Alberta Securities Commission may investigate a small part of an irregularity but pass another portion on to another one. According to investor advocates this pass-the-buck system risks leaving an investigation uncompleted.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, is streamlining registration requirements for companies and advisors that operate in more than one province. For example, if a company or broker operates in Alberta and British Columbia, it needs to register with the Alberta and B.C. security commissions. Before Bill 21 companies complained that this process is cumbersome and expensive. According to an investor advocate the passport system is all about streamlining registration but nothing to do with strengthening enforcement.

I have some questions to ask the hon. minister, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister table letters from stakeholders supporting this initiative? The second one: is the minister confident that this change will

positively impact companies? In terms of being registered in Alberta, how can Albertans be confident that the new registration system is going to improve the old system?

Now, I want to touch a little bit on civil liability, Mr. Speaker. According to an investor advocate up until a few years ago stakeholders couldn't sue for misrepresentation in what is called continuous disclosure. If an executive lies in a press release or annual report, shareholders can sue them. Prior to 2006 the provinces had archaic civil liability protection, say the investor advocates. Here are the key questions that need to be addressed. How restrictive is the civil liability? How difficult is it for stakeholders to prove that a company's intent was malicious? Is there a limitation on the amount that stakeholders can recoup, such as a million dollar cap?

I have some other questions, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister explain 41(1)(b), how the executive director will "assist in the administration of the securities or exchange contract laws of another jurisdiction"? Conversely, will other jurisdictions be interfering in Alberta? Who is going to cover the cost of these investigations? Where is the whistle-blower legislation? Alberta Auditor General recommendations: we will see that there.

Those are the few questions, Mr. Speaker. Otherwise, I have no objection. I definitely will support this bill, but if the minister has time sometime today or in a few days, I would really appreciate it if I got those answers.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't prolong the debate. I understand the need for harmonization. As I said, the member that brought it forward said that the Alberta Securities Commission has done yeoman work and didn't have any problems. Well, I beg to differ, because as I said, I worked under the Securities Commission. There were some bad decisions, bad things happening, and hopefully it has been straightened out.

I've always believed that we needed, Mr. Speaker, a national regulator, not a federal government regulator but a national regulator, because it doesn't make sense having investments with the way money flows, having, you know, 13 different jurisdictions. So I understand the purpose of this passport system, to move towards only one set of harmonized continuous disclosure requirements, but I'm not sure, then, what the need is for each one of the securities commissions. It's very hard to tell from the bill.

The other big problem, of course, is that Ontario is not a part of this, and a lot of the markets flow out of Bay Street and Toronto. So that's a major problem if we don't have all provinces participating, especially Ontario. But in saying that, okay, we're moving towards harmonization, and that's a good thing.

The member says that we're not moving to the lowest common denominator. I don't know that from this bill. How can we tell? How can we tell what the rules are going to be under the passport system? I noticed that with some of the rules that we had at the Alberta Securities Commission, as lax as they may have been, we seem to be weakening it. I still don't understand the reason for that other than, as I said, a race to the bottom. The member says that that's not the case, but we have no evidence that that is necessarily true.

3:10

So, Mr. Speaker, as I say, I'm not going to go on very long. I've made the case about this, but I really wonder what the roles are now of all the other securities commissions. In other words, where does

the Alberta Securities Commission end and where does the passport start? It's impossible to tell from that bill. I suppose that it's in the regulations or whatever. Then we could begin to judge whether this is lessening standards rather than sort of the best practices of all the provinces in moving towards harmonization.

I said before that white-collar crime has not been taken very seriously in this country, and certainly the United States is much more concerned about this. We'll have to wait and see how this works. On the one hand I'm for harmonization, but I wish we'd just have one national regulator that the provinces could agree on, have the best practices from all of the securities commissions. That would make the most sense, but we'll have to wait and see if this passport system is a step in the right direction or a weakening, really, of even individual securities commissions. I can't tell at this particular time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if there's a question or comment from hon. members.

There being none, I'll call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again I appreciate the opportunity to rise and participate in the debate this afternoon on Bill 21. From what I can gather, Bill 21 attempts to harmonize security legislation with other provinces. It's a step in the right direction. I, too, have been reading many reports where we should have a more harmonized system of security regulation throughout the country. As this province and this economy grow, I think we have to give serious consideration to this.

I look at the Minister of Finance, and certainly I can see a change in direction from this government. The Minister of Finance has indicated that, well, maybe it is time for a national regulatory body. I think it's going to be an interesting couple of years with that discussion, Mr. Speaker.

Bill 21 also allows investors to sue public companies operating in Alberta that issue false or misleading information. Now, there are those that would say that it fails to strengthen enforcement, and that has certainly been discussed in the past couple of weeks in this Assembly. But when we look at this attempt to harmonize security legislation across the provinces without abolishing the other regulatory bodies, we have to recognize that this process extends back several years, involving several meetings between provincial and federal finance ministers. In fact, there was a former finance minister from this House who would be sitting with the federal finance minister of today. Hopefully, that in itself will lead to a serious consideration of harmonizing our security legislation with other provinces.

Now, when we look at what is in this legislation – all hon. members of this House have had a good look at that – there's something that I'm disappointed is not in this legislation. It has been brought to my attention on many occasions. I've discussed it in this House. I'm disappointed to see that there is not a more valiant attempt made to change how companies report, specifically not only to the investment dealers but to the investment community. To be specific, Mr. Speaker, with Bill 21 we need to look at how companies register their royalty payments and how these show up on either quarterly reports from respective companies or the annual report, which is filed.

Now, this is not only a problem in Alberta, but in my opinion it's a problem also in Ontario, and it certainly is a problem in New York. Let's look at the Syncrude joint venture for an example. The Syncrude joint venture has seven, eight different participants. They

each have different percentages of the project; some are significantly larger than others. But they don't all report in the same way how they pay royalties to the Minister of Energy. Not two of them are the same, and I think they should be. We can look at Petro-Canada's annual report or their quarterly financial statements. We can look at ConocoPhillips. We can look at Imperial Oil. They're all different. They all report their royalty payments in a different way.

We look at Nexen. We look at the Canadian Oil Sands Trust. Perhaps I would suggest that in the future the securities law be set up so that we have to follow the reporting procedures of Nexen and Canadian Oil Sands Trust. They tell in detail the royalties they pay, in which jurisdiction the royalties were collected, and they also explain in a percentage the royalty that has been paid specifically to this province. Now, if you look at Imperial Oil, you can't determine that. If you look at ConocoPhillips, you certainly can't determine that. Petro-Canada is halfway in-between. If I'm an investor and I'm looking at investing in these companies, that's information that I want to know.

If we were to take Bill 21 at this time and improve it, this is one thing we could do. This is not mere housekeeping. There should be a standardized reporting process for royalty payments. The EUB certainly has had a lot to say about this, and other bodies have had a lot to say about exactly how reserves are calculated and reported. If we want to have good, solid investor confidence, Mr. Speaker, we need to have a system that investors and their dealers can be confident in, and that works. I'm not going to go into the details of the changes that have been made in some of the reserves and how they've been reported by respective companies, but this is one thing that I think has been overlooked in the debate so far on Bill 21. I would urge all hon. members of this House to have another look at this because it's important.

