

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, April 17, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/04/17

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

On this afternoon, as our work in this Legislature continues, let each of us pray for those who have been taken and those who have suffered as innocent victims of violent tragedy. We resolve to comfort the families, friends, and communities who have keenly felt the loss of loved ones through acts of violence and disregard for the sanctity of that which is most precious, life. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta and the United States have a long history of close co-operation, especially in energy. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Ms Drue Pearce. She's in the Speaker's gallery along with our very good friend, of course, the consul general of the United States, Tom Huffaker. Now, I might add that Ms Pearce is a former Alaska state Senator and is now the U.S. federal co-ordinator of Alaska natural gas transportation projects. Of course, the Alaska natural gas pipeline is such an important initiative that will run through Alberta. I might add that today they will be meeting with our Premier and also met with our Minister of Energy earlier today. I'd ask them to rise in the Speaker's gallery and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you a number of guests who are here with us to mark the introduction of Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, for first reading. Some of our guests are seated in the public gallery and others in the members' gallery. Of course, the Mental Health Amendment Act is going to bring in community treatment orders, the legislative side of more focus on how we help persons with mental illness in our community. I'd ask that our guests rise when I announce them and that the Assembly hold their applause until they've all been introduced.

First, we have two representatives from the Schizophrenia Society of Alberta: Dr. Irv Zemrau, president, and Ken Smith, director. We have Ms Elaine Marko. Ms Marco is a teacher at Harry Ainlay high school and a counsellor and someone who as a parent has mental health issues in her family and has been very supportive in bringing this forward. Next, we have members from the Alberta Mental Health Board: Ray Block, president and CEO; Dr. Roger Bland, executive medical director; Louise Laforce-Fertig, a member; and Sandra Harrison, the Mental Health Patient Advocate.

We also have representatives from the Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health. Members and colleagues will recognize Dennis Anderson, who is the founding chair of the alliance and, of course, a former member of this Assembly, a former minister of culture, multiculturalism, and women's issues, Municipal Affairs

and Housing, consumer and corporate affairs. We also have with us Sharon Sutherland, who is the chair of the alliance; Tom Shand, the executive director of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Alberta division; and Pierre Bérube, executive director of the Psychologists' Association of Alberta.

I'd welcome as well Dr. P.J. White, the incoming president of the Canadian Psychiatric Association and chair of psychiatry at the University of Alberta, and last but not least Fern Miller, a senior manager in Alberta Health and Wellness, public health division, who has worked very hard to help bring this legislation to fruition.

All of our guests are rising, and I'd ask you to give them the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the House five members of the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force. These people have dedicated themselves till the end of June to travel the province to find recommendations for the Minister of Justice to make our communities safer. They are Jennifer Scheible, our youth representative; Sue Hughson, appellate counsel/Crown prosecutor; Dwight Oliver, the reeve of Clearwater county and AAMD and C representative; Jean Mah, who is from Alberta Justice – she is on our support team – and Chester Cunningham, who is a retired CEO from the native court workers. I'll ask them to rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly one Mr. Jason Clampitt. Also, with him today is a man to whom I credit most of my life's successes, a man of integrity and strength whom I strive to be like every day. That man is my dad, Keith Griffiths. I'll ask both of them to rise in the members' gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Mike Butler. Mike is a 26-year-old Mill Woods resident who tragically lost his wife last week. Mike's situation raises concerns around funding for programs for persons suffering with mental illnesses and drug addiction. We wish Mike and his family the best and offer our sincere condolences through this difficult time. I would now ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Gail Husum and Barb Billingsley. Barb and Gail are Palace Casino workers who have been on strike for the last 221 days, due at least in part to this government's failure to provide fair labour legislation for workers in this province.

Barb has been at the Palace Casino for 17 years as a pit boss and has worked within the gaming industry for nearly 30 years. Barb works alongside her daughter and son-in-law, and at one time her other daughter also worked at Palace Casino, so this strike has been very important to her and her family's livelihood.

Gail has been a Palace Casino employee for three years and works in the slots department. She went on strike to fight for equality for workers and to see a better standard in terms of wages and benefits for all employees. They are here with UFCW 401 representative Don Crisall. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's a real pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a fine group in from the wonderful little village of Dewberry and representing their school, the Lakeland Country school. There are 15 students here with their parents and team leaders Mr. and Mrs. Darren Wiebe, Mr. and Mrs. Doug Loewen, and Miss Lorraine Thiessen. Also helping them on their trip to see the Legislature Building today are Mr. and Mrs. Bill Toews, Mr. and Mrs. Kevin Toews, Mr. and Mrs. Cam Braun, Mr. and Mrs. Brian Reimer, Mrs. Phyliss Loewen, and Mr. Lyle Unruh. I would ask them to rise and please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed a pleasure to introduce 45 young individuals from St. Lucy Catholic school. They are here today to see us at work and view our fabulous Legislature Building. They are accompanied by Mr. Eriksson and Mrs. Robinson, their teachers, and two parents helpers, Mrs. Lemke and Mrs. Vetter. I would ask them to rise and accept the traditional welcome of our Assembly.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Newborn Metabolic Screening Program

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a rather new father I understand the importance of metabolic screening early on in a child's development. On April 2 Alberta's new metabolic screening program was expanded to screen for 17 different conditions in all babies born in the province. The program includes testing to detect cystic fibrosis, making Alberta the first province in Canada to include routine screening for this serious condition. While metabolic disorders are uncommon, treatment of these conditions within the first few days of life improves a child's chances for normal development.

Alberta is recognized for having an outstanding newborn screening program. Each year about 42,000 babies born in Alberta receive a newborn metabolic screening. The screening program is a perfect example of the teamwork and collaboration that operates within Alberta's health care system. The decision to expand the program was the result of a thorough review of the scientific evidence and best practices in other jurisdictions as well as input from many clinical experts, physicians, and regional health authorities.

1:10

Congratulations to all those who played a part in creating the expanded screening program and to Alberta Health and Wellness for its ongoing leadership on this initiative. I'd also like to recognize the many partners who make the screening possible each day. These people include the health authority staff who collect the samples from babies, staff in the Capital health newborn metabolic and molecular diagnostic laboratories who test and analyze the samples, as well as the many specialists and clinical staff who provide care to

the children and their families. The newborn metabolic screening program is just one way that Alberta is helping to give every child a healthy start in life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta Order of Excellence Inductees

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to recognize some outstanding Albertans who will soon be invested with the Alberta Order of Excellence. This year will see seven people added to the ranks of those who have served our province with distinction. Six of the recipients are Evelyn Buckley, Chief Victor Buffalo, Donald Laubman, Gary McPherson, Douglas Mitchell, and Patrick Nixon. I'm proud to say that the seventh, Dr. David Leonard, is one of ours; that is, he's an employee of the Alberta government.

Dr. Leonard is an archivist and historian who has helped to preserve and share the stories of our past. He currently works as a historian in the Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture department. Dr. Leonard began his career with the Provincial Archives in 1969 after completing degrees at the University of Alberta and earning a PhD from the University of Sheffield in England. After stints with other organizations Dr. Leonard returned to the government in 1981 and has never looked back. He has been busy over those years. At one point he was the provincial archivist. He has written eight books about the history of the Peace region.

If you ever have the opportunity to hear a presentation by Dr. Leonard, don't miss it. His knowledge and presentations are fascinating. With this recognition Dr. Leonard joins a very elite group of Albertans as he is only the third historian to be given this honour. Dr. Leonard's contributions will stand the test of time, as will the contributions of all the inductees.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the members of the House to join me in congratulating the seven Albertans who will be invested with the Alberta Order of Excellence in 2007.

Thank you.

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

Mini World Cup of Soccer

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently in the city of Edmonton a truly unique event was played out that brought together 32 nations in order to participate in and celebrate the beautiful game of soccer. This event, the Mini World Cup, was played in Edmonton's southside soccer centre from March 31 to April 14, and from the opening ceremonies to the final game there was a full house.

The unique feature of soccer is that it is truly an international game that serves to bring together cultures for the love of the game. This event showed the amazing cultural diversity that Edmonton has and how all these cultures can come together and celebrate with joy and passion their common interest: the beauty that is soccer.

The women's final saw an amazing game between Poland and Italy that ultimately was won by Poland 5 to 4 in a shootout. Our congratulations to these teams as well as to Canada for their victory over Scotland in the bronze medal game. In the men's draw the final saw Scotland prevail over Serbia 5 to 1 in a game that was played in front of a packed house, and these two teams did not disappoint. It was truly a game to remember. We would like to congratulate both teams on their gold and silver performances and India as well in winning the bronze after a thrilling 3 to 1 win over Croatia.

With this tournament we have solidified what is Edmonton and all of Alberta, a truly multicultural society that is just as proud of our traditional heritage as we are of being Canadian. Whether it's the Chileans singing songs at the top of their lungs, the Nigerians banging on drums as their team displayed explosive skill, or

Northern Ireland and their rallying cry of “No surrender,” the passion was remarkable and the comradery an example to us all of how everyone can live and play together in harmony.

Mr. Speaker, my congratulations to the Edmonton and District Soccer Association for putting on yet another amazing Mini World Cup tournament.

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

SAIT Women’s and Men’s Hockey Teams

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to recognize the SAIT men’s and women’s hockey collegiate ACAC champions for 2007. The SAIT men’s hockey team defeated their northern rivals, the NAIT Ooks, to take home the ACAC crown on home ice at the SAIT arena. Both teams traded road victories in games 1 and 2 in the best of 5 ACAC finals two weekends ago, and the women’s hockey team became the first Trojan squad to repeat as ACAC champions since the mid-1990s.

The men’s hockey team was coached by Ken Babey, assistant coaches Jim McLean and Lyle Hamm. The players: Cale Jordison, David Simoes, Aaron Roberge, Michael Ewanchuck, Adam Knight, Marcus Wiebe, Chad Chapman, Brett Yeo, Clayton Bastura, Mike Bulawka, Blair Gray, Cam Doull, Dallas Costanzo, TJ Babey, Kyle McEwen, Kyle Gladue, Steve Stroshin, Patrick McGillicky, Tyler Milford, Jonathan Leinweber, Chad Betts, Bryn Gagnon, Darren Zurkan, Reese St. Goddard, and Jordan Ramstead.

The women players: Kierra Minto, Kristin Miyauchi, Jasmin Sutherland, Nicole Hunter, Michelle Glendinning, Tonya Faasse, Sheena Smigelski, Nicki Robinson, Chilla Fedoruk, Andy Dow, Kelsey Shmyr, Carolyn Bowen, Michela Gellert, Jaime Teichman, Amanda Gushue, and Natalie Gerstmar.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.

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

Anniversary of Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Twenty-five years ago today on April 17, 1982, the human rights of Canadians were enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and added to the Canadian Constitution. While human rights were recognized previously, notably by the universal declaration of human rights in 1948, one of the drafters being a Canadian, John Humphrey, and by the Canadian Bill of Rights in 1960, the ratification of the Charter in 1982 was a significant step forward in the history of human rights.

The Charter has huge significance for provincial Legislatures, enshrining in law the protection of the rights and freedoms of every Canadian and limiting the ability of governments to pass laws or pass legislation which discriminates or infringes on human rights. The Charter provides a measuring rod, a touchstone, a baseline for human rights in Canada. It applies to all governments and protects fundamental freedoms such as freedom of conscience and religion and freedom of the press, Canada’s multicultural heritage, aboriginal rights, and so on. But I believe that section 15, which covers equality rights, is the most important of all. Section 15 enshrines the right to equal treatment before and under the law and to equal benefit and protection of the law “without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability” or other grounds such as sexual orientation.

The Charter is 25 years old. It is not written in stone. As the history of human rights evolves, our interpretations will change. The reality of the conflict of rights remains a huge challenge. For

me it is abhorrent that religious groups hide behind the freedom of religion to justify the exclusion of women or gays and lesbians.

There is more work to do in raising the awareness of human rights in Canada, but I agree with Mr. Ed Broadbent, who said in the House of Commons on November 20, 1981: I would like this resolution and particularly the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to hang on the wall of every classroom in every school in every region of Canada; I believe that constitutions are fundamentally about rights, rights are fundamentally about people, and people from childhood on must be encouraged to acquire a deep understanding of their own liberties as well as an even deeper appreciation of the liberties of others.

Mr. Speaker, as an Albertan, as a Canadian I am proud to recognize the 25th anniversary of the Charter. It is a beacon of light to all countries in the world that we respect our own rights and the rights and freedoms of other people.

Thank you.

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

Native Hockey Provincials

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 1954 the Alberta native hockey provincials have brought young aboriginal boys and girls of all ages together to display their ability and to compete for the top prize. Earlier this month the 2007 Alberta provincials were held right here in Edmonton for four days, and they were exciting times. I attended as many games as I could to witness the outstanding skills and sportsmanship that these youngsters possess. Oh, my, the skills they did demonstrate on and off the ice were remarkable. There were an impressive 146 teams participating in this tournament.

Every year these native hockey provincials have grown in numbers and popularity. In fact, some of my First Nations and Métis communities were represented at this year’s event. One of those communities is Gift Lake Métis settlement, some 400 kilometres north of Edmonton.

1:20

The Gift Lake peewee girls never lost a game in the round robin playoffs and, as a result, won the coveted gold medal. For your outstanding performances special congratulations to Mikayla Laderoute, Stéphanie Cunningham, Larissa Cunningham, Elisha Lamouche, Elisha Cunningham, Ashley Laderoute, Kendra Rosychuk, Hayley Laughlin, Brianna Auger, Danielle Letendre, and Jaylee Wolfe.

But, Mr. Speaker, the Gift Lake midget boys won gold against the Fort McMurray all-star team in the A division in an overtime shootout, just like the NHL. To you Kirby Halcrow, Hector Jr. Lamouche, Micheal Lamouche, Dean Nahachick, Lenny L’Hirondelle, Ira Gladue, Kelsey Lamouche, Theron Gaudette, Alden Tallman, Sheldon Johnson, Wapan Johnson, you’ve done us proud.

I’d ask this Assembly to help me congratulate these exceptional athletes.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Bill 11

Telecommunications Act Repeal Act

Mr. Dunford: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce the Telecommunications Act Repeal Act.

The Telecommunications Act was proclaimed in 1988 to regulate the operation of two public organizations, Alberta Government Telephones and Edmonton Telephones. Neither of these organizations exist as corporate entities any longer.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 11 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 31 Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise to introduce first reading of Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007.

Amendments to the Mental Health Act will amend the criteria for involuntary admission to designated facilities to allow earlier intervention, provide a legislative framework to implement community treatment orders in Alberta, and require that treatment recommendations be provided to patients' family doctors when patients are discharged from facilities.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will be supported by accompanying measures to enhance community-based mental health services that will help Albertans living with mental illness and their families to access early intervention services and enjoy full and productive lives.

I move first reading of Bill 31, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to request of the House that we move Bill 31, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today, a letter from Calgary-Varsity constituent Warren Brooke, who expresses concerns about the government's limited CO₂ intensity reductions and half-priced emission credits.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a letter from April 2, 2007, that I received from the EUB. This letter indicates that the hearing on the AltaLink Management's Edmonton-Calgary 500 kV line is to recommence April 16, 2007.

The second tabling I have today is a letter that I wrote on April 13, 2007, to the hon. Premier of Alberta. This is in regard to Bill 22. It

is requesting that the government caucus support an amendment to Bill 22 to mandate that the head office and principal place of business for the proposed Alberta investment corporation be the city of Edmonton, Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and table the required number of copies of just something, a little something, we found lying around collecting dust. It's called A Housing Symposium: Affordable Housing for Albertans, final report, released by Alberta Municipal Affairs, dated November 1998.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton-Beverly-Highlands.

Mr. Martin: Beverly-Clareview?

Mr. Mason: Which one of us would you like, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview first.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I think. I have two documents to table today. The first is a heartfelt letter from Trevor Allan that was sent to the Premier and the minister of municipal affairs. Mr. Allan is an Edmontonian who experienced a \$300 rent increase in just over a year. He is among the many Albertans calling for rent guidelines.

The second document I have is a notice that was recently sent to residents of the Burlington Arms apartment complex in my riding. These residents are among the thousands of Albertans who are being negatively affected by condo conversions.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a document which I referred to yesterday during question period. It's an excerpt from a report to Edmonton city council's Community Services Committee. The report shows a sharp rise in ambulance wait times as well as system alerts and red alerts in the Capital health region.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to table some documents coming out of the Gambling Research Conference 2007, attended by a representative of the independent member's office.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, today I am tabling with the Assembly the annual report of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for the period April 1, 2005, to March 31, 2006, and the financial report of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner as at March 31, 2006.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today the requisite number of copies of the answers to written questions 5,

6, 7, and 8, which were accepted yesterday in this House. Copies of those answers have been delivered to the hon. member.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Openness and Transparency in Government

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The patronage contracts this government signed with defeated Tory MLA Bob Maskell were not adequately monitored. That much is clear. Tens of thousands of dollars were paid out based on completely inadequate billing information. Yesterday the Premier promised to conduct an internal audit of the billings and to make that information public. Taxpayers and Alberta Liberals are skeptical. My question is to the Premier. The government spends millions upon millions of public dollars on contracts every year. If the internal audit body of this government is truly effective, why do departments not have the systems in place to prevent this kind of abuse, or are there two sets of rules, depending on who gets the contracts?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House I said that all of the billing that was done by the person in question will be reviewed by a system we have in place, and that's an internal audit system. What will come out of that internal audit I said would be made public. If there are other rules, guidelines that may be implemented as a result of it, maybe more checks and balances, we'll certainly work with the internal auditor and also with the Auditor General to make sure that we keep always improving the checks and balances that we have in government.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, this PC government has a very serious problem with patronage. The problem is rooted so deeply in the culture of this government that its Internal Audit Committee, the one that is supposed to provide independent, objective audit advice, continues to have, according to this government's website less than an hour ago, a PC Party vice-president sitting on the audit committee. To the Premier: can the Premier explain to Albertans why they should have any confidence whatsoever in an audit of patronage contracts when the committee overseeing the audit has a VP of the PC Party on it?