If we look at the royalties and some of the questions that an investor may have, they could be these, for an example. If economic profits are generated, how much does the government take? How much does it take from marginal fields? How much does it take from larger, more profitable fields? If oil prices increase, what percentage goes to the government? How much incentive does the contractor have to keep costs down with these investments, now with the effective royalty rate? This could all be outlined and detailed. I have the utmost confidence that we can do this for investors. How aggressive is the system when we're talking about the effective royalty rate? What percentage of the production will the contractor be entitled to lift or be able to lift? All this data could be made available and should be made available to the investors.

3:20

If we look at some of the other jurisdictions, which may or may not have some or all of their operations registered in this province, if we look at Alaska, if we look at outfits that just operate here in Alberta, if we look at what goes on in Texas, if we look at what goes on in Wyoming, in Norway, everything is different. Everything is very different. For instance, the effective royalty rate – and an investor would certainly want to know this – is 22 per cent in Alaska, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta the effective royalty rate is 8 per cent, and that's on third-tier oil. In Texas the effective royalty rate is 24 per cent. In Wyoming it is 20 per cent. In Norway it's zero because they have a different system. The hon. Minister of Energy is absolutely right. Some people don't understand that, but certainly there is a special petroleum tax. That is one of the reasons why the Norwegians have been so successful in collecting on behalf of citizens now and in the future billions and billions of dollars. Certainly, I hope that we do the same here. Those are just some of the jurisdictions.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I think we need to give this serious consideration with Bill 21. Every energy company that's reporting in this jurisdiction should be reporting the amounts of royalties that they pay in the same manner so that investors can make up their own mind whether they want to invest in that enterprise or that corporation. But if investors are going to make up their own mind, they should have all the information available. It shouldn't be just hit and miss.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Energy under this Standing Order provision.

Mr. Knight: Yeah, Mr. Speaker. I listened, and I was very interested in the comments that the hon. member has said around the reporting and recording of royalty structures and that sort of thing with respect to investors and investor confidence. I would just ask if there could be perhaps a little more explanation with respect to how the hon. member would presume that we should proceed in Alberta with respect to this to build investor confidence.

Mr. MacDonald: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the question from the hon. Minister of Energy. Earlier, before the session started in March, I was doing some research into exactly how the royalty structure works postpayout with oil sands projects in Fort McMurray. I was astonished.

First, constituents from Gold Bar come into my office, and they say: "Well, we're going to go from 1 per cent royalty payment after the capital costs are recovered to 25 per cent. When is this going to start in Fort McMurray, and when are we going to see an increase in the royalty amounts from synthetic crude oil to the province?" I thought: "That's a very good question. I should do some research into it." So I did.

I was astonished that some companies pay 12 per cent, some pay 14 per cent, some pay 18 per cent. Some companies that are operating in the oil sands areas also are operating with conventional crude oil and natural gas production in the province, and the royalty rates there are anywhere between 23 per cent and 17 per cent. So there's a really wide range of amounts payable, but the first thing that caught my attention was the public's perception that after the 1 per cent royalty rate is taken care of, these operators in the Fort McMurray region pay 25 per cent, and it's simply not true. It's 25 per cent net. Whenever all the reductions, all the holidays and incentives, are taken into account, some of these companies are paying 12 per cent.

For other companies like Imperial Oil, Petro-Canada, Conoco-Phillips whenever you look at their quarterly reports and their annual reports, you cannot determine what amount they make in payments to this province. I don't think that's fair, I don't think it's consistent, and I think we can do better.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional questions under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Are there additional members who would like to participate on the bill? The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports on the debate.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make a couple of comments in respect to Bill 21 Securities Amendment Act, 2007. I had quite a bit of involvement a few years ago in working with the various provinces under an earlier portfolio when the passport approach was first developed and, really, where the consensus was had. We had worked with numerous stakeholders, all

of the national organizations, all of the provinces and were working towards how we help see that our securities approach in the country can address national and international questions. We've always had the ability to deal with the smaller issuers in a provincial jurisdiction, but the interest is to help see that we would have a very efficient – and not just for the issuers but also for those investing in companies and clearly for all the enforcement aspects so that we would continue to have a high level of confidence in investing and attracting people to invest in the equities market in Canada.

There have been a lot of notions put about saying: why not a national regulator? Clearly, there are pros and cons, as was mentioned by others. There have been some substantive benefits by having the regulation of the industry on a provincial level. Our markets are very different, really. They're mostly small cap, micro cap in comparison to the U.S. markets in particular. The vast majority of companies are accessing very locally and are responding be it mining issues in B.C. versus the oil and gas industry in Alberta and a very different sector in Ontario. Yet there still are some concerns for the larger companies who access funds nationally and internationally. It was that drive that said that we've got to find a solution among all the provinces to provide some mechanisms to deal with those national and international.

There was never any support from Quebec, to start, for a national regulator. Every time everybody has ever approached and said the only utopian solution – and there is never one – was to jump to a national regulator, that meant that Quebec was never part of the solution. It also meant that we were trying to say: where can we find the common issues that are of concern to us, and what approaches might we take to resolve them? So we found a different approach through a passport model that we could get all of the various provinces supporting. Name the concern you have for enforcement – be it confidence, be it similarity of laws, all of those things – name the issues, and let's find methodologies to get them resolved. That's what the passport really was. It was not necessarily the end step but a methodology to help address these questions for national and international issuers and for investors.

We came a long way at that initial step. Ontario was also outside that, and it was only with a change of government in Ontario that they've subsequently rescinded their support. But they, too, have been quietly and very much supporting the directions and the aims, the same common aims that we all have among the provincial jurisdictions.

I'd say one of the things that's been a great strength to ensure that there is provincial say in what happens is in the response to the U.S. Sarbanes-Oxley Act that came down. The U.S. has always taken a very prescriptive, rules-based approach to this. Europe, on the other hand, has been taking a much more principle-based approach to securities regulation. When Sarbanes-Oxley came in and was purported as being the solution, the Ontario Securities Commission wished to adopt most of those regulations. It was because of Alberta and B.C. and some of the other provinces, because we also have regulatory authority, some push back, that we took it more Canadian to reflect the very different marketplaces we have here. The Sarbanes-Oxley approach: very prescriptive but doesn't necessarily ensure that they will give any better confidence in the marketplace.

3:30

I would just say in support that tremendous progress has been made to resolving the challenges among the interprovincial and international questions, the efficiencies of the market, consumer protection, the harmonization objective to ensure that all marketplaces do continue to hold a very high standard. That's the only way we'll be able to continue to attract people in the marketplace, which is the end objective.

So in that respect I'd say that this was an excellent first step in bringing together a unique approach among the jurisdictions which has been wisely constitutionally held, where the responsibility constitutionally is the provinces', with the authority given to find another uniquely Canadian approach to finding harmonization in approaches of methodology to resolve the questions that cross our borders. It is a great first step, and you'll see even Ontario coming forward with accomplishing many of the same aims, which might then lead, down the road, to other structures, be they national or others in scope. But it certainly gives us the ability to move the issues forward without getting so bogged down that there's only one regulatory structure that could solve the problem.

The Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the hon. minister in regard to Bill 21. If we had stronger enforcement of securities laws in this province, does the minister think it would have been easier to track the activities of Enron and what they did to our electricity market between 1999 and 2003?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, you may choose to respond or not.

Mr. Melchin: I'm just going to state this with respect to securities regulation. We have and always have had a very strong standard. Some might say that there have been some problems in the past, and there's always been, unfortunately, a history, in any place in any of the world, of some abuse of the rules and maybe not the right ethical standards. But we do have all of the authorities necessary to enforce, to ensure that consumer confidence is there, both in this act and before.

The Speaker: Are there additional questions or comments? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Yeah. The member talked about Quebec and the problems there. I hadn't thought about that, but I notice in here that it doesn't talk about them not participating in this passport system. Is that, in fact, the case, that Quebec is now on board?

Mr. Melchin: It's true. All of the provinces are signatory to this approach other than, now, Ontario. We at one stage even had Ontario, but Quebec is and has participated completely and fully with this. They, too, have the same concerns when it comes to consumer confidence, enforcement, ensuring that we have some harmonization of standards across this country. They want the same objectives. So what's a methodology that would allow us to continue to see that we have the provincial responsibility, which is ours? Our marketplaces are very different. Quebec marketplaces for their issuers are a different place, different types of structures, different types of companies, really, than most of the Alberta listers.

Just one other plug I forgot. Alberta actually has 30 per cent of the capitalization of the TSX and the Venture Exchange. We are already a very significant, prominent, and growing influence. To not lose nor choose to give away something that is very particular and unique to the Alberta marketplace and influence that we have in the financial markets, we therefore need a very strong, active voice and would not want to delegate and give that away. Quebec, for their own reasons, but they are participants.

The Speaker: Hon. members, no additional members indicated to the chair their desire to participate. Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a third time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading
(continued)

Bill 27
Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2007

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

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 27, the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2007.

The amendment to the emblems act would allow cabinet to add any Alberta symbol of distinction to a list of official symbols. Currently the list of official symbols includes the flag of Alberta; the wild rose, representing the floral emblem of Alberta; and the great horned owl, representing the official bird of Alberta, as noted examples.

It's important to realize that all of our province's official symbols will continue to take precedence and protocol. That will not change as they are legislated symbols. What Bill 27 proposes is to grant the authority to cabinet to officially recognize symbols of distinction through an order in council. This would allow cultural groups to obtain a symbol of distinction for a special event or to celebrate an important milestone.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

This proposal will help expedite the process to approve a symbol of distinction at any time of the year without the constraints of having to go through a full and sometimes lengthy legislative process. Bill 27 would provide an efficient process to ensure that important symbols of distinction would be recognized in a timely manner.

It also highlights the amazing diversity in heritage that makes up Alberta today. It is an opportunity to recognize symbols of distinction for Alberta and those that enrich our culture. Various cultural groups in Alberta could request that symbols be added to this official list. The regulation will establish the criteria that must be met before new symbols of distinction are selected. The symbols would represent cultural groups that had contributed to Alberta's diverse society. These symbols would not duplicate or closely resemble a symbol of another cultural group. They would have to be unique to Alberta or represent our province in some way, have some history, and be made in Alberta. They must be nonreligious and nonpartisan. The symbols would not be offensive or divisive. Finally, Mr. Speaker, they would not promote hatred or racism.

This bill would represent an efficient and faster alternative to open up the process to deserving groups with symbols of recognition. By supporting Bill 27, we are recognizing and celebrating the diverse cultural influences that truly make this a unique and great province. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to discuss the importance of Bill 27.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise again and speak to Bill 27, Emblems of Alberta Amendment

Act, 2007. This bill has two objectives: first, to create a new category called an Alberta symbol of distinction, and second, that Alberta symbols of distinction will be decided in cabinet, not in the Legislature. I'm going to support this bill, but I have a few questions to ask the hon. minister.

Let me talk a little bit about rationale. The cultural group can have their symbol recognized. This Bill 27 enhances cultural diversity, but as the minister said, it has to be related to Alberta. It will reflect the province's history and its natural and diverse landscapes and its people. But this bill, Mr. Speaker, does not add a specific official symbol. It allows groups to bring forward official symbol ideas to cabinet. Cabinet makes the decision. Cabinet makes the decision, not the Legislature. This bill appears to be a new direction for debating Alberta official emblems. According to the Emblems of Alberta Act, Alberta currently has 12 official emblems. There are, I think, at this moment about 11.

3:40

Mr. Bonko: What are they?

Mr. Agnihotri: The first one is armorial bearings of Alberta, the flag of Alberta, the floral emblem of Alberta, the official grass of Alberta, the Alberta tartan, the Alberta dress tartan, the official bird of Alberta, the official stone of Alberta, the official tree of Alberta, the official colours of Alberta, the official mammal of Alberta, the official fish of Alberta. The new one, which is coming, is the Alberta symbol of distinction.

I have a question to the hon. minister. This Bill 204 is before the House, Mr. Speaker, and it's also . . .

Mr. Bonko: Twenty-seven.

Mr. Agnihotri: Yeah. I know that.

Bill 204 is before the House, and it's also trying to amend this act to officially recognize the Franco-Albertan flag. Can the minister explain this discrepancy? We could have, you know, passed one bill, served the same purpose. But I want to know from the minister why we have two different ones. Can the minister define a symbol? Maybe lots of members sitting in this House still don't know exactly about the symbol.

Also, I have a question to the minister. If he can answer this. Can the minister confirm that Alberta can have more than one official symbol? What does cabinet plan to do if two groups within one cultural group bring forward competing ideas? Who will decide? Who will be the decision-maker?

Currently all official categories for emblems are debated in the Legislature. Why does this government want to take some of the decision-making out of the Assembly? What's wrong with the current format of debating official emblem categories in the Legislature? Have any other provinces done this before? This is another question.

But, Mr. Speaker, anything that enhances diversity we definitely will support a hundred per cent.

Another thing that the hon. minister just mentioned is that it has to be made in Alberta. There are so many other symbols, maybe controversial, but some communities think it belongs to them, and they want to be recognized just like this. My question is: is the minister going to allow these symbols in the future? As he said, it's open, and we can add lots of other symbols next time. For example, the Sikhs wear the kirpan, the dagger. Some people think that this is religious, but they are saying that it's not offensive to anybody. Maybe for some people it's controversial. So what are we going to say to the community? Some other people use different types of

forks. Security-wise maybe some people disagree with those people, but they are connected with those symbols. What are we going to do? I mean, we can debate in this House, but now there's a new tradition that this government is going to decide mostly everything about the symbols behind closed doors. I mean, they will discuss everything in their caucus.

What symbols, for example, for aboriginal people? We cannot forget the contribution they have made to our society. They are great contributors so far. So I'm still confused. In the future if those communities come up with some ideas, they might be controversial. If we keep on making decisions just in your caucus, not in this House – when we make a decision, all the Assembly is answerable to the public. I think this is not right, but otherwise to the idea of enhancing the diversity in either shape, I mean, we have no objection.