1:30

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again the opposition is not understanding the process in place. We're talking about an internal audit. This will be done by staff of the government of Alberta to ensure that the processes were followed, and I said that then it'll be coming forward in terms of any recommendations and also working with the Auditor General.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The international standards for professional practice of auditing require that "internal auditors should have an impartial, unbiased attitude and avoid conflicts of interest." In Ottawa internal audits are overseen by a committee with a majority of members from outside government. In Alberta, as usual, standards of accountability are shockingly and irresponsibly low. Albertans deserve a direct answer on this. To the Premier: will the Premier remove the Tory party vice-president from the Internal Audit Committee and create a truly independent, nonpartisan audit organization that meets basic professional standards?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, he's confusing the two audit committees. But, you know, when you go across the country, constantly you hear that the province of Alberta has the best set of books, the best reporting mechanism to its taxpayers, and the best controls and measures. If there is further improvement, we're again going to take a leadership role and improve on what we have already accomplished as the government of Alberta.

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

Industrial Development in Alberta's Heartland Area

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the city of Edmonton applied for intervenor status with the EUB in the application of a major upgrader north of Edmonton due to concerns over water and air quality. This move demonstrates just how many holes there are in this government's regional planning when they proceed full tilt on projects without pausing to examine the full impacts on health and the environment. What remains to be seen is whether the province will turn its back on Edmonton's concerns just as it did when Fort McMurray intervened in a project last summer. To the Premier: will this government respond to the city of Edmonton's concerns and conduct a full cumulative impact assessment to determine how this proposed upgrader would impact the air and water quality of residents in the region?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there is a very good process in place allowing the municipalities to comment, bring forward submissions on proposed development not only in their own municipality but, of course, in adjoining municipalities. There is considerably more information with respect to this proposed development, and the Minister of Energy can answer that later.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to any development in the province of Alberta and most certainly with the ones that we're looking at in the heartland area, there will be full – there will be full – impact assessments taken into consideration at the time that the EUB has an opportunity to deal with the application.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The key word is "cumulative." Again to the Premier: will this government conduct comprehensive, independent scientific analysis of the cumulative effects on the river and air of the numerous upgraders proposed in Sturgeon and Strathcona counties?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to constantly improving the environment, securing a better environment for the next generation. It's one of the many considerations we have, not only air quality, water. You know, notwithstanding the comments from across the way, even the leader of the Green Party commented and praised the Alberta government on its leadership role in terms of protection of the environment.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's try this a different way. The proposed projects in Upgrader Alley will require a massive draw on the North Saskatchewan River. It's critical that the government ensure that the same situation that occurred in the South Saskatchewan River basin, where there's no water left for future licences, does

not occur in the Edmonton region. Water is our lifeblood, and we have to manage it carefully to support future growth. To the Premier: will the Premier assure all Albertans that the industrial activity being planned in Upgrader Alley will not jeopardize the health of the North Saskatchewan River?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again there's a considerable amount of misinformation in the preamble. The Minister of Environment will give the correct information.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make two points. First of all, applications are currently under review under both the Water Act and the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. A thorough review is taking place as we speak. My understanding is that the request under the application is for about .1 of 1 per cent of the total stream flow in the North Saskatchewan River. That being said, I have been very public in recent times talking about the need for a cumulative impact assessment and have committed to . . .

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we thought that sometime this week we might get a look at the report of the Affordable Housing Task Force, but this morning the Tory caucus debated or fought about the recommendations from the task force behind closed doors, with no one ever having seen the recommendations in the first place, and now apparently the minister says that we won't be seeing them this week. However, information has surfaced that one of the main points of contention dividing the Tory caucus is the issue of temporary regulation of rental increases. To the Premier: does the Premier accept the fact that right now, given the serious crisis in housing right across this province, his government needs to show true leadership and enact a temporary limit on rent increases?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government is showing leadership. We initiated a very thorough review of the critical shortage of housing in the province, the first time that we had, of course, all-party participation. Both parties were represented on the committee. We didn't meet this morning as a caucus. In fact, the meeting was last night. It was a long meeting. There were a number of issues discussed, and we're working towards resolution of the many recommendations that came forward in the report.

Mr. Taylor: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the first time the thing hit a bump in the road they all ran for cover.

I've been travelling. I was in Grande Prairie last week. I was in Drumheller yesterday. I've been talking to people all over this province about the fact that people cannot afford a place to live in this province, and it's placing a serious strain on them and their families. Mr. Speaker, everybody needs a home. Will this Premier call for a temporary moratorium on condominium conversions instead of just increasing the length of eviction notices if a landlord is converting a rental unit to a condo? Either way the person is still being kicked out.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, we are taking a leadership role in this whole critical area. I've heard personally from many Albertans in terms of suggestions, in terms of what government may do, again, in partnership with the federal government, with municipal governments, and, of course, with the private

sector. This is an issue related to phenomenal growth, and in spite of the many issues that we face as the province of Alberta, many, many Canadians insist on moving to this province because this is where the job creation is and their opportunity to raise their family and retire here in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And those people are going back home when they can't find a place to live. They're going back home to Saskatchewan and other provinces.

You know, all Albertans are affected by this housing crisis, and they're placing great faith in this government to actually show some leadership, which involves action, and accept the recommendations in the task force report. You know, the thing that I tabled earlier today called A Housing Symposium: Affordable Housing for Albertans was the result of a symposium to address the then pressing need for more affordable housing for families, chaired by the minister for municipal affairs nine years ago. Why should Albertans expect this Premier, this government, to act now when they were told the exact same thing nine years ago and nothing happened, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again the information provided is wrong, but I'll have the minister of municipal affairs inform all Albertans what this government has done to date with respect to housing.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say that our ministry and our government is moving forward on recommendations and responses to the housing task force. I want to reiterate some of the work that our ministry and the government is doing in support of shelters: \$23 million in support of the homeless, three plus . . .

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

1:40

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjection] It's time to protect Albertans from the fallout of this economic explosion. Rent increases are putting Albertans at risk of losing their homes . . . [interjection] I'm gonna choke that guy.

. . . and keeping other Canadians from coming here to work. There's a simple solution in the affordable task force report: one rent increase a year capped at the consumer price index plus 2 per cent. My question is to the Premier. Now that the task force report is public, at least for some people, will you quit the song and dance and bring in rent stability guidelines today?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, for the record, when he said, "I'm gonna choke that guy," he wasn't pointing to me; he was pointing to someone else. So thank you for that.

With respect to the housing report, as I said, we're putting it through the process. This will be part, of course, of the budget announcement. It is important from two points of view. It's a social issue because people are looking for places to live, the homeless and the working poor, but it's also an issue for those that are trying to attract more people to the province of Alberta to fill the many job vacancies we have. Certainly, in order to attract more people to Alberta, we need more availability of housing for those coming to the province.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta New Democrats have been putting forward this idea; now the minister's task force has put forward the idea of rent review guidelines. Even the Liberal caucus is on board. Now, will the Premier do the right thing for the people of Alberta who are being kicked out of their homes because they can't afford their rent and bring in rent guidelines today?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I've always said that our government caucus has opportunity for a complete dialogue and discussion of the many issues that come forward. It is going through the process. We understand the many pressures on housing. As I said before, it has a twofold purpose: one, from the social aspect and the other, to attract more people to the province of Alberta to fill the many job vacancies. We're working very hard. As I said, there'll be Thursday's budget announcements and other news to follow.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the task force on housing made the recommendations a month ago. Surely that has given the government enough time to respond. We need solutions, Mr. Premier, not delusions. That, I'm afraid, is what we're really going to see from this government. So will the Premier stand up and take clear action on behalf of renters and show that this government is actually on the side of the people and not on the side of the big landlords?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I take pride in the fact that this government is committed to improving the quality of life for all Albertans. That's an important priority for the government, and we'll keep working on that very diligently. As I said before, the report itself was an all-party committee, and I know that various members of the opposition have had that report for a considerable amount of time. This is part of the openness and transparency of the government to ensure that we involve both sides of the House in the critical discussion of issues that involve all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mountain Pine Beetle Control

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government has recently declared a forest health emergency because of the mountain pine beetles. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: how much did the pine beetle situation change or worsen during the last winter?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the order in council declaring a forest health emergency is a procedural requirement that's necessary in the future to access funding from the sustainability fund. Of course, in the budget that'll be tabled on Thursday I've requested core funding for these types of operations. Depending upon what our surveys show in June, if the infestation is as serious as we believe it is, then our ministry will be eligible to qualify for the additional emergency funding.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question to the same minister: how will this emergency funding be directed against the pine beetles?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, if our estimates from last fall are accurate and the pine beetle infestation is as serious as we think it is, we're estimating that the numbers have increased from 20,000 to 30,000 infected trees up to 2 million to 3 million. If those estimates prove correct, then we have a real battle on our hands. We're preparing both our core funding and, if necessary, the emergency funding to mount operations to identify and remove infected individual trees and also infected stands.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister: how is Alberta co-operating with British Columbia to ensure that we have the benefit of their experience with the pine beetle problem?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. British Columbia has had a great deal of experience with this problem. It's very unfortunate. They're estimating that they're going to have lost 90 per cent of their lodgepole pine by 2012, 2013. Fortunately, they're working very closely with us. We have several different consultative mechanisms. Our forestry people are working with their forestry people. We're also working with the national Forest Service and Parks Canada. I'm happy to report that at the joint B.C./Alberta cabinet meetings next month, I'll be discussing this with my B.C. counterpart.

Thank you.

Mr. Bonko: In 2005 the Alberta Liberals raised the issue of funding to deal with the mountain pine beetle with the then Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. We knew then that the money to deal with the beetle was insufficient. They failed to plan adequately to address the pine beetle for the future. Now we see the results of that failure. Alberta's front-line Canadian beetle-free forest is at threat, and emergency funding is required. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: does he accept that the government has not been proactive enough in recent years when dealing with the mountain pine beetle?

Dr. Morton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to see that the Liberals are at least talking about responsible government instead of government by the judges and the judiciary, like one of their members was talking about before. I'm sure the next thing we'll hear from that side is that the Charter of Rights protects the pine beetle.

Mr. Speaker, my predecessor twice last year requested additional funding, supplementary funding to deal with this emergency. I know that members on the other side would like to see an omnipotent government that can solve all the problems of the world. We deal with problems as they arise.

Mr. Bonko: Parks Canada has recognized the need to harness and control the pine beetle. They know that the pine beetle has two natural enemies: extreme cold and fire. We can't rely on the cold anymore, so Parks Canada has turned to the other natural source. They're using large-scale burns to rejuvenate the forests and to slow down the pine beetle. So to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: will he accept that Alberta should be using a natural approach when holding and dealing with the pine beetle?

Some Hon. Members: Firewall. Firewall.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I am very gratified to see that the members on the other side have finally understood the wisdom of the firewall. Of course, as usual, they've confused things. The firewall is to protect us from Ottawa. It is not to protect us from the pine beetle.

I would just point out what probably every schoolchild knows: responsible forestry leaves buffer zones, riparian zones, wildlife habitat; forest fires take everything. There's nothing worse for the environment, nothing worse for the forests than forest fires.

Mr. Bonko: The minister said that the government's healthy forest initiative will work to make forests healthier through selective harvesting. We don't have the luxury of decades to change our forests, Mr. Minister. How is this minister expecting this measure to take effect in time to offer real solutions for the spread of the pine beetle? Shouldn't the government have been working on this in previous years?

Dr. Morton: Again, the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, assume that governments can foresee the future. It's lucky that they're over there and not exercising the levers of power on this side. We are taking responsible action to deal with this issue as it unfolds. We're not going to hit the panic button the way the hon. member opposite is asking us to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

1:50

Oil Sands Development

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's economy is firing on every cylinder possible, and those cylinders are evident throughout Alberta. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that managing growth pressures in this red-hot economy is one of our government's top priorities. For example, the rapid pace of oil sands development is one very important area that must be addressed. My questions are to the President of the Treasury Board. Given the recently released Radke report, which is formally called Investing in Our Future, responding to the needs of high-growth areas, what is this minister doing in response to the 30 recommendations contained in that report?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The report did identify several areas where there may be gaps in the delivery of our service, whether it be health care, education, infrastructure, housing. All of those departments have had access to the report and are putting together their department's response to the plan. That should appear in our budget in the out years.

One of the recommendations, though, Mr. Speaker, was the development of an oil sands secretariat that would co-ordinate the approach to solving the problem so that we would ensure that the money that we're spending to target this high-growth area would be co-ordinated and would be well used.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, some of those high-growth areas include Edmonton, which obviously reaps a tremendous amount of economic activity as a result of what's going on, economically speaking, in Fort McMurray and, specifically, the oil sands investments there, which top about \$75 billion. So we're grateful for that. However, one of the ideas calls for an oil sands secretariat that ought to be created, and I'd like to know when that particular secretariat will be up and running. Is the minister acting on it with expediency?

Mr. Snelgrove: I think it would be fair to point out that not only Edmonton benefits from the McMurray oil sands growth, but indeed all of Canada benefits greatly from it. So it truly is the engine that's actually driving it.

The oil sands secretariat has been put together, and at this time we are searching for an individual that would head the secretariat. We are no different than any other corporate entity, Mr. Speaker. It's very difficult to find people that may be able to do the job. We're hoping to have the individual in place no later than the end of May, but at this point we are not waiting for them. The departments all are working at bringing forward their business plans and budgets to address the situation.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, my final question is simply this: what will this minister do to ensure that this secretariat, once it is up and running, results in a more timely and a more seamless approach regarding oil sands development so that the concerns of businesses and contractors and local communities can be addressed?

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, to start, Mr. Speaker, I'll be going to Fort McMurray next week to meet with the local business groups and representatives and the mayor. It's also obvious in this government that it's in everyone's best interest to make sure that the development in Fort McMurray is done in a timely and orderly manner. With the Premier and this government's acceptance of the five priorities, one of which is managing growth pressure, I can assure you that the situation in Fort McMurray and the oil sands secretariat will have my fullest attention.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Grande Prairie Land Sale

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The value of a project should be assessed on a variety of legitimate categories, including economic viability, need, and growth concerns, rather than its Tory connectedness. There's no question about the value to the agricultural and manufacturing community of having a container port built at the crossroads of highways 43 and 2 in Grande Prairie county, for which land valued at over \$2 million was given to the county for just \$1. My questions are to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Can the minister assure Albertans that former MLA Walter Paszkowski, who is now the land manager for the county, did not receive preferential treatment with this dollar deal?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as far as I know, we haven't given any land away to anyone other than a municipality on any dollar deals or to our own. So I would definitely have to look into that, but I would say that no one benefited because they were affiliated with the PC Party.

Mr. Chase: It's about time this minister did his homework.

The city of Grande Prairie, just a stone's throw from the four corners terminal, is bursting at its infrastructure seams, badly in need of schools, a hospital, a new highway bypass, and affordable housing. Can the city expect in the very near future to receive much-needed land from the province for a dollar?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, absolutely, if we have things that the city needs and it's surplus to us, we will make a good deal with the city of Grande Prairie.

Mr. Chase: That's wonderful. Grande Prairians, start celebrating. Your minister is with you.

Does the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation have a set of guidelines, categories, requirements, or rules that a community must meet to receive land for a dollar, or is the process completely at the whim of the current minister, the third person to hold this position in a year?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we have processes for everything we do, and it is not at the whim of this minister.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Large Agricultural Operations near Waterways

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The proposal for a large dairy farm in the Calmar/Devon area is now before the Natural Resources Conservation Board. Many residents have objected to the farm, but it is still being considered by the NRCB. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, who is responsible for the NRCB. Why doesn't the NRCB recognize that the local residents are against having an expanded farm at this location and not allow it to be developed?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the Natural Resources Conservation Board is an independent regulatory agency, which means that it operates at arm's length from the government, which precludes any sort of interference on the part of not just the minister responsible but also any member of the government. The approval process that regulates a dairy farm like this is set out under the Agricultural Operation Practices Act, which is legislation that falls under Alberta Agriculture and Food. As I understand it, there was an opportunity for people that were opposed to this proposed development to speak to the NRCB.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. There have been a number of concerns from residents about this farm causing health and environmental problems. Given that yesterday I tabled a petition asking for a one-mile buffer zone from major water courses for such proposals, will these issues be addressed through the NRCB review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am confident that those concerns will be addressed. As I mentioned already, the NRCB listens to all sides involved in these types of concerns. Water issues are addressed, and there are actual specific requirements for setbacks from water. So as this hearing unfolds, I fully expect that the proper decision will be made. But the key thing to emphasize is that the decision is made according to the rules, the criteria that are set out in the Agricultural Operation Practices Act. It's a rule-driven decision-making process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In that case, my second supplemental is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Since local residents are frequently opposed to these factory farms, is there not a need to review how the Agricultural Operation Practices Act is operating?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is committed to making sure that the legislation is fair to communities, industry, and the environment. Alberta did an extensive review of this act, of the NRCB, and relevant regulations. Changes to the regulations went into effect as of October 1, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, this particular application is currently under review, as the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development said, and we certainly need to let due process run its course on this.

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

Workplace Health and Safety

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 28 Albertans will gather to remember workers who have been injured or killed on the job. In 2006 124 Albertans died as a result of workplace injuries or disease, a rate of almost two and a half deaths a week. Alberta workers experience about 14 per cent of all work-related deaths in Canada, even though Alberta has only 10 per cent of the population. My questions are to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Has the minister examined why Alberta workers suffer a higher rate of work-related fatalities than would be predicted by our population?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member does ask a very good question. When we come back to the House, reconvene after the week's break, we plan to have, as we have in the past, some time for recognition of the workers that we have lost. Recently our analysis of statistical information that we collect includes those occupation-related diseases that have added to the numbers of people that have been lost.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I have raised the issue not only in discussions that we've had within the department but with all of the major-sector industries, that we have met and talked about some of the programming that they are bringing forward for safety first. It is not only deaths that we are concerned about. It is injuries on the job. It is issues when the rookie worker has difficulty.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of the 124 individuals who suffered work-related deaths, 10 were under the age of 30. Workers under the age of 25 are 33 per cent more likely to be injured on the job than older workers. Even one death of a young person in the workplace is unacceptable. I think all parents in this province are concerned when their young people go north to work in the oil patch. My question is to the same minister. What specific steps has this government taken to ensure that Alberta's young workers are safe on the job?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we've actually had a number of programs. In September of last year there was a program introduced in the schools so that workers who might be into casual employment or part-time employment would have the benefit of that type of knowledge. We have added to our training programs through the various building and educating tomorrow's workforce programs, so we're doing that with employers on the job. We have very special counsellors, that make sure that these programs are being adhered to. When we talk about the initiatives this coming year, I think there

will be some very obvious changes in the way we are working on evaluating the occupational health and safety of part-time employees.