I'm really supporting this bill, and I commend the hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture for sponsoring this bill. Whatever questions I asked, if the members think those questions could make some complications in the future, we can discuss that at the next stage. At this moment I don't think anything is objectionable to me, and I urge all the members of this House to support this bill.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Bill 27, the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2007, is intended to add any and, I hope, many Alberta symbols of distinction to the list of official symbols. These symbols of distinction will join the ranks of our other provincial emblems, which include the armorial bearings, official colours, and our flag; the Alberta tartan and dress tartan; the wild rose, our provincial flower; the lodgepole pine, the provincial tree; petrified wood, the provincial stone; the great horned owl, which I rather like, our provincial bird; bighorn sheep, our provincial mammal; the bull trout, the provincial fish; and rough fescue, the provincial grass. Now, these emblems represent elements of Alberta that are important to us all. They are important because they're symbolic of Alberta's natural and cultural heritage.

The first emblem recognized in Alberta was the shield of arms way back in 1907. Our other emblems were added periodically throughout Alberta's first century, with the last emblem, rough fescue grass, adopted in 2003.

Bill 27 will strengthen our capacity for inclusion. It will encourage all Albertans to participate equally in the social, economic, and cultural life of the province as we head into Alberta's next century. Our actions to amend the legislation so that cultural groups can add their own symbols of distinction will go a long way to inform Albertans about the cultural diversity of our province. It will aid in the efforts to educate the public about the many unique contributions that these diverse groups have made to the province of Alberta. We're looking to immigration to fill a shortfall of skilled workers, so having a culturally rich and diverse province is a major advantage. As the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture is fond of saying, when we attract talented people to our province, we don't want them to think of Alberta as a place where they can work for a few years, make some money, and return home. We want them to stay and raise their families here. We want them to enjoy living here and to make this province, our province, home.

3:50

I'm very pleased to support this bill because it represents not only ideas that I have about what an inclusive province means; it also

builds Alberta's pride. Albertans are proud of this province and will continue to help promote the diversity that is found in our communities across the province. Bill 27 will allow elected members to grant official recognition of traditionally recognized symbols of distinction. That makes Alberta a better place to live, work, and visit.

Colleagues, please join me in supporting the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2007.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, there is a five-minute opportunity for questions and comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join in the vigorous debate on Bill 27, the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2007. I have a couple of questions and then an observation for the sponsoring member of the bill. I'm wondering what sort of creative controls are in place that support the intentions of this bill. In other words, if a group comes forward with an emblem, a symbol of distinction that they wish to have adopted under this legislation, who decides that it's appropriate or inappropriate, that the colours are correct? What are the criteria that are set in place that support this?

If there are going to be regulations that lay this out, could we see them, please: have them tabled in the House or sent to one of the policy committees? At this point the minister sponsoring the bill must have some idea of how this is all going to work. So how does it work? Is there anything that's deemed out of bounds or off-colour here? Who has the creative control and makes these decisions? What criteria is that based on?

The second thing is: what's being anticipated? Flags? Pins? Heraldic symbols? Buttons? What? There are no criteria being given on what's anticipated as a symbol of distinction. I mean, we're quite good in Alberta at having these gigantic symbols of distinction. You know, the pysanka and the golf club and the baseball bat and all of those huge – I don't know what to call them, Mr. Speaker – tourist attractions and symbols of particular areas or heritages: are they symbols of distinction? Is that what we're going to do, name them symbols of distinction? How does that work?

The third thing is an observation. I take it that this bill is meant in all good faith, but there is just something that kind of is niggling away in the back of my brain about this one. Making the decision exclusive to the government cabinet, that disproportionately affects the members of the opposition and, in fact, the independent members of this House from participating in that decision. It makes it the exclusive playground or the exclusive ability of cabinet – I suppose, supported by caucus – to designate this and cuts out, in effect, the rest of the members of this Assembly.

I know others have raised the question about why it is going behind closed doors to be made as a cabinet decision. I am coming at the same question from a slightly different point of view because what I can see rolling out from this is like the scenario where the lottery cheques are always given away – surprise, surprise – by members of the government caucus, never given away by a member of the opposition caucus.

Well, those groups are in our constituency. In many cases we wrote support letters, but, gosh darn it, we never get called to hand out the cheque. Well, the reason that's given is: oh, it was in the particular member's riding. Yeah. Well, this member has an awful lot of groups that are centralized in her riding, and I've never been contacted to hand out a cheque. As a matter of fact, the government has gone to great lengths to make sure that I didn't know that a group in my constituency was getting a cheque and to have other

government members come into my riding to present a cheque to a group that's in my riding.

That's what I can see happening here, that groups from a particular geographic area now get to help their local group designate their particular symbol as a symbol of distinction and get to do all of the pomp and ceremony that goes along with it, but we on the opposition don't. That is what's starting to bother me because I don't really see much changing of feathers over there. I see the same 60 people sitting there that were the group of 62, and now they're the group of 60. So I don't see a lot of changes of colours of feathers here.

What they've tended to do before is make the sort of bestowing of gifts and the bestowing of honours exclusive and done behind closed doors so that they can control it all, and they've cut out the members of the Official Opposition, the third party opposition, and the independent members of the House. That's what I see happening with this bill. So, you know, I'm happy to have symbols of distinction, but I really question why this is going behind closed doors, under the control of cabinet. I think that it's yet something else that's being done to disproportionately affect members of the opposition and independent members.

I guess what I'll close with is the question to the members of the government: would they be as happy with this legislation if and when – and I think it's if – they found themselves sitting on this side of the House after the next election? Are they going to think that this is such a great bill at that time? I'll bet you that they won't.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments.

Seeing none, does the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs wish to participate in the debate?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to be able to join this debate on Bill 27 and therein an amendment. In particular, I would like to speak to the amendment part of the bill. In its primal stage the bill would require any group in Alberta that had a desire to have any insignia formally recognized in the province to actually bring it before this Chamber sponsored by one of the members of the Legislature as a bill. Then this particular piece of legislation would require the diligence of the scrutiny of any bill, as per protocol in this Chamber.

As we all know, in this Legislature our legislative agenda as it is, without such additional bills, is rather busy. Having such requests added to the legislative agenda in the form of a bill would only detract from our ability to consider the bills that we already normally consider in due course. What would happen is that it would require a much more significant and much more thorough research and submission process for such groups that wanted special insignia to be recognized, and in many cases, as experience in most likelihood will show, it will be groups and not-for-profit agencies and other groups that don't have the resources to do so. Also, it would occupy many private members' time from their usual duties in the constituency to sponsor such bills and satisfy the request of the constituents.

Now, the amended form of this bill allows for such groups to circumvent that process – and when I say circumvent, I mean it in a very positive manner – and allow for a much more expedient recognition of such a request through an order in council. For those who perhaps may be viewing this debate, an order in council is simply a consideration of the cabinet to have it discussed and scrutinized at the cabinet table in view of very stringent criteria that are outlined in the bill itself. So it will not be a frivolous decision, but it will be a much more expedient decision.

So what benefits do we have? Well, (a) it will be much easier for

Albertans to present a request to this government to have their symbol officially recognized in the province, which will add to our heritage because we often pride ourselves in symbolism affiliated with many organizations, and (b) it will not detract from the time spent on otherwise presented bills in this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, I think that this bill is an important one. It is important to not only preserve tradition but to create new tradition, to create new insignia and new symbols representing those important aspects and important groups in our society, and this bill will exactly accomplish that. Since the minister is the individual originating this bill, having an Alberta francophonie flag as the initial symbol recognized in this province perhaps would be appropriate in view of this bill and the initial sponsor of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I fully support this bill, and I encourage all members of this Chamber to support this bill as well. Thank you.