Dr. B. Miller: When questioned recently in the Legislature by the Liberal opposition about providing funding to help employers develop better safety practices for farm workers, the Premier said, "Why should we be funding common sense?" To the same minister: is it the minister's and this government's position that common sense is all that is needed to protect Alberta's workers from harm?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the interesting conversations I've had since I've been in this ministry is with Dr. Louis Hugo Francescutti, who said that many of the things that protect people are the things they learn from the time they are born until they are six years of age. In fact, the very best way to job-proof our workers is to teach them properly from the home. In many respects people would call that common sense, or common sense as tutored within the home. So, obviously, there are a variety of things, very many complex issues that can be taught right from the start at the home and later on as they are trained by employers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Affordable Housing (continued)

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now that Albertans know about the recommendations in the Affordable Housing Task Force report, I guess it's time for the government to act. Hope springs eternal. We are in a crisis situation. My office is getting calls every day. We have people walking in that are very concerned. The time is now to act. I want to talk specifically about condo conversions. We notice that over 1,000 rental units were converted to condos in Calgary last year. At the same time, they're not building affordable housing. My question is to the minister. When is this government going to take off its philosophical blinders and act decisively to place an immediate temporary moratorium on conversions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say that we are continuing to build affordable housing on a continuing basis and also that we do view and see the challenges of the conversion of rental units to condos. We are looking at some of the areas of the report that we need to address. We are doing that as a government.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the point that we're trying to make here is that there are thousands of people right now that are facing a lot of stress with these rental increases and condo conversions. They can't wait while you study it. They can't wait for the slow pace of the affordable housing that's going up. We need action now. My question is again to the minister. If he can't announce it today, when are we going to know when they're going to put a stop to condo conversions? Give us a time.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that we are going to give the opposition and the third party and the residents of Alberta the answers when we have finished the discussion and looking at a positive direction for trying to address the growth pressures in Alberta.

Mr. Martin: The fact that you're behind closed doors having a discussion is not much solace to the thousands of people that are facing pressure, Mr. Speaker. My question to this minister is simply: doesn't he recognize that the longer they wait, the worse the crisis is? People want action right now. I again say to the minister: when are we going to get action and some movement on rent guidelines and condo conversions?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, this is a complex issue, and it cannot be solved overnight. I'm very happy that the member from the third party recognizes that we are meeting as a caucus, as a government, to try to find solutions for the growth pressures that we're having now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Litigation against Firefighters

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton and Calgary firefighters advise me that insurance companies have developed a new trend, where they or property owners under the advisement of insurance companies now sue firefighters or fire departments in cases where despite their best effort firefighters were unable to extinguish a fire or save the property. This practice insults the professionalism of our firefighters, drives them into lengthy and costly litigation, and allows insurance companies to download their costs onto taxpayers. My first question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: is the minister aware of the fact that several Alberta municipalities and fire departments are now facing litigation for several million dollars each, which simply is aimed at diminishing insurance companies' liability and results in downloading costs to taxpayers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes. The ministry is aware that there are significant issues that have taken place in this regard. I want to say that our Fire Services Advisory Committee is right now at work trying to find the solutions and will make a recommendation to our ministry later this year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. In Saskatchewan and Quebec their respective municipal government acts have been amended, preventing litigation where no gross negligence took place. Will the minister amend Alberta's MGA now to do the same?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, our firefighters are protected under section 535(2) of the Municipal Government Act. That is the protection of municipal employees, which paid firefighters and voluntary firefighters fall under.

Mr. Lukaszuk: In that case, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: are Alberta's volunteer fire departments protected from such litigation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, they are. They do fall under the same category, under 535(2) of the act. The voluntary and the paid firefighters are under the same legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Electricity Transmission Regulation

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why is this government making the Energy and Utilities Board a docile servant of the Independent System Operator when you passed this regulation to reform the transmission system last week?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, there would have to be some, again, misunderstanding with respect to the hon. member across the way. There's nothing in the new transmission regulation that makes EUB subservient to any other board or entity that operates within that system. As you know, we're also bringing in legislation to deal with a situation where the EUB will have a separation, and we'll end up with two separate boards that deal with these issues.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister: why does the EUB, then, in the regulation have to explain its actions, and the Independent System Operator does not?

2:10

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, it would depend, I suppose, on which actions it was that we're discussing. But there is nothing in the old transmission regulation or the new transmission regulation that makes the EUB subservient in any way to the AISO.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, to the same minister: did you read the entire transmission regulation before you recommended it to the cabinet? Yes or no?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, yes, I did, a number of times.

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

Safety at Postsecondary Institutions

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members of this Assembly and people around the world are well aware that yesterday a terrible tragedy occurred at Virginia Tech. A student attending that institution shot 32 people and then turned the gun on himself. My heart goes out to our American friends, and our constituents have concerns here at home as well. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Can you please clarify what your department is doing to ensure the safety of staff and students at postsecondary campuses across Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were all horrified by this incident, and our condolences go to the loved ones of the victims and, indeed, everyone affected by this senseless violence, as your prayer indicated this afternoon. I think I speak for everyone in the House when I say that it's unfathomable to imagine the grief of these parents. Our government's first priority is to ensure the safety of students. The government is committed to ensuring safe and secure

communities for all Albertans. In Alberta each postsecondary institution is responsible for the security on campus, and under the legislation they're expected to have operational measures but also, within that, security measures, and they do. They work very closely with their local police departments and, in fact, have had exercises in that regard.

Mr. Rodney: A supplemental for the same minister: I just wonder if you have any more points of clarification specifically with respect to Edmonton, Calgary, and/or smaller centres.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, both in Edmonton and Calgary the postsecondary institutions in the two large cities work very closely with the local police forces to the extent of having keys available for buildings, diagrams. The response times in Calgary through training and exercises: they have gotten that down to under four minutes for a tactical team response. I think all of the postsecondaries in the province are certainly taking a very serious relook at the plans they have in place. The important thing is that we do have plans in place, we do have security, and it is a safe and secure environment for our students to learn and thrive.

Mr. Rodney: My final question is to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Are there any plans, Mr. Minister, to arm members of campus security?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We certainly have no plans to arm campus security at this point in time. Providing campus security with side arms is not a simple matter. The potential use of deadly force associated with handguns is a very complex issue with significant related implications. Campus security would require extensive firearms training, training in emergency and rapid response situations, as well as their annual recertification. I want to emphasize that police throughout our province have a strong working relationship with postsecondary institutions to ensure that our students can learn in a safe and secure environment.

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

Timberland Investment Loss

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Finance minister provided a written response to questions that I've been asking about \$7 million that were given up in supplementary supply. The money was used to address investment losses in a number of pension and endowment funds. The response states that following a \$170 million purchase of the timberland asset class, there was an \$11 million loss that occurred due to, and I quote: an inadvertent several-month delay in hedging the related exposure to the Canada/U.S. dollar exchange. My questions are for the Minister of Finance. What organizational changes were made or which controls were strengthened to ensure that this \$11 million mistake does not happen again?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There's actually legislation before this House at this present time, that will be

discussed later on this afternoon, that shows some of those controls. Timberland was an experience where an individual did make a mistake. It was something that cost us dollars. The fund was not hedged when it should have been hedged, and quite simply we are putting in place in Bill 22 legislative regulations to ensure that this doesn't happen again.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It sounds like somebody had a bad day at the office.

I find the minister's response interesting because in his written response he actually indicated that the bill that's before the House this afternoon, Bill 22, and this particular situation were not related. So it's an interesting response from the minister.

My question, also for the minister, is this: exactly who made the \$11 million boo-boo? Was it an individual, a fund management team, outside advisors? Who made the \$11 million mistake?

Dr. Oberg: First of all, Mr. Speaker, we should not be talking about personal issues such as what occurred with timberland. It was an individual within my department. It was someone who should have known better, in fairness. It was someone who didn't, and subsequently we as taxpayers have had to pick it up. It is something that has been a considerable issue. There's been a huge amount of discussion about this. That's one of the reasons why in AIMCO there are regulations and legislation to ensure that this doesn't happen again. We cannot have these kinds of mistakes happen again with someone who knew better.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Then the obvious question is: what reprimands or actions were taken against this individual as a response to the \$11 million mistake that was made?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's been a full investigation of this particular individual. The incident has been looked at, and we are currently reviewing the recommendations. It has been fully looked at. A mistake was made, and I think we have to recognize that.

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

Climate Change Consultation

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our planet is warming at a faster pace than at any other time in recorded history. In 2002 Alberta implemented a climate change action plan for education and research. In 2007 Alberta introduced the first legislation in Canada for regulating greenhouse gas emissions. Steps are now being taken to give Albertans an opportunity to address future plans for climate change in Alberta. Last week I attended the government of Alberta's public consultation meeting on climate change in Alberta with the Minister of Environment and the MLA for Lacombe-Ponoka. The people who attended were very passionate and wanted to make sure that the government's final plan will reflect their concerns. To the Minister of Environment: can the minister assure Albertans that this is more than a paper exercise, and their opinions and concerns will be taken . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I can most definitely assure the member and her constituents that this public consultation process is taking place for very serious reasons because we are asking Albertans to provide us with important input on a go-forward basis on how we can update our climate change policy. Albertans are taking the process just as seriously as we are. We've had good representation at each of our meetings. I was in Fort McMurray last night, and I anticipate a good crowd at the meeting in Edmonton tomorrow night.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister. In Red Deer we've heard from Albertans with very diverse opinions about what they want in our new climate change plan. Does the minister anticipate that he will be able to address such a wide range of concerns in his final plan?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've indicated at every one of the meetings that I've attended that if everyone agreed with one another, this would be an exercise in futility. There would be no necessity to talk to Albertans. We expect there to be diversity brought forward, and at the end of the day I don't expect that everyone who has contributed to this report will necessarily agree with the final result. What I do hope that they will agree with is that they had an opportunity to participate in an inclusive process that recognized the diversity of their opinions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how will the minister strike the balance between those who say that industries are the bad guys and need to pay versus those who are concerned that industries may leave the province if they become the focus for achieving greenhouse gas reductions?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's precisely the point. There are some who will choose to use this as some kind of a political process that will pit one against the other. Frankly, I don't buy that argument. I don't think it has to be either/or. I think we can have economic success and environmental stewardship, and that's really the outcome that I'm looking for at the end of the day from this process.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and answers.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Motions**

Amendments to Standing Orders

15. Mr. Hancock moved:
 - A. Be it resolved that the temporary amendments to the Standing Orders that were approved by the Assembly on March 12, 2007, be amended as follows:
 - 1 Standing Order 3.1 is struck out, and the following is substituted:
 - 3.1(1) The Assembly shall be called into session each year for a Spring Sitting commencing the first Monday of February, unless otherwise provided by order of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, and concluding the first Thursday in June.
 - (2) Unless otherwise ordered, the Assembly shall meet for a Fall Sitting each year commencing on the first

- Monday in November and concluding on the first Thursday in December.
- (3) The Assembly shall stand adjourned for a constituency week every 4th week during the Spring Sitting which, where possible, shall be aligned with school holidays or other holiday breaks, unless varied by a calendar agreed to by the House Leaders of the Government, Official Opposition and other recognized parties in consultation with Members not within a recognized party, which shall be filed with the Clerk on or before January 15 each year.
- (4) If a Fall Sitting commences prior to the first Monday in November, the Assembly shall stand adjourned for a constituency week every 4th week.
- (5) Nothing in this Standing Order precludes the Government from advising the Speaker that the public interest requires the Assembly to meet on a certain date, and the Speaker shall give notice that the Assembly shall meet at that time to transact its business as if it had been duly adjourned to that time.
- (6) Nothing in this Standing Order precludes the Assembly from adjourning prior to the adjournment dates in suborders (1) and (2) if so ordered by the Assembly.
- (7) Sitings may be extended beyond the adjournment dates in suborders (1) and (2) on passage of a Government Motion, which shall be decided without debate or amendment.
- (8) The Government shall be called to provide the Assembly with a budget and estimates for the ensuing fiscal year on the 2nd Thursday in February unless, prior to the commencement of the Spring Sitting, the Government House Leader has provided to the Clerk notice of an alternate date, in which case the budget shall be provided to the Assembly on such date.
- 2 Standing Order 4 is amended
- (a) by striking out suborder (2) and substituting the following:
- (2) Notwithstanding suborder (1), evening sittings may be scheduled on a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, or any combination thereof, upon passage of a Government Motion, which may be made on one day's notice and is subject to debate.
- (b) by adding the following after suborder (2):
- (2.1) Notwithstanding suborders (1), (2), (4) and (5), during the 2007 Spring Sitting, the Assembly shall meet for consideration of main estimates in Committee of Supply in the evening on the following dates and shall sit from 7 p.m. to 10:15 p.m.:
- May 14 to 16, inclusive;
- May 28 to 30, inclusive;
- (c) in suborders (4) and (5) by striking out "7 p.m." and substituting "8 p.m.";
- (d) by striking out suborder (6) and substituting the following:
- (6) Notwithstanding suborders (4) and (5), on afternoons when there is an evening sitting of Committee of Supply, the Speaker or Chair, as the case may be, leaves the chair until 7 p.m.
- (7) When the Committee of Supply meets during an evening sitting, the Committee shall rise and report at 10 p.m.
- 3 Standing Order 7 is amended by adding the following after suborder (1.1):
- (1.2) If the items in the daily Routine are completed prior to 1:30 p.m., the Assembly shall proceed to Oral Question Period, and any matters outstanding shall be taken up prior to the calling of Orders of the Day.
- 4 Standing Order 8 is amended by adding the following after suborder (3):
- (3.1) On Monday afternoon, if the Assembly is in Committee of the Whole, the Committee shall rise and report prior to 4:55 p.m.
- 5 Standing Order 34 is amended by striking out suborders (3) and (3.1) and substituting the following:
- (3) The Government House Leader shall give the Assembly one day's notice of any Written Questions or Motions for Returns that are to be dealt with.
- (3.1) On the Wednesday preceding the consideration of Written Questions and Motions for Returns, the Government House Leader may, by notice to the Clerk, indicate Written Questions and Motions for Returns that the Government will be accepting.
- (3.2) The Clerk shall read the number, text and name of the sponsor of any Written Question or Motion for Returns of which notice of acceptance has been given pursuant to suborder (3.1) when this item of business is called.
- 6 Standing Order 53 is amended by renumbering it as Standing Order 53(1) and adding the following after suborder (1):
- (2) The Government shall respond to a report of the Public Accounts Committee within 150 days of the date on which the Committee reports.
- B. Be it further resolved that the following temporary amendments be made to the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to give further effect to the March 7, 2007, House Leaders' Agreement:
- 1 Standing Order 8(7) is amended by striking out clause (c) and substituting the following:
- (c) A Public Bill Other Than a Government Bill shall be called in Committee of the Whole within 8 sitting days of the day the Bill receives second reading unless the Bill has been referred to a Policy Field Committee, in which case the Bill shall be called within 8 sitting days of the day on which the Policy Field Committee reports.
- 2 Standing Order 32 is amended
- (a) in suborder (3) by adding "Subject to suborder (3.1)," before "When a division is called";
- (b) by adding the following after suborder (3):
- (3.1) After the first division is called in Committee of Supply during the vote on the main estimates under Standing Order 59.04, the interval between division bells shall be reduced to one minute for any subsequent division.
- 3 The following is added after Standing Order 52: Policy Field Committees
- 52.01(1) Four Policy Field Committees, consisting of 11 Members each, shall be established to consider the following subject areas:
- (a) Standing Committee on Community Services – mandate to relate to the areas of health, education, children's services, seniors, supports for the disabled, tourism, parks, recreation and culture;

- (b) Standing Committee on Government Services – mandate to relate to the areas of government services, government organization, personnel administration, expenditure management, capital planning, revenue, justice, international and intergovernmental affairs, trade, aboriginal affairs, policing and security;
- (c) Standing Committee on Managing Growth Pressures – mandate to relate to the areas of post-secondary education, technology, human resources, labour, immigration, rural development, municipal affairs, affordable housing, libraries, infrastructure and transportation;
- (d) Standing Committee on Resources and Environment – mandate to relate to the areas of energy, the environment, agriculture, sustainable resources and forestry.

(2) The Chair of a Policy Field Committee shall be a member of the Government caucus, and the Deputy Chair shall be a member of the Official Opposition.

Consideration of Bills by Policy Field Committees

52.02 A Policy Field Committee shall review any Bill referred to it.

Consideration of regulations by Policy Field Committees

52.03 A Policy Field Committee may review any regulation, amendment to a regulation or prospective regulation within its mandate in order to determine whether the attention of the Assembly should be drawn to any regulation, amendment to a regulation or prospective regulation on the grounds that it

- (a) imposes a charge on the public revenue not specifically provided for by statute;
- (b) prescribes a payment to be made by any public authority that is not specifically provided for by an Act of the Legislative Assembly;
- (c) may not be challenged in the courts;
- (d) makes unusual use of the authority provided for in the parent Act;
- (e) has an unexpected effect where the parent Act confers no express authority for that effect;
- (f) purports to have retrospective effect where the parent statute confers no express authority to have a retrospective effect;
- (g) has been insufficiently promulgated, is outside the scope of the parent Act, has not been enacted properly, or has been made without the necessary statutory authority;
- (h) is not clear in meaning;
- (i) is in any way prejudicial to the public interest.

Orders of the Assembly take priority

52.04 An order of the Assembly that a Bill, regulation or some other subject matter stands referred to a Policy Field Committee shall take priority over any other hearing or inquiry.

Referral of annual reports to Policy Field Committees

52.05(1) The annual reports of each Government department, provincial agency, Crown-controlled organization, board and commission shall be deemed to be permanently referred to a Policy Field Committee.

(2) Each Policy Field Committee may

- (a) examine each annual report referred to it and report to the Assembly whether the report is satisfactory;

- (b) consider in more detail and report to the Assembly, on each annual report it considers unsatisfactory;
- (c) investigate and report to the Assembly on any lateness in the tabling of annual reports;
- (d) report to the Assembly each year whether there are any bodies which do not table annual reports in the Assembly and which should present such reports.

Public hearings on regulations

52.06(1) A Policy Field Committee may conduct a public hearing on any Bill, regulation or prospective regulation under review.

(2) A Policy Field Committee shall be required, prior to reporting that the attention of the Assembly be drawn to any regulation or prospective regulation, to inform the Government department or authority concerned of its intention to so report.

Policy Field Committee inquiries

52.07(1) A Policy Field Committee shall inquire into, consider and report on any matter referred to it by the Assembly.

(2) A Policy Field Committee may on its own initiative, or at the request of a Minister, inquire into any matter concerned with the structure, organization, operation, efficiency or service delivery of any sector of public policy within its mandate.

(3) An Order of the Assembly that a Policy Field Committee undertake an inquiry shall take priority over any other inquiry, but a Policy Field Committee shall not inquire into any matters which are being examined by a Special Committee.

(4) All inquiries must be concluded and a substantive report presented to the Assembly no later than 6 months after the commencement of the inquiry.

(5) Funding for the purposes of undertaking an inquiry, in addition to the committee's regular allocation, is subject to the prior approval of the Members' Services Committee.

Additional powers of the Policy Field Committee

52.08 In addition to any other powers of Policy Field Committees, the Committees may examine any matter within their mandate and recommend to the Assembly on the need for legislation in that area.

Response to reports

52.09(1) The Government shall respond to a Policy Field Committee's report on any matter other than a report on a Bill within 150 days from the date on which the Policy Field Committee reports.

(2) No motion concurring in the report of a Policy Field Committee to which the Government must respond under suborder (1) shall be voted upon until that response is tabled in the Assembly.

4 The following is added after Standing Order 55:

55.01 Reports of the Officers of the Legislature shall stand referred to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices unless otherwise ordered.

5 The following Standing Orders are added after Standing Order 59:

Application of Standing Orders during main estimates

59.01(1) The Standing Orders of the Assembly shall be observed in the Committee of Supply's consideration of main estimates except as follows:

- (a) a Member may speak more than once;
 - (b) no Member may speak for more than 10 minutes at one time;
 - (c) Standing Order 5, concerning quorum, shall not apply until the main estimates are voted upon.
- (2) Notwithstanding suborder (1)(b), and provided that the Chair has been notified, a Minister and a private Member may combine their respective speaking times for a total of 20 minutes, with both taking and yielding the floor over the combined period.
- (3) During Committee of Supply consideration of the main estimates, officials of the Government may be admitted to the floor of the Assembly to advise the Minister whose estimates are under consideration.
- Hours of main estimates
- 59.02(1) Subject to suborder (2), the Committee of Supply shall be called to consider the main estimates for not more than 75 hours.
- (2) During the 2007 Spring Sitting, the Committee of Supply shall be called to consider the main estimates for approximately 60 hours, with the time for consideration concluding upon the completion of 4 rotations of the 15-hour cycle outlined in Standing Order 59.03.
- (3) Subject to the Official Opposition designations as provided for in Standing Order 59.03(2), the schedule for consideration of main estimates shall be determined by the House Leaders of the recognized parties and shall be tabled in the Assembly at least one sitting day prior to the Committee of Supply being called to consider main estimates.
- (4) If the House Leaders fail to reach an agreement, the Government House Leader shall schedule the appearances of departments for estimates consideration by the Committee of Supply.
- (5) On the first day of consideration of the main estimates by the Committee of Supply, the first member of Executive Council to speak shall move that the main estimates in their entirety be considered by the Committee.
- (6) During the consideration of the main estimates, the Committee of Supply shall meet for a minimum of 3 hours at one time unless there are no Members who wish to speak prior to the conclusion of the 3 hours.
- (7) If the Committee of Supply meets for more than 3 hours at one time, the time in excess of 3 hours shall be available to any Member who wishes to speak and is recognized by the Chair.
- (8) The time spent in Committee of Supply beyond 3 hours any afternoon shall not be included in the calculation of the time for a 15-hour cycle.
- (9) During the Committee of Supply's consideration of the main estimates, the Chair shall interrupt
- (a) at 5:45 p.m.,
 - (b) at 10 p.m. if there is an evening sitting, or
 - (c) when there are no Members who wish to speak prior to the times indicated in (a) or (b),
- and shall order the Committee to rise and report, and the Committee shall immediately rise and report progress without motion put.
- (10) Standing Order 5 does not apply to a report to the Assembly from the Committee of Supply under suborder (9).

(11) When an amendment to a department's estimates is moved in Committee of Supply, the vote on the amendment stands deferred until the date scheduled for the vote on the main estimates.

15-hour cycles, hourly allotments to caucuses

59.03(1) In this Standing Order, "cross-ministry" means the estimates of 2 or more departments to be considered by the Committee of Supply during consideration of the main estimates.

(2) The schedule for cross-ministry appearances shall be designated by the Official Opposition in consultation with the Third Party.

(3) The first 60 hours for consideration of the main estimates shall proceed through 4 rotations of a 15-hour cycle whereby

- (a) a caucus is allotted a particular block of hours during which time that caucus is entitled to designate which estimates are to be considered, and
 - (b) only the designated Minister or member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf and members of the caucus that has been allotted that time will be recognized to speak unless there are no members of that caucus who wish to speak.
- (4) The 15-hour cycle shall be allotted as follows:
- Hours 1 to 6 - Official Opposition
 - Hours 7 to 9 - Third Party
 - Hours 10 to 12 - Private Members - Government Caucus
 - Hours 13 to 15 - cross-ministry appearances with the following allotments:
 - (i) the first 2 hours shall be divided between the Official Opposition, who shall have 90 minutes, and the Third Party, who shall have 30 minutes, and
 - (ii) during the last hour any Member may speak.

(5) During each 15-hour cycle, where the members of a caucus are allotted a particular block of time and those Members no longer wish to speak, then consideration for the entire block of time scheduled for that day is deemed to have occurred and any Member may be recognized by the Chair until the Committee rises and reports.

(6) Following the completion of the 4th 15-hour cycle of estimates consideration, the schedule for the remaining hours in Committee of Supply shall be determined by the House Leaders of the recognized parties in consultation with Members of the other parties or independent Members.

Voting – main estimates

59.04(1) On the date scheduled or at the end of 75 hours of consideration, there shall be one vote on the main estimates unless

- (a) additional votes are required on amendments pursuant to Standing Order 59.02(11) prior to calling the vote on the main estimates;
- (b) on at least one day's notice a Member has provided written notification to the Chair and the Clerk of his or her desire that the estimates of a particular department be voted upon separately, in which case that department's estimates shall be voted separately and the

final vote for the main estimates shall consist of the estimates of any departments not yet voted upon.

(2) The votes under suborder (1) shall be taken without debate or amendment except as provided in Standing Order 59.02(11).

(3) The Government House Leader shall give notice of the date for the vote on the main estimates not later than the completion of the 4th 15-hour cycle of estimates.

(4) Notwithstanding suborders (1) and (3), for the 2007 Spring Sitting the vote on the main estimates may be scheduled with a minimum of one sitting day's notice to occur any time after the completion of the 4th rotation of the 15-hour cycle, unless otherwise ordered.

(5) On the date for the vote on the main estimates and prior to the vote on the main estimates, the Chair shall put the question to approve the estimates of the Legislative Assembly, as approved by the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, and the estimates of the Officers of the Legislature, which shall be decided without debate or amendment.

(6) At 5:45 p.m. on the date scheduled for the vote on the main estimates, if the vote has not been taken earlier, the Chair shall interrupt the proceedings, and the Committee of Supply shall commence voting and, if required, continue beyond the normal adjournment hour until all matters have been voted upon, at which time the Committee shall immediately rise and report.

Tabling of responses

59.05(1) Ministers must table answers to questions asked in Committee of Supply within 2 weeks.

(2) The vote on the main estimates under Standing Order 59.04 shall not be held until the answers have been tabled in the Assembly as required under suborder (1).

(3) Suborder (2) does not apply to questions asked in Committee of Supply within 2 weeks of the date for the vote on the main estimates.

6 The following sections of the Standing Orders shall have no force and effect for consideration of main estimates for the balance of the 26th Legislature:

- (a) 60(1);
- (b) 61(1) - (7) and (9);
- (c) 62(1) and (2);
- (d) 65(1)(b).

7 Standing Order 62(1) is struck out and the following is substituted:

62(1) In this Standing Order and Standing Order 64, "normal adjournment hour" means 6 p.m.

8 Standing Order 68 is amended by striking out suborder (2) and substituting the following:

(2) The report of a committee is the report as determined by the committee as a whole or a majority of it but shall include any dissenting or minority reports concerning the report or parts of it.

9 The following is added after Standing Order 74:

Referral of Bill to a committee after First Reading

74.1(1) Immediately after a Bill has been read a first time,

- (a) with respect to a Government Bill a member of the Executive Council
- (b) with respect to a Public Bill Other Than a Government Bill the sponsor

may move a motion, without notice, to refer the Bill to a Policy Field Committee.

(2) The Member moving the referral motion may be permitted to give a succinct explanation of the motion.

(3) Any motion made pursuant to this Standing Order shall be decided without debate or amendment, and if the motion is decided in the negative the said Bill shall be ordered for Second Reading.

(4) This Standing Order does not apply to appropriation or Private Bills.

Proceedings on Bills referred to a committee after First Reading

74.2(1) When a Bill is referred to a Policy Field Committee after First Reading, the committee may conduct public hearings on the subject matter of the Bill and report its observations, opinions and recommendations with respect to the Bill to the Assembly.

(2) Upon the concurrence of a committee report that a Bill be proceeded with, the Bill shall be placed on the Order Paper for Second Reading.

10 The following is added after Standing Order 78:

Referral of Bills to a Policy Field Committee after Second Reading

78.1(1) Immediately after a Bill has been read a second time,

- (a) with respect to a Government Bill, a member of the Executive Council
- (b) with respect to a Public Bill Other Than a Government Bill, any Member

may move a motion, without notice, to refer the Bill to a Policy Field Committee, which shall be decided without debate or amendment.

(2) This Standing Order does not apply to appropriation or Private Bills.

Public hearings after Second Reading

78.2(1) When a Bill is referred to a Policy Field Committee after Second Reading, the committee may conduct public hearings on the content of the Bill.

(2) No public hearings may be conducted under suborder (1) if the Bill has been subject to committee consideration after First Reading.

Report of Policy Field Committee on Bills

78.3(1) A Policy Field Committee to which a Bill has been referred by the Assembly after Second Reading shall be empowered to report the same with or without amendments or to report that the Bill not proceed.

(2) The report may contain a written statement of the committee's conclusions if the Bill was the subject of a public hearing.

Procedure on report from Policy Field Committee

78.4 When a Bill is reported pursuant to Standing Order 78.3, the following procedure shall apply:

- (a) any Bill reported shall be considered committed to Committee of the Whole Assembly unless otherwise ordered;
- (b) when a report recommends that the Bill not proceed, a motion to concur in that report shall be put immediately and decided without debate, and if agreed to, the Bill shall be dropped from the Order Paper but if negated, the Bill shall stand committed to the Committee of the Whole.

C. Be it further resolved that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing shall, without further motion, review and consider

- (a) the amendments to Standing Orders resulting from the March 7, 2007, House Leaders' Agreement by comparing the reforms to the practices in other Assemblies, examining whether the reforms afford open discussion of public policy where Albertans can participate and whether the reforms maximize oversight and accountability;
 - (b) the need for additional amendments or reforms to the Assembly's rules and practices to further objectives of open, public discussion of public policy, the role of the Assembly in overall government accountability and the work/life balance of Members; and
 - (c) following the 2007 Spring Sitting the operation of Standing Orders 59.01 to 59.05 and the process used for Committee of Supply in 2007, and shall report to the Assembly with its recommendations no later than February 2008 with respect to the matters in clauses (a) and (b) and no later than the conclusion of the 2007 Fall Sitting with respect to the matters in clause (c).
- D. Be it further resolved that the Policy Field Committees referenced in Part B of this motion be designated as Category A Committees for the purposes of the Members' Services Committee Allowances Order, RMSC 1992, c.M-2.
- E. And be it further resolved that
- 1 The amendments in this motion come into force on passage.
 - 2 The amendments in this motion and the amendments approved by the Assembly on March 12, 2007, as amended, shall have effect until the dissolution of the 26th Legislature.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a proud day, in my view, as I have the opportunity to rise and move Government Motion 15 as it stands on the Order Paper. Government Motion 15 provides for temporary amendments to the Standing Orders of this House. They do some significant things in terms of the way we operate our business as legislators in this province on behalf of all Albertans.

Over the course of the fall of 2006 the Progressive Conservative Party had a leadership process, and during that leadership process all of the candidates talked about how we govern and how we should govern. But the candidate who was successful and became the Premier of the province made it very clear during that campaign that he believed that it was necessary for us to revisit the Legislature and the legislative processes with a couple of objectives in mind. One of those objectives was to make sure that this was a place where Albertans would desire to participate. Albertans would be prepared to put their names forward and serve.

One of the barriers to having people choose a political life and choose to be a Member of the Legislative Assembly is the life that we lead. Many members of the public don't necessarily appreciate the long hours and the service that the members of the Legislature put in. They certainly don't appreciate, unless they have a good look at it, the way we conducted business in the past, where sometimes we would meet at 1:30 in the afternoon and adjourn at 5:30 and then meet again at 8 and go into the late hours of the evening or perhaps

the early hours of the morning and sometimes all night. That was not conducive to a good family life, that was not conducive to a good work/life balance, and certainly not conducive to recruiting Albertans, women and men who wanted to have a family life, respected their family, and actually wanted to see their spouses and their children from time to time.

So that was one of the objectives, to help address the issue of the work/life balance and the workload so that it was a place where people could come, make meaningful representation, make meaningful participation but do it without sacrificing their families to a greater extent than is absolutely necessary. That was one objective.

The other objective was to make the process of the Legislature and government more effective. We had had a process, a very good process, where private members on the government side of the House have had very good input into developing government policy, I would say more than in any other parliamentary jurisdiction that I am aware of. In other words, members on the government side could attend a standing policy committee. We've heard lots of concerns raised by members of the opposition about the standing policy committees, but they have been a very effective tool to allow private members to have more participation in developing policy, developing legislation, having input with respect to budget, et cetera, as I say, than any other place that I'm aware of in the parliamentary jurisdiction. And that was a good thing.

But what was not good about it was that it did not allow the public to see that kind of input, so a government member could have input at a caucus, input at a standing policy committee, if a member of Agenda and Priorities or the Treasury Board could have input there, but none of that was public policy being made in public. Now, that doesn't mean that process was wrong. It just means that there needed to be additional processes. That's one of the objectives that our Premier tasked me as Government House Leader to achieve in discussion of how we could renovate our processes, and that's one of the things that I'm so proud of being able to bring forward in this motion today.

We are by this motion establishing policy field committees. Now, that's not a new thing for legislators. Lots of legislators have standing committees of the House to which business can be referred. But it's been a long time, if ever, since policy field committees were a part of the Legislature of Alberta. We tabled in this House early in the session a House leaders' agreement, and I can say that we've had very good discussion with House leaders from the opposition and the third party over the course of the last three months in terms of how we can appropriately bring together this concept of Legislature committees which can bring the public into the policy process and into the legislative process.

So this government motion, which, as I say, arises from the all-party agreement that we had, establishes those policy field committees in the areas of community services, government services, managing growth pressures, and resources and the environment. With those four committees any area, any policy field would fall within the purview of one of those four committees.

The committees would have the opportunity to review a bill that was referred to it by the House, so any bill that this Legislature believes should have the opportunity for public hearings, the opportunity to hear witnesses, or the opportunity for further discussion can be referred, on motion, to a policy field committee. That policy field committee, consisting of mainly private members of the House, can then review the bill, call experts if they wish, call witnesses if they wish, or open it to a public hearing if they wish to get further input. They can recommend amendments to the House. They can recommend to the House whether or not a bill should proceed. In other words, further scrutinization and detail work on a

bill can be done with the benefit of testimony and with the benefit of expert opinion and with the benefit of hearing from the public. That's one of the advantages of a policy field committee.

The second advantage of a policy field committee is that this House can refer regulations to it. As you will know, Mr. Speaker, and colleagues will know, regulations are the purview of Executive Council. We've had discussions – and I remember the former Member for Calgary-Buffalo always used to raise the issue of the concern that he had about government bringing forward what I call framework legislation, legislation which set out the policy and direction but which left to regulation the detail. From my perspective that's a very important way of doing legislation. You can have some flexibility to adapt and to make it current on a reasonable basis, but you have the policy framework in the bill. Of course, the former Member for Calgary-Buffalo used to complain about the public not seeing lobbying made by way of regulation. Well, these policy field committees now have the ability to deal with that type of issue.

If a minister, prior to taking a regulation to Executive Council, wishes to have further input and discussion, the regulation can be tabled in the House, as has sometimes been done in the past, but now that regulation, after being tabled in the House, can be referred to a policy field committee for advice. The policy field committee can review that regulation in some detail and provide advice back to the House, and the House would then provide advice to Executive Council. The regulations still remain the purview of Executive Council.

The other opportunity is for a policy field committee to look at a regulation that's already been passed if they believe it's in the public interest to review that regulation and have a public debate on that regulation. So it's an opportunity to take those pieces of law which are passed, quite appropriately, by Executive Council under the purview of an act and have a more public discussion on them.

There's also the opportunity for policy field committees to look further into other issues. Of course, every annual report of every department and of agencies, boards, and commissions tabled in the House is automatically referred to the policy field committees, and policy field committees could on their own account consider any other area within the purview, or the field, of their committee.

By establishing the policy field committees, which we're asking the House to do today, we're really opening up the process, first of all, to give private members of the House a more effective and definitive role in engaging the public in discussion of the public's legislation, whether it be laws or whether it be regulations, and an opportunity to hear from the public and bring what they hear from the public back to this House if appropriate to do so. It's an exciting opportunity – a very exciting opportunity, I believe – and I would recommend to the House that we pass these temporary Standing Orders so that we can establish these policy field committees and really reinvigorate the legislative process in that manner.