4:00

The Deputy Speaker: Is there anyone wishing to have a question or comment under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just rise to make a few comments. The comments I would have are these: I don't have a lot time or energy or desire to go along with any of these kinds of bills, which, in my opinion, tend to pick and choose certain cultures, ethnicities, or religions. The reason that I say this is that when I hearken back to some of our great-great-grandparents that homesteaded in this country and the part of the province that I come from, there were people from eastern Europe, Czechoslovakia, Hungary. There were people from Holland. There were Scots. There were Irishmen, Germans, Danes, Norwegians, Swedes, and not that many Ukrainians, colleague, but it just happened to be in that area of the province at that time.

You know, from my personal experience, my wife's grandparents had come here via Quebec from France, and when they hit the small town that they were homesteading in, they found they were the only French family. Apparently the great-grandpa turned to the family and said: "Nobody else speaks French here. That's the end of it." They made a determination at that time that they'd come to this province to merge in with other ethnicities and religions and become one, become Albertans and Canadians. I think they kept their family pride and their family history and all their unique traits of their own family to themselves.

I think of the best friend that I had as a child growing up, whose family came here from Czechoslovakia, and the only memories and relics that they have of their family history or their heritage are five pieces of crystal. There weren't any government programs to assist them to learn English as a second language. There weren't any government programs to help them assimilate. There was just something called hard work and pride in the new country.

So I think it's dangerous ground to go down because I, for one, would wonder if another ethnic group, whether it was an Irishman, whether it was somebody from Holland or somebody whose family came from Japan, in our constituency would have every bit as much right to want and expect some of these special recognitions. But they don't. They just want to be Albertans and Canadians and get on with their life.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? Seeing none, did the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross wish to participate in the debate?

Mrs. Fritz: No, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing none, are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading
(continued)

Bill 3
Climate Change and Emissions Management
Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Government House Leader want to move on behalf?

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm more than pleased to move Bill 3 for third reading.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with great interest once again to speak on Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. Certainly, we have tried to perhaps improve this bill. There's been no lack of trying on our parts. On Tuesday I brought up a number of amendments that centred around giving Bill 3 some teeth in regard to being able to take it away from this idea of intensity targets to absolute reductions in carbon dioxide emissions here in the province of Alberta because, you know, we are in the midst of a turning point, not just in the province of Alberta but around the world. We have to make these tough decisions about the way that we use energy and the way that we produce emissions from that energy.

Certainly, we are in an advantageous position in this province because, of course, we are making tremendous profits at this juncture from our nonrenewable, carbon-based energy, that we have available to us through coal and through oil and natural gas. It has provided wonderful prosperity for our province, but you have to plan ahead because (a) that is a nonrenewable resource, and (b) we are now seeing the negative effects from the carbon dioxide climate change emissions that are resultant from the hydrocarbon technology. What a great time to bridge the way that we use energy in this province and actually use some of the profits that we're making from hydrocarbon to move to a more sustainable, renewable energy system.

So Bill 3, or something like it, with the amendments that I had brought forward, would actually be a good start because, of course, if we are in fact putting hard caps on CO₂ emissions, then we will also collect revenue from that and be able to invest in renewable resources that are going to give us something to work with in the long run.

So just to remind the House, Mr. Speaker, of some of the amendments that I had brought forward, the first one, A1, was to deal with absolute reductions and not intensity reductions. The second amendment was to do with gas sequestration. I think there was some confusion about that, I believe, on the Tuesday. I'm sure there was, you know, or else I would have had it passed perhaps.

The confusion lay in the idea that we were opposing carbon capture and gas sequestration. You know, that's not the case, but certainly, we just were very concerned about investing billions and billions of taxpayers' money on essentially what is an industrial problem. The bottom line is that industry should be paying for their own problems associated with carbon dioxide. In fact, that is the

way by which you set up a system to move industry and to move our society away from using as much carbon dioxide or carbon-based emissions.

You know, the sort of money that we're talking about to build essentially an experimental pipeline is \$5 billion or more. Imagine if we invested that same money in renewables or in retrofitting people's homes to make them more efficient for heating or in public transit systems or in a whole, wide range of other things that would give us far greater return in (a) carbon dioxide reduction – right? – and (b) improving the quality of life for all Albertans. So instead of building a big pipeline and all the rest of it, we believe that, in fact, we could achieve greater reductions with alternative investments in sustainable energy production.

The third amendment that I brought forward was to do with confidentiality. You know, it's always funny how these are tagged on to so many of these major bills, that we don't get full disclosure of what is going on or where the information is coming from and what decisions are being based on. I think that the amendment that I placed on that confidentiality sections taking out the confidentiality section serves as a reminder of just how far we have to still go in this province in regard to open, transparent government because, you know, information is the essence of transparency and access to information, and of course, once again, in Bill 3 we've found evidence of quite the opposite.

4:10

The fourth amendment, that I brought forward on Tuesday, was to do with complying with the arrangements of the Kyoto accord, of which Canada is a signatory and of which most industrialized nations are as well. It's interesting because, you know, people have fought tooth and nail against the international agreement to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. One of the arguments, a completely facetious and irrelevant argument, was: oh well, countries like India and China and perhaps the United States are not signing onto this agreement, so that makes it irrelevant. Well, lo and behold. As we speak, the Chinese government is, in fact, meeting to start the groundwork for China to be part of a Kyoto-type agreement. So, it's just not true that other major nations are going to avoid this. It's inevitable. Certainly, the United States, with the regime change which is imminent, will sign onto a carbon reducing agreement as well.

Simply reminding ourselves that there is an international agreement in place of which we are signatories and then applying it to some carbon dioxide climate change emissions reduction bill that we're passing here seemed to be a no-brainer. I was very shocked and surprised to see that, in fact, there was only limited support from the New Democrat caucus, which is perhaps the progressive voice in here, which is a good thing. It's a good thing that we have some progressive voices in the Legislature in regard to climate change. I think that the population definitely appreciates it. It's a good thing to do.

With those comments then, certainly, the main issues that we have that find Bill 3 unacceptable are (a) it does nothing to achieve actual reductions. Intensity targets allow, in fact, drastic increases in overall emissions. Number two, Bill 3 demonstrates just how far out of touch we are in regard to climate change and how out of touch this Legislature seems to be with the popular opinion of the population in regard to doing something about climate change.

There was an interesting Ipsos-Reid poll that just came out today. Almost 60 per cent of Canadians, in fact, were in favour of the government taking decisive action in regard to climate change, and the same majority believed that it would not harm the economy, which is another very, very poor and sort of scaremongering

argument that we hear, but would enhance the economy of not only our province but the country.

So, you know, perhaps we should give the public more credit because, of course, this is ultimately true. If you are decreasing your reliance on carbon-based energy systems, you have plenty of opportunity to in fact increase the quality of life of the population by changing the way we use energy, changing the way that we transport ourselves, and creating a healthier environment for everybody.

Another reason that we oppose Bill 3 is that the carbon trading provisions in the bill are very limited. You have some sort of half-cooked idea of just trading in Alberta. I mean, it's very limited in scope. Certainly, one of the keys to carbon trading is to have an ability to look right across the country and even internationally and selectively to in fact trade with carbon. You know, as long as we can set up a system that can be verified, there's a multibillion dollar industry in carbon trading already going on all around us, and why would we not join that in the interest of carbon dioxide reduction?