Now, there's a second piece to the motion, and that's with respect to the Committee of Supply. Committee of Supply is a very important process in our House. The Committee of Supply is part of the budget process where the government is held accountable for the spending of the public's money. As the budget will be tabled this Thursday and then estimates referred to the Committee of Supply, it's an opportunity for in-depth scrutiny of that proposed spending. What these rules do is provide for a significant increase of the oversight by this Legislature of government's proposed spending on behalf of Albertans.

There's probably no more important role of this Legislature than oversight of the government: making sure that the government is held to account for the spending of the public's money and making

sure that in spending that public's money, it's doing so in the context of appropriate policy frameworks and appropriate outcomes that we want to achieve. So a good portion of this motion is about setting up a new Committee of Supply process which will expand the amount of time available and the ability for in-depth scrutiny by all members of the House in terms of the requested supply that's brought forward each year.

2:30

There are some other amendments which are being asked for. One of those relates, again, to not only the work/life balance of members but also to the ability of the public to understand what their government is doing, and I refer to the set times for sitting. Traditionally, of course, parliaments are called when Executive Council decides that there is business to be brought forward. That was the tradition of all parliaments. More and more, parliaments are going to fixed sitting dates. What we're proposing here is that there be a fixed sitting date where the Legislature would be called on the first Monday of every February and would sit through till the first Thursday in each June for a spring sitting.

Of course, we're expanding on the concept that was introduced previously with respect to temporary Standing Orders, the idea of having constituency weeks every fourth week so that members can go back and be in touch with their constituencies and their families and bring that new knowledge and that reinvigoration back for the processes here.

We also provide for a fixed fall sitting of the Legislature. The fall sitting would be from the first Monday in November to the first Thursday in December. Now, in either the spring or the fall sitting, of course, it should be noted that the sittings could be extended, if necessary, to complete the business or could be adjourned earlier if that was appropriate. In addition, nothing detracts from the ability of government to ask for the Legislature to be called at other times during the year. So there's flexibility but still an expectation that we would have that we would sit for a certain length of time, for certain periods of time, and the public would know when we're here.

Those amendments will assist in helping with the work/life balance, and the rest of the temporary Standing Orders which are provided for are really supplemental to that in terms of the process, the procedure by which some of the business of the House is carried on. For example, a bill could be referred to a committee either after first reading or after second reading. After first reading, presumably, the committee would talk about the principles before it came back as to whether the bill should actually go forward. If it was referred after second reading, the more in-depth hearing process and committee process could be undertaken, and amendments could be recommended. In either case the time frame for referral would be after the bill had been passed at either first or second reading and before it had been taken up at the next stage, obviously.

But probably the most important piece of this whole process, Mr. Speaker, is to recognize that the rules of the House and the procedures of the House do belong to the members of the House. The final portion of this motion, section C, specifically requests that although we adopt these as temporary Standing Orders of the House for the remainder of this Legislature, they be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing for review and consideration.

In other words, we're proposing these temporary Standing Orders as a reinvigoration of the democratic process in this province, an ability for Albertans to see more and understand more about how their government works and how their Legislature works. But it's necessary for the members to be able to grasp hold of them and make them their own by referring them to the standing committee

and asking that standing committee to have a look at not only the processes that House leaders have recommended in the House leaders' agreement and have brought forward in this motion but also to look further at what other democratic assemblies and parliaments do to see if this can be improved upon or if, after some experience with it, there are some of the rules and processes that people don't like, to be able to change them. That's a very necessary process.

So we're asking that the House adopt section C of this, to refer these immediately to the committee, to have the committee review them while we're using them and bring back their experience and their ideas by early next year. Of course, the Committee of Supply process would be needed immediately because, as I failed to mention earlier, one of the things that we're asking for is a fixed budget date, which would be the second Monday in February. That would closely adhere to some of the parliamentary best practices, which really suggest that budgets should come in prior to the beginning of the next fiscal year. So that's why we're moving it as close to the front end of the session as possible.

But the Committee of Supply process is one that is very complex. We're trying it out this spring, but we're asking the standing committee to review the process immediately after we adjourn the spring session to see whether, in fact, it's been effective and whether any changes to that might be brought back to this House even by this fall so that they could be effective for a budget process starting immediately at the beginning of next year's spring session.

Mr. Speaker, I could go into more detail – but I won't – about these Standing Orders. I would ask for the support of the House in these Standing Orders. I think this is a major step forward for our Legislature in terms of how we might both improve the way we do our business and, most importantly, improve the way that Albertans have the opportunity to participate in the legislative process which governs their province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in support of these Standing Orders. Clearly, I was one of the parties that was negotiating them, and at this point I would urge all members of the Assembly to support what we have worked out over the last three months. It feels like longer, but I think it was only three months.

I have to say that there was an openness to discuss and explore some previously forbidden procedures and processes. I appreciate that flexibility that was demonstrated by the government side, and I'm sure it is reflective of the charge that the new Premier gave to his House leader as he negotiated. I'm also mindful that the new Premier is on record as saying that he would do nothing which would enhance a Liberal or ND's chances to win a seat. So, you know, you take all of those things into consideration and do your best to move forward.

I came into this process with a few goals in mind. I wanted to help to make this Assembly, this Legislature, a more humane place in which to do business. Clearly, I also wanted to make it a place that was more attractive for women to seek out seats and to serve Alberta's citizenry through their serving as MLAs. It has not been particularly attractive in the past, and I wanted to do what I could to change that and to encourage more women to run for provincial political office. Of course, when you start to look at changes that would benefit or would make it more attractive to women, I mean, that makes it more attractive to everybody. I think it does make it more family friendly. So that was part of the package that I was looking for.

I also wanted to see more time for private members' business in the Assembly and more emphasis on private members' business and more flexibility, more likelihood that bills would get more time and attention, be passed, and become part of public policy. So there are a few small things in there that reflect that. We have one small section that notes that if we don't get in a full three hours of private members' business on Mondays, we would conclude that on Thursdays. I don't think that will often be used; nonetheless, it's there. In my opinion, it was something I worked for to make sure that we understood and honoured and had put into writing the importance and value of private members' time in this House.

I've been one of the very vocal critics of the government's very closed shop: total government control, the use of its majority as a hammer with which to beat members of the opposition in various committees and here in the House. After 10 years I can say with some authority that I've seen that used to excess. I wanted to see what I could do to encourage the government to exercise less of an iron fisted control on every single process and to not use majorities in committees as a way of just ramming through a government agenda without ever listening and honouring any of the other issues that were being brought forward by private members on any of the all-party committees.

2:40

Of course, much of my experience flows from the 10 years that I spent on the Public Accounts Committee, very frustrating work there. I think we will see a difference in the enhancements that have been brought into the Public Accounts Committee as a result of my predecessors and my work and the current chair of the Public Accounts Committee, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and others who've all worked on that.

I think that on the opportunity that the Government House Leader was talking about, the opportunity that the government private members had to participate in the standing policy committees, one of my complaints about that was that it was done, frankly, at the expense of the private members in the Legislature. By moving the decision-making process behind closed doors, it really affected the way this Legislature operated. What we had was government private members who sat in here, and some of them, I swear to you, Mr. Speaker, never participated in debate of a bill. Their reasoning at the time was that they'd already talked about it in the standing policy committees, and the work was done, and now they were just waiting for it to all be done. So it put a huge workload on the members of the Official Opposition and the third party because we did all of the work in the Legislature, or many nights it certainly felt like that.

I'm hoping that we will see more engagement from the government private members, particularly more participation in the budget debates and in the debates of legislation that's brought before the Assembly. That is my sincere wish, and I think it would make a stronger Assembly and would help us all to be more responsible and responsive to our constituencies.

We have experienced the new timelines already. I'm hearing some people happy and some people not happy. I note that there may well be a period of adjustment, or we may well decide that it doesn't work. I'm particularly noting the extra hour that was added to the day. So although the night sittings have been dispensed with, an extra hour, a half hour at the beginning and a half hour at the end, was added onto the afternoon.

Of course, that's presenting some interesting scheduling difficulties or concerns or challenges with the community. The business community and the charitable community often hold functions over the lunch hour, and at this point we need to try and get members back into the House by 1 o'clock. Many of those functions are set

up to run from sort of 11:30 or a quarter to 12 until 1:30. So we'll have to see what happens, whether the community adjusts to the House and moves its timing back a bit or whether we participate less in those occasions in the community. I hope that's not the case because I think it's an important part of what we do, and it does get members into the community, but it is one of the challenges that has already presented itself around the changes in timing.

In fact, although we have dispensed with three evening sittings, which usually average two to three hours a night, we have picked up four hours in the afternoon sittings, so we're really not down by that much time overall in the week.

I would think that as we come close to our second constituency week, those will be deemed to be quite a success. I have already experienced that I'm not as far behind as I would usually be with my constituency work after spending as many weeks as we have in the Assembly. I am able to get back and sort of catch up, which I really valued, and was able to say to people that wanted to meet with me: "Well, you don't have to wait for four or five weeks. In fact, we'll be able to get you in for a meeting, you know, by the next constituency week." It also meant that I didn't have to rush through the meetings at, you know, 20 minutes apiece, trying to get five or six people through on a Friday, but that we could spend more time with the people, as much time as they needed, and I really appreciate that. So I think that the idea of those constituency weeks interspersed with the Assembly weeks will be an innovation that we will all be very proud of and will probably hang on to. If I'm allowed to look at a crystal ball, I think that one is a good bet.

The question period changes we've also experienced a bit and I think have made for, certainly, a livelier exchange. But, also, clearly, as the Speaker is pointing out to us at the end of every series, more questions are being able to be asked and a better exchange happening, and I'm very pleased to see that. So I think that it's been quite successful.

We've now experienced the first round where written questions and motions for returns which have been accepted by the government are not in the House for debate but are read into the record by the Clerk, and I think that that is going to prove to be quite helpful.

A small thing but I'm pleased to see that I was successful in getting an agreement that there would be a government response to any recommendations brought forward by the Public Accounts Committee. Sometimes we on this side feel that when we put recommendations forward or there are reports written, they go into the government side and disappear forever. There are a number of requirements in these new Standing Orders that require the government to report back to the Assembly within a specific period of time. I'm responsible for many of those, and I'm proud of it because I think it's part of that exchange of information which is very important.

The policy field committees, as the Government House Leader mentioned, are not new. Actually, I think we're, if not the last, one of the last in Canada to engage in these more free-flowing and open-ended set-ups for discussion of substantive issues.

A couple of things I'm still trying to achieve for that. One is a venue, an avenue for either an individual from the community or an individual member from the House to get an issue on the agenda. Thus far I haven't been successful in that, and we have a situation where, essentially, it's the majority vote of the House that sends an issue to the committee or a reference from a minister that sends it to a committee. But we did get that the committee could decide to take something on itself. Admittedly, still, that would require a majority of government members on the committee to agree to it. So it still is mostly controlled by government and the agenda set by government. I was hoping that we could have opened that up a bit, but it

all depends on how the committees under the leadership of this new Premier decide to behave themselves, frankly.

I've been on committees where there was a great willingness to work together, and they've been very productive, and I've been on exactly the same committee in which that willingness was not there, and it was horrible. It was pretty much a waste of my time even being in the room because my opinions were not welcome and the time that I spent doing the research, I wasn't able to get them put out into the committee for discussion. So we'll see how this works. I'm still hopeful.

I am pleased to see that dissenting reports will now be included. I think that's very important in a democratic society and something that I worked hard for.

There could be an argument that bills that get sent to the policy field committees never come back. I don't think that's what we've done. I have hope that this could be a vigorous working committee which enhances and enriches the ideas and legislation and regulations that we've sent forward to the committee. Part of that is, again, in having the committee be reported back, that there's a necessity that the committee does report back and that there's a timeline for reporting back. The reverse side of that is that there is a requirement that the government respond to what the committee has brought forward. So that's closing the loop there, and I think we were successful in that.

2:50

One of my big arguments in the negotiations was around support staff. I'm glad I was persuasive, and I think everyone has managed to benefit from that. I'm not sorry about that. I think that's a great thing, and we should all be able to do better work with reasonable staff support for that.

The Committee of Supply. I think I'd just had it by last year's budget debate, or maybe it was sup supply. I honestly don't remember, Mr. Speaker. But at the point I realized that I was trying to debate \$6 million a minute, I'd had it. I felt that the process had reached a point of absurdity, that it was not worth continuing. We are dealing with large sums of money here. This government does have a habit of bringing in now usually two supplementary supply budgets as we go through the year. Particularly with the initial estimates, as we debated that budget, we just didn't have enough time. As a critic, even with multifaceted portfolios or very large portfolios like Health and Wellness – and I was able to get, you know, maybe 20 minutes to 40 minutes of time to be able to question a minister – it was ridiculous.

So we have a new way of going at this. I am hoping that it will be productive and that we will be able to have a much more productive exchange of information with the ministers. Relaxing decorum which allows ministerial officials onto the floor should be able to give the ministers direct support and all of us access to information that we can carry back to our respective caucuses but also to our constituents. Of course, having all of this on the record recorded by *Hansard* with the public able to come and watch us I think is very important to the democratic process.

The idea of the cross ministries is one that's very important to me. I sure hope this is going to work. I came at this because of my experience in trying to get core funding for sexual assault centres over the last couple of years. Every time I raised the issue in the House, I was told I was talking to the wrong minister. Eventually I had in fact done the round of all ministers that had suggested that I speak to a different minister, which was about four of them. It was an issue that each one recognized that they had a piece of but nobody took responsibility for. The buck didn't stop anywhere, and as a result, frankly, there was no buck. I became very frustrated with this

and thought there has to be a way for us in the budget debates to be able to talk about an issue that appears in many different ministries, but nobody is ultimately responsible for it. That's the idea behind the cross-ministry debate days in which all parties, all members of the House will get an opportunity to talk about an issue that crosses over ministries.

Let me give you an example: land use. That's a big issue in many different areas and, in fact, many different ministries in the government. But we don't get a chance to get all of those ministers together in one room and talk about that issue only as it pertains to those different ministries and possibly be able to listen and hear each other and what each minister is saying about it and have other ministers listen to each other, to approach it as a team. I know that's not the way you usually do things in an Assembly, but it's reflective of the working basis that I come from. I think that having more of a team approach to issues like that may well be very helpful, and I hope it's the way of the future. It is based on a different theory than this House has been accustomed to working on, but women have been pretty good at working together as teams and coming up with some darn good ideas, so I'm hoping I can lend that over to the rest of this House and get some good results for it. Some of the ones we're looking at are things like land use, industrial development and health impacts, vulnerable people, and the whole idea of taxation and fees.

I'm pleased to see with the vote process that I was able to convince my colleagues to allow exceptions because sometimes I found myself in a position of having to vote against an entire budget because I disagreed with what was happening in one section of it. So by allowing an exception process where you can ask that a particular vote be pulled out of the entire vote, then you're better able to express where your happiness or displeasure lies with what's been proposed by the government.

Just very briefly, I'm also glad that I was able to achieve agreement to get responses from the various ministers and their departments within two weeks of having the actual budget debate, with a nod to the previous Deputy Premier, the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, who was the mistress of the two-week response. She was very good at it and also good to her word. I thought: well, if she can do it, everybody else can. In fact, that's what's going to flow from this.

There are lots of possibilities in what we've laid out here. I'm sure there are other changes that we could make to the Standing Orders that would make some people very happy, and I'm sure there are other ones that would make them less happy, but I think this is a pretty good package that we've got. I'm sure that on all three sides we would like to change a little here or we wish we hadn't gone along so far on some things, but overall I think it's a very good package. I think we can see the results of some of the work we've already done and that it is something that has enhanced this House, and I'm pleased to have been a part of the process.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Government Motion 15 for new Standing Orders for this Assembly. Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will not go through the whole process, I think. [interjection] Thank you. But I do want to make a couple of comments. If it takes leadership reviews to change the Legislature, maybe the government can think about doing it every year. This certainly has been a major change. The reality is that it's to all our benefit to make this Legislature work better. I have to give a lot of credit to the House leader of the opposite side and particularly to David Gillies for a lot of hard work. Frankly, we

in the opposition can ask for whatever we want and demand it, but it's not going to happen unless there's a willingness on the other side to move this along.

I think this was an example, Mr. Speaker, if I may say so – and I've said this before – where often the people see us in question period and there's sort of the give-and-take of question period and you think that all we do here in the Legislature is fight. Well, nobody enjoys that more than me, but there's more to the Legislature than that. I say that this is an important move to try to make the Legislature work better for all of us in here so that, more importantly, the people of Alberta have respect for what's happening here in the Legislature.

There are major changes that we've already talked about. The policy field committees and the Committee of Supply specifically, Mr. Speaker, will be works in progress. I don't think any of us can absolutely predict how this is going to work down the way. I'm sure there will be lots of growing pains with it because we're into a bit of the unknown here. But I do believe that the policy field committees and the way we've set up Committee of Supply makes this Legislature more important. It's certainly important for the opposition. I do believe that it's an opportunity for people on the government side to participate in a more meaningful way, too, in the policy field committees, as you see them doing in the House of Commons and others. If we're dealing sometimes with officials or other people, government members don't need to feel that they're attacking the government or the minister. They can be just as involved as anybody else in this process. At least that's what I would be hopeful would be happening.

I do think that this will be an interesting process, and I know that there's probably been some push back on the other side. I can say that for a number of my colleagues it was really hard getting them to move along with this House leaders' agreement, but I was able to persevere and bring them along, Mr. Speaker.

As I say, we all know policy field committees and the Committee of Supply. We know the changes that are going to be made. We know about the review. I think that now is the time, Mr. Speaker, to pass this motion and move ahead so that we can see how this works. As I say, it's a work in progress.

Again, I would thank the other people that worked on this with us. Hopefully, we've done something good for the Legislature and, more important, for the people of Alberta. Thank you very much.

3:00

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a true privilege and a pleasure to be able to get up and finally address this supposedly all-party House leaders' agreement, in which not all members of the Legislature were allowed to participate. I signed this with some reserved support in the fact that it could come to this Legislature, and then I could finally speak on it because I do feel that there are some critical amendments that can and should be put in place here as we go forward in the future. But there are some very positive movements that this government has made, so I'm very pleased about that.

Mr. Speaker, it's obvious from the start of this that the democratic process was not fully adhered to in that they did not recognize all members in the Legislature, and I am grateful for the Speaker's work in acknowledging those who were left out. I believe that that's where much of the benefit for democracy was held, in the Speaker's office instead of the opposition leaders or the House leader, in moving forward and seeing that all members were and are included in the standing policy committees.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the field committees versus the standing policy committees that we've moved forward. I'm very pleased with the changes in question period and the reallocation of time. Forty-five seconds back and forth makes it a true question-and-answer period, that I think will be a benefit for democracy and the people of Alberta. Moving to the field committees is a positive, and I am in favour of that.

But I'm very disappointed in the decision to keep in place the old standing policy committees, thinking that they are the root and the backbone of the policies that they want to bring forward for democratic process here in the province, and that like question period, they didn't extend the time. We still kept the 50 minutes, but it was reallocated.

It would have been a benefit for the taxpayers of Alberta had they just reallocated the committee money and put that towards the field committees rather than having those old standing policy committees still in place. I think that \$1.16 million is required to be paid out to the MLAs that are sitting on those committees. Like I say, in a real House leaders' agreement I feel that the field committees or all-party committees would be to the benefit of the taxpayers in efficiency, in prudence, and in the work that would and could be done in this House.

The Committee of Supply. It's an interesting change. I definitely agree with the members that more time needs to be spent on that. We're talking, you know, a \$30 billion budget, and still the time is very short. But I have some concerns with the so-called 15-hour cycle for that committee. Once again, it seems like it's a little bit, well, not as democratic as I would like to have seen it. It just seems that perhaps much like in question period, a little bit more of a rotation in there would add to the benefit of the discussion going on.

I haven't been briefed on it, and it's always difficult to know if one really understands the language, but my understanding is that the first six hours would be solely for the Official Opposition to utilize. I think that there's a good interaction as we go through question period and it revolves through the different parties. Different questions come up. Even for myself, as a sitting MLA I have found that often, as we hear the different views from both the government and the opposition sides, it can spark something in our mind, and we can do perhaps a little better job. Rather than just having six hours of the same questions being drilled at them, perhaps if we back up and take a different angle, our eyes and our understanding might be opened up a little bit more and be of benefit to the entire House. I guess the big thing is that, like I say, being left out of the discussion was very disappointing.

I'm thrilled, though, with the constituency week. It really helps, especially for those MLAs like myself that travel a long way. I believe that will be very beneficial, but I'm very disappointed in the fact that the three House leaders all live in Edmonton, and that's the only view that I see reflected in this House leaders' agreement. There is no improvement in my quality of life if I happen to be up here extra time or for any lady who doesn't live in Edmonton, their quality of life. I ask the question: if we were having our conference in Regina or Winnipeg or somewhere else, would we want to extend it? Or because we've travelled there, would we work efficiently and hard through the day and the evening to get the work done?

I understand and I appreciate the two sides, but the majority of the MLAs were not allowed housing benefits because of the distance, the close proximity that they live in. So those 23, I believe, get to drive home at night and improve their quality of life, whereas those who live outside the Edmonton area do not drive home. What was really disappointing, though, is that when they set up the weeks to be off, they said that they would do that in alignment, possibly, with the holidays. This time when we had the time off, it was aligned for

those MLAs who actually get to go home every night to be with their families, but they also got the week off. When we came back from our week off, our children were out of school. We're back here working, so we don't even see them the whole week that they have off because we're up here. So I don't think a good view was looked at when it came to that. It was a very close, myopic view, looking solely at the benefit to the people that live here in Edmonton. I think that that should perhaps be looked at and addressed a little bit more carefully, especially, like I say, that week off, if it could be worked so that we could be back home with our families when they're out of school.

To close, again I'd like to say that my biggest disappointment and what I would like to see changed is the money that's being spent on these field committees versus the money that's spent on the standing policy committees. I think that that needs to be looked at, whether it's more field committees or something to be broken down. The House leader mentioned that they're very concerned that these backbenchers participate in the standing policy, but it's not out in the open. It's very easy for them to open up those closed doors and have some meetings in caucus and cabinet and let the public in so that they can see and the secrecy is revealed.

It's always been amazing to me how they said that those backbenchers have to have an opportunity for question period. I think that if the government really wanted to do that, they could have an hour in the morning in their caucus meeting, and if they want to have *Hansard* or to bring in the news media, whatever it is, it would be very easy to open it up and allow the debate to be made public. It's amazing to me that some of the MLAs that I've talked to have said: "Oh, no. I spoke out on that. Oh, I worked on that, but I lost the caucus vote." We never know. I won't quote some of the specific ones, but I understood that some votes were very close, and if it came to the House and was a true, open, and democratic vote, some of those things wouldn't have passed the way they did. So I would like to see the government move a little bit further in that direction.

If they really want an open and honest debate, bring it into the House, then. That's why we're here, what we're sitting for. There is no shame, no matter which party you sit in, to represent the people that elected you, whether you're for or against that bill, because the fact of the matter is that we're very diverse geographically, you know, economically, and some things just aren't for the benefit of an area, so you need to speak out. I would very much like to see those debates brought into the House. I think that we could move a long way on that. You know, some of the other agreements that didn't go through are kind of, I guess, if you want to say, still behind the back doors.

Question period is another good example. We're currently getting 99 questions a day. What that works out to in calculation is that myself as a single-MLA party should get one question every two days. The independent members should get that. That would be more equitable.

I feel we can move forward. This is a good first step, but as usual it's not a bold enough or far enough step. I hope that we'll have a more democratic process and be able to move forward. Like I say, I appreciate the movement that the government has made. I know that it can move more.

Thank you.

3:10

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise, and I'll try to be brief. I must applaud the new Premier for pushing these changes to come forward and to the Government House Leader and

David Gillies for the hard work that they've done on this. I must also thank the Government House Leader, the Speaker, and the third-party House leader for being so gracious to give some of their time on occasion to inform me as to what has been coming forward on this and to discuss with me the importance of some of the matters.

The policy field committees, I think, are a very important development in our governance. The ability to look at regulations, while we have not really been able to look at them in a meaningful way in the past, in an open and public manner is something that I think will really very much open up the process of another level of government to the Alberta public and ensure that the Legislature itself has some greater credibility to the people of Alberta.

I think that the policy field committees will also have some function in informing all members somewhat more on some of the intricacies and some of the areas in the legislation that maybe they weren't too involved with. Being an independent member, it is sometimes very interesting to look at this whole House and the operations of it a little differently because what you see sometimes is a lot of riff and debate that doesn't say too much in order to fill time on the part of the Official Opposition. Having been there, you see that so much is often said which really isn't too informative and/or informed. I think that the policy field committees will work to help members become more informed and to look at the legislation in a much more detailed manner.

The ability of private members to be more involved in this I think is a great development, and again I support this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Would there be additional members who would like to participate on this motion?

Should I call on the Government House Leader to close the debate, or should we call the question?

Mr. Hancock: Just briefly, Mr. Speaker, to say thank you to the Opposition House Leader, the third-party House leader, and to all members who participated vigorously both at caucus and other discussion opportunities as we brought forward the process to try and revise the rules. The process itself, I believe, notwithstanding the comments of the independent Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, has been a very positive one, and I would ask for the support of the House.

[Government Motion 15 carried]

head: **Statement by the Speaker
Standing Order Amendments**

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's time for my log cabin story. I arrived in this building in 1979 as an elected person, having been a deputy minister. When I arrived in this building, MLAs basically had no offices. There were 13 of us who shared room 512 in this building. The offices were so small that you could barely put a desk in them. In fact, the former member who was introduced today was a bit more portly than I am. He had a difficult time walking between the side of his desk and the wall to get to his chair.

There were no constituency office budgets. They did not exist. If you were an elected person, you came here. You had no funds for an office back home in your constituency. Previous to that, in fact, when Premier Manning was the Premier of Alberta, MLAs would line up once a year to get a cheque. Once a year you got a hand-shake from the Premier, and you got a cheque, and you went home.

There were no pins available to members in 1979. There was nothing. You literally had to go and grovel to a minister of the Crown if you wanted to get a pin for your constituents.

The Legislative Assembly was rather different. We smoked here. We smoked right in the building, right in here. There were very few benefits. In fact, there wasn't anything. Caucuses had no funding provision. There were no committees of the type that we have today under the standing committees of the Legislative Assembly.

Over the years that has changed. The rules have changed as well. You're now in the 101st year of the history of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. I want to congratulate the three House leaders, and I want to congratulate all the members who worked on these Standing Orders changes. In my opinion, they are among the most profound changes to have been made in the 101-year history of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, and I was involved in some pretty profound ones in 1993.

What you've basically done is enhance the funding operation for the various caucuses to do immaculate research work. The funding provisions have been provided for now by the all-party independent committee of the Legislative Assembly, the Members' Services Committee. The Official Opposition will get an additional \$360,000 per year. The government caucus will get an additional \$720,000 per year. The third-party caucus will get an additional \$180,000 per year, and the independents will get an additional \$90,000 each to do research associated with these new policy field standing committees. The expectation is that these funds will be spent for the support and the research associated with that. There should be quite a dramatic change in the operation of this Assembly as we go forward.

So I repeat again that this Assembly is now in its 101st year of operation, and things in the past have never, ever provided such an opportunity for members to be as involved as they are today. It truly is congratulations on a very, very momentous occasion. Without any doubt, in my view, these are the most significant changes made since 1993.

Hopefully – hopefully – experience will show that these orders can be made more than temporary although there is some governance in here by what the members have done today in terms of this motion, to basically say that there is an opportunity for certain things to happen. I certainly hope that the chairman of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing and that committee will without further motion review and consider what has been done.

There's no better opportunity for members to learn about what's happening in other jurisdictions than for members of this Assembly to accept the invitation that's been offered to them to attend the regional meeting of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in Winnipeg this summer, where representatives from every jurisdiction in Canada will meet: all of the provinces, the Senate, the federal government, and the territories. In fact, the Standing Order provisions are a major, major subject matter of the whole conference. That would save a tremendous amount of money in travel. You would meet with leaders from across the country in that particular venue. To date only two or three members have indicated their interest in wanting to do that, but I extend that invitation again.

To all of you: a letter will go from my office tomorrow to the three caucus chairs advising them of this funding provision, and the dollars will become operational tomorrow. There is a subsequent motion that is required here. This motion gives governance to committees. The next step, of course, has to be to fill the committees. To have a blank and vacant committee, the committee can't be very operational that way, so one would look forward to the spirit of co-operation in the next two days to have this done so that when one

returns, presumably on April 30 of this year, when the budget process is under way, then in fact a new venue will occur.

Again, to all of you: congratulations. This is very significant. This is very momentous. It will only work, however, if there is the spirit of co-operation. The chair has reviewed every word of this on a number of occasions and understands that there are some grey areas. There may be some interpretations that we'll have to deal with as we go along, but they'll be done in the same degree of harmony that the three House leaders have found among themselves in the last couple of months. Despite all the angst that was in the back rooms and behind closed doors, in public there's love in the air.

head: 3:20 **Government Bills and Orders**
 Third Reading

Bill 3
 Climate Change and Emissions Management
 Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Mason moved that the motion for third reading be amended to read that 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.

[Adjourned debate April 12: Mr. Eggen]

The Speaker: We're on an amendment on Bill 3. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on the amendment.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment on Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007, in which there is a reasoned amendment, as it's called, to propose measures that will allow that the bill not be read a third time.

Well, Mr. Speaker, this is the issue of the century, and for us on the other side of the House to support a bill that does so little to move us forward in capping and actually reducing emissions is a very difficult commitment to make in spite of the fact that one could argue that there is some progress. Indeed, after five years of battling this government to admit the science and to acknowledge the will of the people and to recognize the threat that climate change is posing, there is, indeed, as the government argues, a step to place a tax on extra emissions starting this year, which has to be seen as progress. There's a recognition on this side that that is a modicum of progress. What Canadians and what world bodies and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change are calling for is substantive change in the way we address our energy and our carbon emissions.

We on this side of the House feel that we cannot support Bill 3. This amendment would allow us to in good conscience indicate to the government that there is a much stronger call across this country, across the world for leadership on this issue and that by supporting this amendment, we would not then support Bill 3 but would hopefully move the government forward to a more significant, serious commitment to capping and reducing our emissions in this province, looking at issues like offsets and carbon trading as an important addition to what needs to be done in the province: investments in renewables, real investments in energy conservation, and energy efficiency.

This is, indeed, what we would hope for, and we believe that we represent the vast majority of Canadians and Albertans in this wish. So I stand to support the amendment as put forward by the members

of the third party.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, our leader brought this in, and I will be supporting it. I think this is an important issue. This is, sort of, if you like, the big debate that we have to hold in this Legislature. It says that we want to reduce the intensity of specified gas emissions contained therein combined with rapid oil sands development. A point I want to make in dealing with that is the rate of development because it's clear that everything we debated in this session, the problems that we're facing, whether it be in housing, whether it be in health care, whether it be in education or children's services, all are an overheated economy. It seems to me that the government is in a headlong rush to rip out the tar sands as fast as they can. I know there's pressure to get into the American market. It's coming from the Americans. It's also coming from our federal government.

Mr. Speaker, as long as we continue, if you're going to talk about intensity and you keep putting on more and more huge projects, you can never catch up; CO₂ is going to keep increasing at dramatic levels. There's no way to stop it if you want to do that and if your whole economic strategy is this, even though it's creating all sorts of problems. The Alberta advantage is becoming a disadvantage for more and more and more people. At the same time, we're doing exactly the wrong thing in terms of caring for our environment. That's why over here on this side of the House we've been saying that we have to slow down this development. Nobody is really benefiting other than a few CEOs in downtown Calgary.

We've talked about rents, we've talked about health care not being able to keep up, and at the same time we're heading towards an environmental disaster with more and more CO₂ being there, Mr. Speaker. That's why we've said: "Look. For the time being let's at least slow it down, have a moratorium, figure out what kind of Alberta we want in the future, figure out what makes sense in terms of how much CO₂ we can keep putting out, see what makes sense in terms of our needed social programs."

Our infrastructure is falling behind. We can't keep up. It just doesn't make much sense anymore, both in an environmental and an economic sense. How is this progress when we are doing more to foul up the environment at the same time that more and more people are suffering with rising rents? We can't keep up to our emergency services in the hospitals. We have vacancy rates of virtually zero throughout even all small towns. We can't keep people working in the nonprofits because they can't make enough money; they can make more at Hortons. We have a labour shortage. How is this progress, I ask you, Mr. Speaker? How can we possibly say that this is good for anybody? It's certainly not good for the environment and, I would argue, certainly a disadvantage for more and more people in this province.

Mr. Speaker, it seems to us that rather than the government saying, "Well, this is really protecting the environment," it's not. It's going to lead to rapid increases in CO₂. Make no mistake about it. That's the reality. We can do better here. I could even, I suppose, maybe not agree with it, but I could understand it somewhat if I saw that this was benefiting all sorts of people, but it's not. I know that the Premier has talked about not putting his foot on the brakes, but if you're heading for a collision both in environment and with the way your services are being delivered, only a fool wouldn't put his foot on the brake. It's time to stop and take a look at this. That's why we should support this reasoned amendment.

Thank you very much.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:28 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Martin	Pannu
Eggen	Mason	Pastoor
Elsalhy	Miller, B.	Swann
MacDonald	Miller, R.	Taylor

3:40

Against the motion:

Boutilier	Haley	Mitzel
Brown	Hancock	Oberle
Calahasen	Herard	Ouellette
Cao	Hinman	Pham
DeLong	Jablonski	Renner
Ducharme	Johnson	Shariff
Dunford	Lindsay	Snelgrove
Evans	Lougheed	Stevens
Forsyth	Lukaszuk	Strang
Goudreau	Lund	VanderBurg
Graydon	Mar	Zwozdesky
Groeneveld	Marz	

Totals:	For – 12	Against – 35
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[Motion on the amendment to third reading of Bill 3 lost]

The Speaker: We're back to the debate on Bill 3.

Shall we call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View on the debate on Bill 3?

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak again to Bill 3, Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2007. Just a few points that will cap my comments and the reason why we have great difficulty supporting this bill.

The international panel on climate change gave its fourth report just in the last month indicating profound changes on the planet, profound threats to habitat, to human beings, to especially coastal communities, spread of infectious diseases, drought problems, obviously a serious loss of glacial-fed streams, which can affect around the world close to a billion people who depend for their water supply on glacial runoff. It's very clearly the most serious issue that this government, the Canadian government, world governments will be facing in our generation, and frankly citizens are looking for more.

A 1991 federal government report indicated that climate change was real, that human activity was contributing significantly to it, and that urgent action was needed. Sixteen years ago we were called to action, and no governments in this country took the lead. We are all responsible, we all are accountable for the inaction of our governments.

Now we are presented with an opportunity in which we are dropping the ball again with the appearance, only the appearance, of doing something with intensity targets, timed for the next 13 years to somehow bring us to some form of reduction in which there is, in fact, a true increase in emissions, up to 70 per cent predicted, with the growth anticipated in this province. How can we in good

conscience accept a policy that will lead us to a 70 per cent increase in our emissions in 12 years? This is unconscionable.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

There's a serious mismatch between what science, what the public, and what international governance is calling for here and the response of this government. We are looking for real change. We have to move very quickly to a cap on emissions. We have to look at trading and off-setting incentives. We have to move away from the incentives that we continue to give to fossil fuels and transfer those over to renewables and to indeed energy efficiency and energy conservation initiatives.

Citizens are looking for leadership. Action needs investment, Mr. Speaker. Action needs investment. The Stern report last year presented a very credible analysis, a 700-page report, in which Sir Nicholas Stern, supported by a number of economists around the world, indicated that we can spend now or we can spend much more later. One per cent of GDP is what he suggested as a minimum investment each country has to make to start to make the significant reductions in our emissions and our impact on the environment. One per cent of GDP in Alberta would be \$2 billion a year. Two billion dollars is what the international experts are saying we need to spend now, or we will be spending \$20 billion a year mopping up the mess that climate change is going to make in terms of our food production, our flooding, our droughts, our loss of habitat, our infectious disease impact.