Also, this legislation depends almost wholly on the regulations for its implementation, and this (a) makes Bill 3 subject to change without debate and, number two, adds a layer of secrecy and lack of consultation that makes this bill very, very poorly organized.

Finally, Bill 3 is not part of a comprehensive and integrated approach to combatting climate change. It's just one piece. Maybe it's just one piece of the puzzle. Obviously, until you have a realization that you can't be developing all of the tar sands projects at the same time and building, you know, this sort of gold rush mentality, then there's no way that we could ever possibly achieve carbon dioxide reduction. It's just not mathematically possible. So until we, in fact, have a moratorium on new tar sands project approval, then this whole thing is worse than a pipe dream. I would suggest that it's a way to deliberately deceive the public into thinking that we're actually doing something when we're doing quite the opposite. I find that to be the most troubling part of Bill 3. I think that there are ways by which we could salvage it, as I said, through those amendments that I had suggested.

The final thing that I would like to say about it is that at the very least let's try out this new all-party committee system that we have here and move some of the regulatory parts of Bill 3 over to those new all-party committees that we just finished painting and polishing up and are ready to go. What a great way to demonstrate that we are in fact serious about debating these things in a democratic manner and making the very best decision based on the very best data that we can get not just from inside this House but from the general population as well.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will close my comments on Bill 3 in this reading. I certainly look forward to the debate because it's certainly not over yet.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and say a few brief words about Bill 3. A few years ago there was a TV commercial, and I believe it was for Fram oil filters. The gist of the commercial was that you could save yourself a little bit of money by buying a cheaper oil filter, but in the end your savings would be wiped out by car problems eventually. The tag line of the commercial featured this mechanic, and he said: you can pay me now, or you can pay me later. I was reminded of that commercial while reading through some of the debate heard in the Legislature on Bill 3.

Now, that old commercial came to mind specifically while reading

a report about climate change, that has been cited by a number of members in this Legislature, written by Sir Nicholas Stern. The Stern report recommends that we have to start spending 1 per cent of our gross national product now per year or we're going to be spending 20 per cent of our gross national product in 20 years due to massive dislocation of people, loss of life, and loss of land.

One per cent of our gross domestic product in Alberta would be \$2 billion spent annually on carbon reduction technology, carbon reduction incentives in the renewable area, biofuels, energy efficiency technologies, carbon capture and storage. Two billion dollars is what this report suggested is going to be needed if we are going to seriously commit to climate change reduction. Presently we spend no more than \$500 million a year on climate change initiatives. If Sir Nicholas Stern is correct, that's not even close to what we should be doing.

There's no doubt at this time that climate change has become, justifiably, the single most important issue of the 21st century. Will Bill 3 address this urgent matter? Not likely. From an Alberta perspective consider what impact climate change could have in Alberta. We will see a reduction in surface water and soil moisture. Mountain and northern regions and the boreal forest will face increasing risk from wildfires, insects, decrease in soil moisture, and changes to the ecosystem. This is not alarmist rhetoric from scientists with a green agenda or the ravings of tree huggers. These worrisome predictions come directly from a government of Alberta document called Facts about Climate Change.

While we support efforts to combat climate change, Mr. Speaker, Bill 3 simply is not enough. We need real reduction in greenhouse gases. When I spoke of Bill 3 last week, I said that we absolutely had to get this bill right. Unfortunately, I don't believe this is the case. The issue is too important for half measures, but that is exactly what we have in front of us today. The government is clearly behind the times of the people of Alberta. As the saying goes: you can pay me now, or you can pay me later.

Thank you.

4:20

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 29(2)(a) are there any comments or questions?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, Bill 3 at this stage has been given considerable debate. There have been amendments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder and the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, to just name a few. There's also the general thought that this legislation is a good start on climate change, but it's not good enough. It certainly has some things in it that, I think, are necessary. The \$15 a tonne tax charged on emissions over the cap: it's a carbon tax. Is it about time for a carbon tax? We have to do something.

Now, what we do with the money that's collected is very important. In fact, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View suggested yesterday in an amendment that if things aren't working out, well, we can go from \$15 per tonne commencing in 2008 to \$20 a tonne commencing in 2010 and \$30 per tonne commencing in 2012, and this money could go into a green fund. The number that was discussed earlier in debate, Mr. Speaker, for the amount that would be in this green fund was \$175 million. That was the anticipated amount that would be collected. When we look at the general idea of this, it's very sound. The implications of this will be felt for many years in the future; there's no doubt in my mind.

Will we use this money for CO₂ sequestration? Will we use it for research into reducing emissions from coal-fired electricity genera-

tion stations? Will we use it for transportation sector research? We could use this money for any number of things, but we have to be very careful. I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to be very careful that we do not single out one particular sector of the economy and pick on them for dramatic increases in CO₂ emissions. [interjections] This is causing some fuss, Mr. Speaker, and I will put it away before it causes any more fuss. Thank you. The previous speaker said that it was a Thursday, and he was absolutely right, a Thursday afternoon.

Getting back to Bill 3, we just can't single out one sector of the economy, and that's the energy industry. When we are talking about reducing our CO₂ emissions, we have to talk about changing our ways: how we drive, how we fly, how we purchase our goods, which goods we purchase. Should we look more closely at the way they're manufactured and how they came to this jurisdiction? There are a lot of things that can be done.

I think we better be very careful not just to pick on one sector of the economy, the energy sector, for instance, the oil sands area or electricity generation. Sure, there has been a dramatic increase in CO₂ emissions from those sectors, but as we buy more cars, as we travel faster, that is also responsible for a significant increase in CO₂ emissions. We're building more and more houses further and further away from central areas of our cities, which requires, naturally, more car use. We are not talking about using any of this money for mass transit systems in urban areas. All this is related, Mr. Speaker.

In conclusion, with Bill 3 I would urge all hon. members to devise solutions to our greenhouse gas emissions. Devise solutions, but let's not pick on one sector of the economy and one sector only.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) for questions and comments is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar if by not picking on one sector of the economy, he means that we disregard particular sectors of the economy which may be responsible for massive increases in CO₂ production. Should we apportion the responsibility according to the amount that's produced and the amount of increase that a sector produces, or should we treat low emitters the same as high emitters?

Mr. MacDonald: No, we should not treat low emitters and high emitters the same. The hon. member would clearly understand that in Bill 3 there are close to 30 per cent of the emitters that are not included at all. In fact, we talked about that at second reading. It included intensive livestock operations. It included some of the petrochemical industry. It included fertilizer plants, places where there was a different energy reaction than combustion. Those, from what I can gather from the hon. Minister of Environment, were part of that group of 30 per cent. What I mean by sectors of the economy: we have to do something with the transportation sector. We have to change how we operate there.

Ms Blakeman: High-speed rail.

Mr. MacDonald: High-speed rail is certainly a very, very good idea, and I talked about that in discussions earlier about investment in mass transit systems. If we are going to collect this carbon tax, what do we use it for? That is one of the reasons why we should consider more rail links. We should consider more mass transit. If we're going to build all these suburbs that are a 45-minute commute

from the central core of our cities, we're going to have to come up with something better. That is, hopefully, what we will do.