It's hard for us to get our heads around this, but the best experts in the world on climate and the best experts that we have access to in terms of economic sustainability are saying that 1 per cent of our GDP is needed, which is \$2 billion a year in this province. We are spending a pittance relevant to this admonition from this international body.

What would this money go to? Well, very clearly, the primary targets have to be to shift towards renewable energy forms: a much stronger investment in solar and wind and geothermal, potentially more in-stream hydro, and then potentially some hydrogen and coal gasification. Any new coal-fired plants in this province have to have the technology for cleaner coal through carbon capture and storage. That's a second area that this investment should be going into, to enable and promote research and implementation of carbon capture and storage in all new coal-fired plants as the cheapest and the quickest way to make a significant difference.

Clearly, we have to reduce subsidies. We could be doing that by transferring the natural gas rebate program into a serious commitment to energy efficiency and not subsidize fossil fuel use but shift fossil fuel use to renewables and energy efficiency. We need a more serious commitment to public transport in this province, rail and electric particularly. We need a more serious commitment to building code changes. Both housing and institutional business building codes have to change.

We can make a very dramatic difference. The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy said that we could do 40 per cent of the job of reducing our carbon emissions simply through energy efficiency and energy retrofits. That's a huge result from simply using the existing technologies and ensuring that they're used through environmental audits, energy audits on buildings, and government assistance/incentives for retrofits and the shift to renewable energy.

Mr. Speaker, I won't belabour the fact that we on this side of the House feel that there has been an abdication of responsibility in Bill 3. There has been a failure to recognize the seriousness of the investment that's needed and the seriousness of the impacts that are

the Canadian Bar Association, and to the Law Society of Alberta. Stakeholders reviewed and expressed support for the proposed amendments. They also provided feedback and suggestions for additional changes. As a result, the amendments have been drafted to reflect all of the recommendations provided by the stakeholders.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the proposed changes in this bill will better reflect the current practices within the Alberta Court of Appeal as it relates to appeals from boards or tribunal decisions. They will eliminate conflicting provisions, provide greater clarity about the process, and establish consistency as to when appeals are to be heard.

I encourage all members of this House to support Bill 19. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to respond to the hon. member moving second reading of Bill 19, Appeal Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. I actually have to start with a compliment to the hon. member, who I really appreciate having in this Assembly and appreciate his work ethic. He certainly works hard and is, for the most part, a fair and reasonable person to work with.

Now, the bill that we have before us, Mr. Speaker, is amending appeal procedures. I have to admit that not being a lawyer and not having a lawyer in our Official Opposition caucus poses certain challenges. But on the flip side of this, I'm also very proud of myself because I have improved. My ability to read legal bills and to read legal language and to understand through a very critical lens what the government might be trying to bring forward has improved significantly since I joined this esteemed Assembly in 2004.

Before I go into the bill itself, as a matter of procedure or course I usually read the news release, the government press release that announces to the world that the government is bringing forward a particular piece of legislation. This news release, which was dated March 20, talks about building a stronger Alberta and bringing forward legislation to establish new provincial guidelines for appeal procedures.

4:00

The hon. member, as he was introducing his bill, was talking about eight different statutes, but when I went through the bill, at least the copy I have, I only counted seven. I know that the one that seems to be the discrepancy is the Gas Utilities Act, which I couldn't at first glance find in my own copy. So unless it's embedded in a certain section that I can't see with a big, bold title, I would appreciate the hon. member alerting me to where exactly it appears in the bill.

It's not a big bill. It's about 12 pages thick, but again it's lawyer friendly, not necessarily layman friendly, and any guidance and any assistance from the hon. mover of the bill would be greatly appreciated.

So what are we trying to do? The bill is intended to bring legislation in line with current practices in the court system related to direct appeals from board or tribunals, which is something I agree with. It provides clarity and consistency with what we do now in appeal processes, which is fine. I don't disagree. The main feature is to bring in a workable time limit, something that people can adhere to and not find onerous or unrealistic in the legislation, allowing direct appeals to the Court of Appeal.

Now, the acts I counted are the Agricultural Operation Practices Act, Alberta Energy and Utilities Board Act, Electric Utilities Act, Energy Resources Conservation Act, Municipal Government Act,

Natural Resources Conservation Board Act, and number seven is the Public Utilities Board Act. I'm assuming that maybe the Gas Utilities Act would fall under that one. But, again, this was just my quick first scan of the bill, so I'm going to now maybe scrutinize it a little more. Each of those seven acts being amended involves the decisions of a regulator, a regulator such as the Energy and Utilities Board or the NRCB or the Municipal Government Board.

Those decisions can be appealed to the courts. However, in the existing legislation, as I understand it, each of these acts frequently leads to parties being unable to meet the timelines. As such, we are opening the door for, you know, adjournments or postponements to the court process because of the unworkable time limits.

In those various statutes there were no provisions for the procurement of documents that were requested by an applicant from a board.

I would pause here for a second, Mr. Speaker, and talk about those boards, which have really grown in size, mandate, and authority, if you will. They're becoming almost like government agencies by themselves. While they were initially envisioned to be sort of at arm's length, they are now so huge and their mandate is so widespread that, you know, for somebody to approach them with an appeal process and ask for documents, it's a little intimidating, and it's a little difficult for that person to procure those documents that are in question.

This is one of the reasons why we had so many delays in the process. Those boards, as they were initially set up, were under no statutory obligation to provide the materials requested in any set period of time. So I think that clarifying this and streamlining it is useful, and again I commend the drafters of this legislation for catching this and trying to rectify it.

Now, the bill is in response to concerns raised by the Chief Justice. Again, that's good because now we're listening to the people who are, like, hands on, the people who are in the field, telling us that this is something that they are struggling with, and now we as legislators are responding and reacting to that concern or that frustration.

They were unworkable time limits, which hindered or interfered with people's access to the Court of Appeal with respect to those boards or tribunals, as I mentioned. So in terms of the actual amendments in this amendment legislation, I think the first one is to set those realistic time limits at 30 days for an application for a leave to appeal to be filed. It removes the consent provision from a judge of the Court of Appeal to grant a leave to appeal.

Again, I'm really proud of myself here because three years ago that didn't make sense to me. It was all Greek. But now, you know, what a difference three years make.

The second component is to remove the obligation to actually have leave to appeal granted from a judge. Again, I look at this as improving access. Basically, what we're proposing here is to just have to provide the intent to apply for a leave to appeal, which is, I think, simpler, and it makes it easier for applicants to move forward.

The third component is to add a provision relating to a time limit of 14 days from the day on which the written request is served for the board or that tribunal that we were talking about to provide any materials requested by an applicant. That's, again, wonderful. In this day and age people are asking for quick justice, and they're asking for access to information. If we continued, you know, allowing boards or tribunals to just sit on those requests indefinitely and to waste time and to drag, justice was not being served, and it wasn't being served in a timely fashion. So that is a positive change.

The fourth component, or the fourth attempt that this bill is trying to do, is to stipulate that if leave to appeal is "granted by a judge of the Court of Appeal, the appeal must proceed in accordance with the

practice and procedure of the Court of Appeal.” It also states that “the notice of appeal must be given to the parties affected by the appeal.” I think that is, again, a favourable direction that we should be accepting because notice of appeal allows all the parties to be prepared and it creates that sort of even playing field for all parties in that particular court case.

Now, there is a bit of technical wording which I found a little challenging. It basically has to do with the transcripts and records of hearing. But what we did, again, to make sure that nothing fishy or nothing mischievous was being embedded here was we asked two or three lawyers in the field. They replied to us that they don’t see this as any concern about something that might be contentious or something that might be questionable or objectionable and definitely that they don’t see it as being a barrier in the process to appeal to the Court of Appeal.

So we trust those legal opinions, and we trust their integrity because they’re people who are, again, in the field, hands on, and they have no interest in which way this act is amended. They’re fairly impartial, and they said that they don’t see it as having any negative impact on people’s access to the courts or the ability to appeal in the Court of Appeal, so in that regard I’m not going to worry much about that component dealing with transcripts and records of hearing.

Not to consume a lot more time, Mr. Speaker, I don’t think there’s anything in Bill 19 that would raise any significant flags. Again, I commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill because he is definitely one of the hardest working in his caucus. We appreciate the fact that he shared the background information ahead of time with members of the opposition, which really makes our lives easier. It allows us to not be as suspicious or not be as critical because now we can do the research ahead of time and not be rushed to participate in debate.

With that, I invite further comments, but the Official Opposition is leaning towards supporting Bill 19, Mr. Speaker.

4:10

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 19 in second reading. Appeal Procedures Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, was just introduced by our colleague from Calgary-Nose Hill, and his introductory comments were helpful in describing the nature of changes that this bill proposes to accomplish by way of the amendments that are made to seven different pieces of legislation that deal with a variety of boards, tribunals, et cetera in the province.

Mr. Speaker, some of the changes that are being proposed clearly make sense in terms of the time limits, the requirement of 30 days for serving the intention to appeal and the time limit of 14 days for the boards or tribunals to respond to the request for materials for the purposes of the applicant to be able to seek leave to appeal to the Court of Appeal. So the changes in the time requirement I think make sense.

Changes in the language that, again, the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill suggested needed to be made in order to make the language more current with the times: I think those are welcome, make sense to me.

The only primary concern that I have, and still have after listening to the member and other hon. members, is the kind of materials that the applicant will be able to ask for when preparing application for leave to appeal. Mr. Speaker, the provisions in Bill 19 make a distinction between requests for materials and requests for transcripts. The distinction is made that certain materials can in fact be requested from a tribunal or a board in order to prepare a leave to

appeal, but excluded from the materials are the records of the proceedings in order do so.

I’m somewhat puzzled by this distinction. In terms of general principles I think I would like to see a piece of legislation which doesn’t make it more difficult, doesn’t reduce the probability, if you wish, of the application for leave to appeal to succeed. It seems to me that the fact that the amendment proposed here will explicitly exclude the ability of the applicant to have access to transcripts in preparing the leave to appeal application would make it more difficult, perhaps, or reduce the likelihood of success of the application for leave to appeal. So that is, I think, my primary concern.

It is true that changes need to be made in existing pieces of legislation to achieve greater levels of efficiency, save where effort can be saved in the legal processes when applicants want to take matters before the courts. True, efficiency as a value is important. Saving resources and time and being able to do things in a timely fashion without wasteful effort having to be put in to do so is a good thing, but we have to put the principle of efficiency against the principle of the right of applicants to seek legal redress by way of appeal. In my view, this distinction that’s introduced by way of these amendments in this bill, the distinction between requests for materials which boards and tribunals would be obliged by law to provide within 30 days excepting the transcripts, would tilt the balance in favour of efficiency at the cost of the notions of justice and fairness and the rights of the applicant to exercise the right to appeal. So that remains my concern.

I have thought of introducing an amendment to rectify the problem that I see in the bill, to improve the bill. There are, as I said, you know, very positive features in the bill which I’m in support of. The only matter over which I have reservation is the exception made with respect to the access to transcripts, that the time of preparing the application to seek leave for appeal that is being legislated here will make it more difficult for the applicant, in my view, to prepare an application for leave to appeal in a way that could enhance the likelihood of the success of the application for leave to appeal.

I hope that in the ensuing debate I have an opportunity to hear a stronger defence or a clearer explanation for this bill introducing this distinction between certain materials that must be made available in order to prepare the application for leave to appeal and certain other materials, specifically the transcripts, not being made available. I think the transcripts are an important piece of the materials that the applicant will need and would like to have available to prepare an application for leave to appeal because having the transcripts available, in my view, would most likely enhance the likelihood of the application for leave to appeal to succeed. That is, perhaps, my only major concern with respect to Bill 19.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Any other speakers?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill to close the debate?

Mr. Magnus: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a second time]

4:20

Bill 22

Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act

[Adjourned debate April 4: Mr. Eggen]

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to rise and participate in debate on this Bill 22, Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act. As you know, this act is trying to establish a new provincial entity, a new provincial corporation to manage Alberta's investments. While maximizing return for the taxpayer is something that any government should be looking at, and while maximizing return on investment should be something that any Legislature supports, one has to wonder at the rationale behind this direction and this turn today compared to yesterday or this year compared to last year, for example. What changed? What brought on this policy change to move it from, you know, under the direction or under the control of the Minister of Finance to something that is outside of government, something that might be relatively at arm's length compared to the current situation?

The government is telling us that this new provincial corporation could improve net investment returns by 25 to 100 basis points. They're basically explaining, as per their press release when they announced the introduction of this bill, that every 10 basis points in net value-added would yield a return of something like \$16 million per year in net income – that is through the Alberta heritage savings trust fund – or, according to their figures, close to \$50 million per year on all the balanced investment portfolios managed by the corporation.

Two questions. Number one, why can't we do this now? Why can't the staff and employees of Alberta Finance as they are structured now offer this better return on investment? Why do we need to go outside of the Ministry of Finance to achieve this better return? The second question that comes from this statement or this observation is: why did we wait so long? If the government is claiming that this is basically following best practices in other jurisdictions – and they use the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan as one of them or the Canada pension plan as another – why did we wait so long?

Now, I'm under the impression that there has been a recent study commissioned by the government which concluded that a stand-alone organization would be, sort of, a better way to invest and to manage the investments. I have to ask the question if this decision was made based on just the one study. You know, if it's just the one study that resulted in such a profound policy change or change in direction, what did that study tell us? What was lacking, or what was not being done adequately that we had to actually resort to a measure of this magnitude?

The government is also telling us that going this way, creating this organization, is going to balance operational independence with the highest standards of transparency and accountability, yet in the same paragraph the government is telling us that "the Lieutenant Governor in Council will appoint a board of directors responsible for the oversight of the corporation." We all know that this is basically language that really means that it's the minister who's going to appoint the board. You know, lay people would probably understand that the Lieutenant Governor is in charge, but this really tells us that the minister is going to appoint people to direct the corporation. How is that granting that organization operational independence if they're still appointed by the minister in charge?

Also, the same press release is telling us that "the government will continue to set the investment policy for all government funds." So my concern here, Mr. Speaker – and I think it's a justified concern – is: are we creating a new level of bureaucracy, or are we creating something that might be not needed, something that might be redundant? Operational independence: wonderful if we can guarantee it. With operational independence there should come accountability, and there should come transparency.

If we move in that direction, and if this House agrees that this is the direction we need to go, who are they going to report to? Who

are they going to be accountable to? Will it continue to be the Minister of Finance, or will it now be the President of the Treasury Board, or will they report directly to the Assembly? We need to know. We need to know that chain of command, or that line of authority. Where does it start, and where does it end?

I honestly thought that the Ministry of Finance was doing a fairly good job. This press release and the bill itself tell us that we could do better. I'm all for doing better, but I'm just hesitant to create new departments and new agencies and to appoint people to them. It should come as no surprise to you, Mr. Speaker, that we also have issues with respect to appointments to boards and agencies and, you know, different departments and stuff like that because we have concerns with respect to patronage and redundancy and waste. We need assurances that this is not the case, at least in this particular situation.

Another thing is that today in question period there was a little confusion that arose from a particular question that my hon. colleague for Edmonton-Rutherford raised. We had heard that during supplementary supply there was an entry for \$7 million for investment loss. When we investigated, the hon. Minister of Finance told us that it was basically due to an error in hedging, if I remember the term correctly, with respect to the difference in currency exchange between the Canadian dollar and the U.S. dollar. It was an error made by an employee of Alberta Finance, and by the time they caught it, it had cost the taxpayer \$11 million.

Now, on the one hand, the hon. Minister of Finance today was saying that now this agency is going to prevent this from happening again and that part of the rationale for its inception is basically to address concerns like this. But in a written response to my hon. colleague for Edmonton-Rutherford, the minister has indicated that the rationale for converting the province's investment management operations to a provincial corporation, I quote, is not in any way related to the losses cited in the supplementary estimates. End quote.

So there is a bit of a mixed message here. Mistakes have to be avoided. Protocols and procedures have to be tightened, Mr. Speaker, and we have to ensure that it's not just one employee that is making decisions like this. There should be checks and balances and people double-checking and triple-checking before a decision is made or a decision is finalized because, honestly, as we were discussing this morning in caucus, we really sympathize with that employee.

The employee has to be accountable, and they have to be responsible for the error they made, but it's really not entirely their fault. They have supervisors, and they have bosses, and those bosses have bosses, and those bosses have a Minister of Finance that actually oversees this entire department and is entrusted to handle those investments and to make those decisions and to scrutinize those decisions on a day-to-day basis. So, yes, someone made a mistake, and they have to be dealt with, but also we have to really investigate what led to that mistake and what led to that mistake not being caught on the day it was made, a month later, or six months later, Mr. Speaker.

Now, we have raised many concerns in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, with respect to different government agencies and boards and commissions. If you remember last year, for example, there was a lot of talk about the Alberta Securities Commission. Now that we're creating this new department and now that the minister will appoint people that are going to direct it – and they would have a lot of autonomy and a lot of power – how can Albertans be confident that the issue of governance and the issue of management are going to be dealt with so we can ensure that, you know, professionalism and ethical behaviour are going to be highlighted and emphasized and that they're going to be of the utmost importance?

4:30

The next concern which I'm going to raise is with respect to their budget. We are creating a new board, and this new board is going to require staff. They're going to require letterhead and business cards, and they might be moving to a new building that, you know, you have to pay rent for and then utilities and insurance and all that stuff. With all of this in front of us and with all of this being thought about, are we also going to require them to not only co-operate with the Auditor General because everybody has to co-operate with the Auditor General, but take those new policy field committees that we're going to be establishing, Mr. Speaker, which is really a wonderful turn of events – and I welcome their incorporation into our legislative life. Will they be required to appear before the policy field committee that's in charge of finance and that's in charge of making investment decisions? I would hope that the answer is yes, and I would hope that they would not feel that we're unduly infringing on their autonomy, that what we're doing in fact is helping set that policy direction.