I don't think we should just pick on the oil sands projects or we should just pick on coal-fired baseload generating stations because we, unfortunately, need what they provide. Now, should we take this money and do research and development into better and more efficient ways they operate and not only reduce the amount of CO₂ emissions but dramatically reduce them to 1990 and below levels? We certainly should, and that's, hopefully, what will happen.

The Deputy Speaker: Others under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, are there others that wish to participate in the debate on Bill 3? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just very briefly. I've spoken to this bill in second and in committee, and I want to go on the record again in third. I think partly what's up for debate with this bill is that this is a small step, but is that good enough? You know, can we be incremental with this? Is the glass half full or half empty? To me, this is just not good enough. The glass is half empty. I'm not willing to put my vote behind it to say, "Well, you know, it's better than nothing" or "It's a small step in the right direction." It's way too small a step in the right direction.

4:30

You know, we are so far behind what the public is telling us to do, what our own constituents are telling us to do on this, which is: "Take leadership. Make bold moves. Move this in all the directions that it needs to move." My colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar was just talking about some of the other sectors that are affected and where we need to do work. We need to be developing alternative energy sources. We need to be working on conservation. We need to be working on an individual level right up to a corporate level.

This bill is not reflecting that. It is not good enough. It's too timid. It's cowardly. It doesn't show leadership. It doesn't take us far enough and fast enough on where we need to be going. The science has clearly outlined what needs to happen here and what's important, and the government is just dithering and is overly cautious and disorganized about an approach to this. It's just not good enough.

My constituents consistently list concern for the environment/greenhouse gases as one of the top three issues in my constituency. I would argue that at this point in time it's probably wrestling with health for the number one issue in my constituency. What I hear from my constituents is: "This doesn't go far enough. This is not good enough. Don't get behind it."

We don't even have to go back to the drawing board. There are an awful lot of good ideas that are out there that have been brought up in debate already. We don't have to go that far back to come up with a much, much better bill. Indeed, when you look at the amendments that were brought forward – some were brought by the ND opposition, and our environment critic, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, had two good amendments as well to try and make the bill more aggressive and more progressive. They were all defeated, so I just think there's a timidness and a disorganization in the approach to this issue by this government that I'm not willing to support.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, does anyone else wish to participate in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise to speak to third reading of Bill 3, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. I have addressed this bill previously in the House and indicated that the Alberta New Democrats cannot support this particular bill and outlined that, basically, the reason is that we believe that the emissions intensity approach which is enshrined in this bill is not an honest approach.

It doesn't take into account the fact that the government has indicated that unrestricted economic development which is driven by investment in tar sands is going to be allowed to continue. They're not going to step on the brake, as the Premier has said, notwithstanding the fact that we have severe problems with infrastructure, housing, shortages of new schools, lots of problems with respect to health care and emergency rooms, and not to mention all of the environmental problems, the demands on very, very limited water supplies, particularly in the southern half of the province. The list goes on and on, and this province will not be able to catch up.

But the more pressing long-term problem is the whole question of climate change, which is very real. More and more people are beginning to become alarmed by this, having seen the changes within their own lifespan. Let's not forget that climate change in the world can be a natural phenomenon, but it normally takes place over periods of time of 10,000 years or much more and usually occurs as a result of very small changes in global temperature of one or two degrees Celsius. In fact, we've seen changes within our own lifespans equivalent to that, which means that in terms of the pace of climate change the earth is now moving towards a warmer climate at a blinding rate of speed – a blinding rate of speed – compared to the natural processes that have led to ice ages and the retreat of glaciation and so on and all of those normal types of climate change.

What we're seeing is something that has changed within our own lifespan, which is just the bat of an eye in terms of geological time. So those changes, more and more people are coming to believe, will not just inconvenience us and cause economic damage but may in fact produce life-threatening situations for our children and our grandchildren. More and more people, Mr. Speaker, are concerned about the impact on human society looking forward 50, 100 years, 200 years into the future and are concerned that we will in fact not leave this earth in a habitable form for the future generations of the planet.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, absolutely refuses to take any responsibility for Alberta's contribution to climate change because if it did, it would deal with CO₂ production and other greenhouse gas production in a way that didn't allow economic development at a high rate of speed to shoot up our CO₂ emissions. For example, I want to make a couple of quotes. Toxics Watch has estimated that at a 4 per cent growth rate Alberta greenhouse gas emissions will rise by 66 to 83 per cent above 1990 levels by 2020 even if intensity is reduced by 50 per cent. The Pembina Institute estimates that at the current rate of economic growth the government's plan will allow emissions to rise by 72 per cent above 1990 levels by 2020. We can't let that happen. We owe it to the future generations of this province and of the world – our children, our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren – to do better.

So I would like at this time to introduce an amendment to the bill. I believe the table has that, and would ask that it be distributed. Would you like me to read it now?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes. We'll just give the pages a moment to have them circulated, please. Okay, hon. member, you may proceed.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I will move that third reading of Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management

Amendment Act, 2007, be amended by striking out the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, be not now read a third time because the proposed measures to reduce the intensity of specified gas emissions contained therein combined with rapid oil sands development will allow ongoing, dramatic increases in specified gas emissions and make it impossible to meet the requirements of the Kyoto protocol.

4:40

So, Mr. Speaker, just to briefly summarize the rationale for this, we do not believe that this House should pass Bill 3 at the present time, that it should not be given its third reading, because the intensity approach combined with rapid economic development, particularly in Alberta’s tar sands, will allow total greenhouse gas emissions in this province to shoot up dramatically. In fact, they will shoot up dramatically, and they will affect the climate, and Alberta is not going to meet its responsibilities to the rest of the world if this bill is approached.

I know that other members across have views on this matter, and I would encourage them to stand up and put their opinions and positions on the record, Mr. Speaker, as we are doing.

It’s quite clear that it is unacceptable from the point of view of dealing with climate change to permit increases in the range of 66 to 83 per cent above 1990 levels just by the year 2020. As I’ve indicated before, Mr. Speaker, the impact of that combined with the failure of the rest of the country under successive Liberal and Conservative governments as well as the failure of the United States and other countries to meet their obligations will in fact produce a disastrous world situation, which most of us will escape because we won’t be here. But our children and grandchildren will be here, and they will have to face it. That is unacceptable to me as an Albertan, as a parent, and as a responsible member of this Legislature. So we need to do better.

Hopefully, if this motion is passed, the government will have an opportunity to reconsider its problem, reconsider the issue. I do not deny the complexity and the difficulty of grappling with this particular situation in the context of the economic growth in this province and of the type of economy which we have. It should not be underestimated, and we do not underestimate it, but we have to do better than this.

So, in conclusion, I would urge members to pass the reasoned amendment which the Alberta NDP caucus has put forward and have the government take another look at this situation, review the options, come back with something that’s responsible that will support economic growth today but which will also take into account the environmental impacts and the effect of climate change on this planet and on the people who live on it, the animals who live on it, and take a longer term and a more responsible view of the situation. That will conclude my remarks, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to rise and support the reasoned amendment that’s been put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. This conforms with a number of the visions that the Alberta Liberals have on record for what we see as the direction the province should be going in around climate change, around conservation, around protection of our environment, and also, you know, the consideration that we’ve tried to direct the Assembly towards regarding our northern cities and what the development is doing to them and some of the issues that it has created. I mean, they are wonderful cities – Grande

Prairie, Peace River, Fort McMurray – and terrific people that are living there, and they’ve had some pretty interesting barriers placed in front of them, additional things that they are having to cope with in their everyday personal and working lives because of the choices that are made by this government. As I say, this does fall in line with the principles that have been set forth by the Alberta Liberals, and I’m happy on our behalf to state our support for it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I appreciate my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood bringing forward this reasoned amendment. As I said in my previous comments, it’s almost worse. Well, it’s definitely worse to in fact put something out that might give the impression that something is being done when it’s business as usual or worse, as I said, a geometric increase in carbon dioxide climate change emissions in the province of Alberta under the proposed provisions of Bill 3. So it’s like when someone wants to believe that everything is okay; it’s that ostrich sort of mentality. You put your head in the sand and hope for the best. This is the kind of thing that Bill 3 seems to be doing.

We not only have a responsibility in this Legislature to provide regulation and to provide laws that will protect and enhance people and the environment of our province, but we also have an obligation to lead. Leadership sometimes involves difficult decisions, and one of the more difficult decisions that we do have in front of us is how to retool and change the way that we deliver energy here in this province.

So we could come up against a potentially cataclysmic change in the climate based on our reliance on hydrocarbon energy systems, and that’s the place where you have to make that fundamental change. When we’re in a position to do that, it’s exciting but not if we continue to think that business as usual is really the best means by which to govern its elite. And this is a very excellent case in point where, in fact, we do have to make some moderation in the way that we deliver and unfold our energy industry, and we do quite frankly have to touch the brake. There has to be a moratorium on new tar sands development in the province of Alberta, or not only will we increase our carbon dioxide climate change emissions fivefold or sixfold or sevenfold, but we’ll also burn our economy out and create a less diversified, very focused on a single-industry economy that is literally eating away at all of the other systems that are in place to build a good and just society.

I’m perhaps piling so much onto Bill 3 here, but that’s what it comes down to. It comes down to making a choice as to whether or not we’re able to make a change from hydrocarbon-based energy delivery systems to a more sustainable approach. Now, certainly that doesn’t preclude the fact that we’re going to continue to use our hydrocarbon wealth and continue to use the hydrocarbons that we have available to us as nonrenewable resources in the province of Alberta. What we are saying, though, is that we have to sip those resources more judiciously instead of gulping them down in great quantities like we are doing today. You know, it’s a fine thing to have nonrenewable energy resources, but of course by definition they are (a) nonrenewable and (b) are contributing to an unsustainable situation in regard to climate change carbon dioxide emissions. This reasoned amendment is very well worded and very well titled as well as a reasonable thing. It’s time that we do face facts and look for ways by which we can change direction.

4:50

The whole issue about the way Bill 3 deals with carbon trading is

very flawed at best and limited. The way that it deals with offsets and with paying penalties, again, is very flawed and confused. No wonder industry doesn't appreciate this approach. It doesn't seem to have any direction in terms of long-term planning. Like, where are we going to go from \$15? Where is the plan for five years after that or five years after that? What's the direction of this whole thing? You know, business and corporations have to plan for that too because it's part of their cost of doing business.

Many progressive businesses in this province have already planned for the inevitability that carbon dioxide climate change emissions have to be dealt with and, you know, have been buying offsets for years and trying to build systems where they can be potentially reducing or diversifying their energy portfolios. It's time for this place, this fine Legislature, where the regulations come from to meet those progressive companies and corporations and, in fact, give them the long-term plan that they deserve. The public demands it, and good business practice, long-term planning demands it. Above all, coming back to my original point, the responsibilities that we have invested in us here at the provincial Legislature of Alberta to provide leadership absolutely demands it as well.

I will not stand idly by while we put something like Bill 3 forward and try to make it look like everything is okay when really it's not. As I said before, sometimes when you do something in a half-measure, you are actually being willfully deceptive to the public, and I find that somewhat objectionable.

Considering as well that we certainly are of sound mind, generally, as far as I can tell, and reasonably intelligent, then I can only presume that there is some hidden guiding hand that is actually making these decisions from behind and giving us a cloudy and confused picture. You don't have to look very much further than who gives what to whom in terms of donations from the oil and gas sector. There seems to be a direct inverse correlation between the strength of environmentalist policy and donations made to political parties by the oil and energy sector. You know, it doesn't take much to draw those two points together.

As I said before, there are lots of progressive corporations that would like to see a strong environmental policy with regard to climate change, but then everybody has to look at their bottom line, including corporations, and the bottom line is that if it's easy and if there's a way by which you can continue to pollute more and create more carbon dioxide, then of course if your business rivals are doing that, you're likely to do that as well.

Again, back here at the Legislature I think that we should hold ourselves to a higher standard and be sure that we're not being influenced unduly by oil and gas donations that are going to perhaps cloud the way by which we create legislation. I would suggest that in the absence of any logical reason, I can presume that there is a strong tainting influence of political pressure based on donations to political parties here that is influencing the construction of Bill 3. So first and probably foremost, that is the reason that I believe that this reasoned amendment, in fact, should be moving forward.

You know, it doesn't preclude that we shouldn't do anything at all. I heard someone mumbling that out there. But let's get back to the drawing table. Let's use these all-party committees that we've

now created, that have risen like a phoenix from the ashes of something less democratic, and build something strong, use those all-party committees to build a good, strong bill and a good, strong law that, in fact, assists corporations making the transition to using less hydrocarbon technology, invests in Alberta homeowners and businesses to make them more energy efficient, builds systems for public transportation, invests in renewable energy, which gives you an immediate, exponential boost in your carbon dioxide climate change emission reductions, and invests in the way by which people can actually even produce energy in their own homes.

Net metering is a tremendous success in places where the government invests in its proliferation, in places like Germany and Denmark where people are allowed to produce energy in their own homes or businesses or farms and sell it back onto the grid, right? What a fantastic way to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. People don't even necessarily have to have a means by which they can generate electricity. They could just store it in off-peak hours and then produce it back during peak hours.

There are just no limits to the ways by which we can imaginatively tackle this problem. We have the financial means by which we can tackle this problem. It's just a question of will, and, you know, when we start to look at carbon dioxide climate change emissions in bits and pieces, we realize that it is all of our responsibility.

Again, some members opposite like to talk about how we're just punishing the big corporations and the people driving their cars and heating their houses are getting away scot-free. Well, that's not true because the whole system is integrated together, and of course where the big increases are happening is not in individual domestic consumption but in the big industrial emitters. That's why we focus on them. We don't focus on the poor gentleman who lives in an older home and has trouble heating it with his gas heater but on something like TransAlta and Sundance, which is one of the second or third biggest emitters of carbon dioxide in the whole country and probably one of the largest in North America.

That's the way that you have to do it. You have to grab the bull by the horns and look it in the eye, and that's what we certainly are doing here now. We are putting this reasoned amendment forward to start building the foundation to actually create some meaningful and effective legislation in regard to climate change and emissions management.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn debate for this evening. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we do now adjourn until 1 p.m. on Monday, April 16.

[Motion carried; at 4:58 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1 p.m.]