I am not comfortable with the fact that the minister or the government is going to continue to set the policy directions for Alberta's investments. I think it should be a function of one of those four policy field committees, and we should really invite input from all sides of the House and also from outside the House. Alberta has quite a large supply of financial advisers and people who can actually make sound decisions day in and day out. I think we should really invite that input from the public and from stakeholders and not just rely on six or seven or 10 people that are hand-picked by the minister to make those decisions. If we're worried about an \$11 million error today with all the checks and balances that we have, I am concerned that we might have larger errors materialize in the future. So the issue of governance, the issue of ethical behaviour is a big one, Mr. Speaker.

Again, back to that operational flexibility, just to assure the citizens of this great province that the corporation will not put the wishes or the views of its creator, a.k.a. the government or the cabinet, above the interests of Albertans. You know, this concern arises whenever you have a political appointment to any board or any commission, and this one in particular is going to be dealing in, I think, excess of \$70 billion. The government has investments exceeding \$70 billion, and these people have to be held accountable that they don't put the wishes or the directions of the cabinet ahead of the genuine interests of Albertans. Albertans own the investment, and if they benefit, it's them who benefit, and if something wrong happens, it's Albertans whose investments lose value. It's them who suffer.

Now, referencing other jurisdictions, you know, like the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan or the Canada pension plan is wonderful. Let's make sure, then, that our practices and our protocols and the operational manual for this new investment corporation are modelled after those other jurisdictions. So we don't just reference them; we should really learn from their experiences.

So I will take my seat, Mr. Speaker, and invite further comment. But it's something that we are going to cautiously support. I hope that the hon. minister provides us with some answers. Thank you.

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

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you. I thank the hon. member for some of his insightful comments. I appreciate them as we work together, I would say, as we look at these policy field examples that he mentioned and thank him for his positive comments to the government on this initiative but also on the Legislature. It's going to be

really important to understand that good ideas, no matter from what political party, are what we want to embrace. Of course, be it whomever they come from, this government accepts good ideas. Obviously, the responsibility of the government will be to execute those ideas in terms of what we do. So I just want to say: good ideas. No one person or one group has a patent on good ideas, and that's what makes any government successful in terms of embracing those good ideas, which we will continue to do. Who knows? Maybe some day in the future there will be a ministry of good ideas.

The Acting Speaker: Any others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 22, Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act, in its second reading. This is obviously an important piece of legislation. It will create a new Crown corporation that will be asked to handle very large sums of public money, close to \$70 billion, being done on the assumption or with the goal of boosting the returns to investments that now are in public funds by \$500 million.

Mr. Speaker, it is an important bill because it does create a new Crown corporation. There are all kinds of questions about what kind of arm's-length relationship this corporation will have with the government. Presently much of the work that this corporation will do is done in-house in the Department of Finance. At least in theory that work currently being done in the Department of Finance is accessible to us in terms of seeking transparency and accountability of decisions.

Once you put these important decisions in the hands of a Crown corporation, you certainly free it from the possibility of political interventions in the decisions that get made with respect to these investments, which may affect financial markets or what have you. That's, I suppose, one of the underlying advantages in establishing a corporation. It frees or prevents or, if you wish, insulates it somewhat from political influence that may come from the government, from the cabinet, from the Executive Council, or from the minister in charge, the Minister of Finance or whoever.

On the other hand, it's a question of public accountability of these funds because these are funds that really in principle belong to the province of Alberta and therefore to the people of Alberta. The people of Alberta have a right to have confidence in the alternative that's being proposed, confidence both in the accountability side and the transparency side.

Mr. Speaker, of course this Crown corporation will be dealing with investments. Many Albertans may have concerns about the investment policies. Ethical investing, for example, would I think be a concern that many Albertans would have. Once you put these matters, important decisions and \$70 billion, in the hands of an arm's-length Crown corporation, what kind of access, what kind of control, what kind of influence will the residents of this province have on decisions which relate to whether or not a particular investment decision has respected the principles of ethical investing? So I have questions about what kind of accessibility, what kind of access either Albertans in general or this House on behalf of Albertans will have with respect to reviewing and asking questions about the ethical nature of the investment decisions made by such a corporation.

4:40

The related question is, of course, Mr. Speaker – we have seen that once there are investment corporations that have come into being, they make decisions which have been considered not legally appropriate, and some of the public corporations have been taken to

the court, and CEOs have been criminally charged in some cases and have faced the consequences of their actions, some cases in progress right now, as we speak, with respect to that.

The premise that this corporation, AIM, Alberta Investment Management Corporation, will deliver benefits in the form of enhanced returns on the investments is just one premise. There are other potential possibilities and difficulties that could arise, and we need to therefore proceed gingerly, to put it in an interesting way, when making a decision on the pros and cons of establishing a Crown corporation that will be responsible for investment decisions on public funds. So the accountability issue becomes very, very important, and the oversight, the ability to oversee the activities, of such a corporation by a legislative body, by a democratically elected forum such as this one, becomes an important issue.

I think our colleague from Edmonton-McClung raised the issue of whether or not the policy field committees relevant to this area will have any role in not only overseeing the activities and decisions of this corporation but, in my view, should have a central role in examining this bill. We should invite financial experts, advisers, people from the academy perhaps, regular citizens to come and give advice to this government on this very crucial piece of legislation, which is really the establishment of a Crown corporation dealing with, at the moment, \$70 billion.

Who knows? If this government did see the light and, in fact, agreed to enhance the revenues that come into the public purse from revenues generated from the exploitation of nonrenewable resources by their royalties, if the royalty rates were to increase, as I hope this review will make certain that happens, that Albertans get a higher rent on the resources that will not be there within two or three or four generations, then it won't be just \$70 billion. It may be \$200 billion or \$300 billion. We know that other jurisdictions in the world such as Norway or Alaska have used their royalty rates to in fact accumulate very large sums of money available to the citizens of those jurisdictions for investment.

So the role of this corporation could in fact be far more crucial given the possibility of the \$70 billion fund to grow into a much larger fund, hundreds of billions of dollars. Given that that possibility is open to us, whether this government will help Albertans achieve their goal is another matter, and I have very serious doubts that the government has any intention, really, of enhancing royalty rates so that Albertans in general will benefit from the historically unprecedented high rates on these resources that companies benefit from. We as Albertans are stuck with the royalty rates established when these oil prices and gas prices were one-third or one-fourth of where they are now, yet the royalty rates haven't changed.

Assuming that the royalty rate change can be made by the government of Alberta, whether this one or another government that replaces it, the role of this corporation becomes even more crucial in shaping the future possibilities for Albertans, and the decisions that this corporation will be making will therefore be of great significance to them. So I raise the question of whether or not the Minister of Finance is in fact willing to heed the advice coming from this member to refer this bill to the policy field committee that would be relevant for this particular area.

It's a very, very important bill, Mr. Speaker. I can't overemphasize the importance of this being looked at more closely. We need to give ourselves time. We need to give Albertans the opportunity to have input on giving us their advice as to the features of this bill, the contents of the bill, and what they would like to see changed or what provisions they would like to see enhanced and where they would like to see new provisions added so that their interests are fully protected and the accountability and transparency issues are well addressed.

That said, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and hope that the Minister of Finance will give me an answer in the affirmative with

respect to my suggestion that this should be the first bill that is referred to the relevant policy field committee that will come into place now that the House today voted on the motion from the Government House Leader, which will now enable us to establish those policy field committees.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Any other speakers?

The hon. Minister of Finance to close debate.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I want to say thank you to everyone who has debated this bill at second reading. There has been a lot of thought put into this bill. There have been a lot of issues that have been dealt with regarding this bill. Indeed, this has been something that has been contemplated for the last four to five years. It culminated in a study, which I tabled in the Legislative Assembly roughly a month ago, which showed the potential upside for moving to this type of format, for moving to this type of investment opportunity. I think it would be extremely difficult for us as a Legislative Assembly to turn our backs on the potential savings, the potential increase in income of close to \$500 million a year, which is what 100 basis points would give us.

Mr. Speaker, there have been questions raised about the administrative costs. There have been questions raised about numerous other costs, but I will say to the members in this Assembly that when I talk a hundred basis points – and I will give the range of 25 to 100 basis points – in actual fact, that is a net increase in the amount of dollars that have come forward.

Would it have been easier simply to keep all of our investments within the Department of Finance? Yes, it would be. Is that the best thing for our \$70 billion in investments? The answer is no. The study that was brought forward showed us that, and it showed us that we do need to take the next step, which OMERS, which the teachers' and the various other pension funds around the country have done.

The second point – and I would certainly hope that the members from Edmonton would adhere to this principle – is that by centring in Edmonton a Crown corporation that has \$70 billion in assets, we hope to get a spinoff financial industry in Edmonton. By having that critical mass of \$70 billion here, we really feel that that spinoff will occur.

4:50

So, Mr. Speaker, this bill has been done with a lot of thought. It's been done with a lot of consternation, but we have made a decision to move ahead with this bill because we feel that it is the best for our investments. It's the best for our pension plans, and I will add that all of our pension plans, some \$25 billion worth of pension plans, are in agreement with moving to this format, in this direction.

The last thing that I want to say is quite simply that this board will not be political appointments. This board will be put on for expertise. We cannot have political appointments, Joe's friend or anyone else's friend, put on this board to manage \$70 billion. The hon. member across the way talked about the policy field committees. Unless I'm wrong, there is no one in this Legislature who can manage \$70 billion worth of investment, and I include myself in that particular group of people. That's a huge task. It's a huge responsibility, and we need to ensure that the proper people are in place to manage our money as Albertans, Mr. Speaker.

So I anxiously look forward to the Committee of the Whole on this one.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

**Bill 28
Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2007**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? Hon. Minister of Justice, are you rising for this?

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise to begin discussion this afternoon in committee on Bill 28, the Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2007. This bill 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 only if they started part-time service on or before their 70th birthday. I'd like to start by thanking the members opposite and my colleague the Minister of Health and Wellness for their comments in second reading.

Today I'd like to summarize the benefits of Bill 28 and answer questions that arose in debate at second. Extending the option of part-time service to full-time judges over 70 years of age will benefit Albertans. More highly experienced and competent judges will be retained to continue serving Albertans on a part-time basis. As my colleague the Minister of Health and Wellness stated in debate, the provision for part-time service was made available at the request of the Provincial Court.

Part-time service is one way to keep judges who have put in considerable service serving on the bench. The other way is to appoint supernumerary judges, who are called upon to serve from time to time as needed. Supernumerary judges are retired judges who are paid on a per diem basis. Part-time judges sit on a consistent and scheduled basis as opposed to a supernumerary judge, who sits on a periodic basis. Other benefits of part-time service are that judges receive regular exposure to current trends and access to professional development opportunities.

As I pointed out in second reading, there is a financial benefit to the government with these amendments. On an annual basis two part-time judges sit the same number of days as a full-time judge but cost the government \$60,645 less. This is because part-time judges are already receiving their pensions, and the government is no longer required to make contributions to their pension plans.

Mr. Chairman, another benefit of Bill 28 is that it will provide the Provincial Court with more flexibility in scheduling their sittings. The act now requires part-time judges to sit full-time for two three-month periods in each year. Bill 28 will change this requirement so that part-time judges sit for the equivalent of six months on a full-time basis in each year of their term.

The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview requested an update about the need for this bill at this particular time. He wondered if this legislation was related to the courts being very busy as a result of a booming economy. Mr. Chairman, it is true that the courts are increasingly busy, and this is due in part to a growing population. The impetus for this legislation, however, is to help us retain experience and knowledge on the bench, which are valuable assets to Albertans at any time. I would add that these changes were initiated at the request of the Provincial Court of Alberta, and it is fully supportive of this bill.

I believe this addresses all of the questions raised in debate, and we should move forward with this bill at this time. I would ask, as a result, that all members of the Assembly support the bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's indeed a pleasure to rise and participate at this stage of debate on Bill 28, the Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2007. If I remember correctly, this is probably my first chance to speak to it, and I thank the hon. Minister of Justice for the bill briefing ahead of time and also for his responses that he just gave to some of the comments and concerns raised in second reading.

The purpose of this bill, Mr. Chairman, is to amend the Provincial Court Act to allow judges to continue to work after they reach the age of 70. The second substantive component of this bill is to require a part-time judge to sit the equivalent of six months on a full-time basis. This is versus, maybe, the current practice of potentially serving two separate three-month periods on a full-time basis in each year of his or her term. So with respect to this second component I don't understand whether it has a different value or if it's, in fact, not the same thing. I suspect that maybe it has something to do with scheduling simplicity for the Chief Judge and the Assistant Chief Judge to assign, you know, roster duty or to schedule those part-time judges. So counting the days, really, it doesn't make a big difference whether somebody works six months or two three-month blocks. I suspect that it has to do with the scheduling, to make it easier for that Chief Judge or for the Assistant Chief Judge to stipulate who works where when.

Are we trying to keep experienced judges on the bench for a longer period? Yes, we are. Are we supportive of this direction? Yes, we are. It does two things. It actually achieves two favourable outcomes, Mr. Chairman. One, for judges who want a reduced but guaranteed amount of judicial service after retirement, it allows them to have that option, which is favourable. It also allows for a reduction in the pressure on the court. Both volume and gravity or complexity of cases are of concern, so now we're allowing an enhanced speed, if you will, with which cases are processed. I've always maintained – and many people like me – that slow justice is bad justice.

If we can accelerate processing and if we can move things quicker and restore the rights of people who have been wronged or offer them compensation or restitution or, indeed, provide them with closure for their ordeals and for their suffering, that's definitely something that is favourable and that I am in favour of. The interest of having access to justice and fairness is definitely paramount, Mr. Chairman.

5:00

Now, allowing judges to work part-time after they reach the age of 70 and extending that lifespan, if you will, is favourable, like I said. I just hope that one of the reasons why we're leaning towards this amendment is not to cut down on costs. We all know that two part-time judges might actually do the same work that one full-time judge might; however, the government is not required to contribute to their pension plans, for example. So hopefully this is not one of the reasons, you know, in terms of cost savings.

The other thing is that while we are eager to extend the working life of judges who are experienced, it shouldn't be coming at the expense of or placing younger judges at a disadvantage, interfering with, let's say, a young Crown prosecutor who is qualified and who meets all the criteria and all the requirements to be promoted or to be appointed to the bench.

So on the one hand it's great that we're creating this opportunity for retired judges to carry on their duties and to participate in the judicial process, but also we have to be cognizant of the fact that younger ones might be coming through, going up the ladder, basically, and we shouldn't be putting them at a disadvantage. It should be an accommodation of both. I think that we might be achieving this accommodation of both because we have tremendous backlogs, and we have tremendous workloads in our courts. So maybe my concern is not as warranted, or maybe I'm being too concerned.

Moving on. With respect to allowing judges to participate and to carry on their duties, remember, Mr. Chairman, when we discussed Bill 16 in this House last week. Bill 16 is the Police Amendment Act, 2007. The Alberta Liberal caucus introduced an amendment to Bill 16 which asked for the inclusion of a retired judge in the special investigative unit, the unit which was basically established to investigate serious allegations of police wrongdoing, incidents involving death or injury or situations with respect to sensitive information or situations of a sensitive nature.

Now, we asked for a retired judge to be on that integrated investigative unit, and we also asked for a retired or former Crown prosecutor, a retired or former police officer, and at least two members of the public. We were talking about members of the public that don't fit into any of those three categories: judge, Crown prosecutor, or police officer. It was unfortunately rejected by the government caucus. One of the arguments we heard is, basically, that we might be putting ourselves in a legal conundrum because we might not find a retired judge to serve on the integrated investigative unit, and if we go ahead and establish the investigative unit without a judge in it, then we might be breaking our own law.

That was an excuse which I found a little weak given that on the Order Paper we have Bill 28, which basically extends the working lifespan of judges and allows them, should they choose, to continue to practise. So that tells me, in a way, that we do have a healthy supply of judges who are around age 70 or older than 70 who are willing to continue to work even on a part-time basis. Their expertise would be critical, and we all appreciate the fact that they've been doing this for many years, and the qualifications and the experience that they have amassed are to be noted.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar indicated in the debate on Bill 16, the Police Amendment Act, that we should leave judges alone to enjoy their retirement. He indicated that, in his book, his definition would be that once you're retired, you're definitely retired; you're done. I quote from *Hansard* where he said: "I want to grant them that opportunity to stay retired. I want to let them be retired because that's important. I know that when I retire, I hope that people will just let me retire. Yes, they have lots of skills; they have lots of abilities." I disagree because we have tremendous backlogs, and we have pressures on our legal system that can be addressed fairly and adequately by allowing those judges to continue to practise.

Definitely, this amendment in Bill 28 enhances that ability of the courts to retain the services of qualified and experienced judges who have both the capacity and the ability to continue to serve Albertans and the interests of justice. I emphasize, Mr. Chairman, that slow justice is bad justice. As MLAs – and I'm included, and you're included as well – we hear from constituents all the time that the wheels of justice sometimes turn slower than expected or slower than they should. Maybe this way we can accelerate, you know, the processing of court cases.

They are willing to continue to work, and we have to offer them the legislative framework with which they are allowed to continue to work. This is an enhancement over supernumerary judges, who

are called in from time to time to fill in like locums, for example, but who are unable to continue with their professional development. It provides a better way of retaining the services of judges, as opposed to the supernumerary status.

So, in essence, Mr. Chairman, we don't have any major concerns with this. I just hope that this is done in a structured way. I will definitely lend my support to any measure introduced in this House that would increase access to justice and provide a mechanism to expedite the movement of cases through our court system. As such, I encourage all members of this House to join me in voting in favour of Bill 28. I thank you for this opportunity.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise with some interest in speaking to Bill 28, Provincial Court Amendment Act, for the first time. Certainly, as my colleague just very eloquently, I thought, pointed out, this is a positive and innovative means by which we perhaps can help to expedite the swift and equitable passage of justice in our provincial courts. Considering the backlogs that we have to deal with so often in provincial courts, then perhaps this is, in fact, an innovative way to change that around.

This bill is a simple amendment to the retirement clause of the Provincial Court Act and will allow judges to continue perhaps on a part-time basis past their 70th birthday. Currently the act states that a judge approaching their 70th birthday must state in writing that the judge is willing to give up their appointment and that also a judge may be eligible for a one-year extension. Under the part-time provision of this bill judges must serve for two full terms, three months each, if they want to get the part-time status. So this bill simply puts a little subclause in there that the judges have received a one-year extension of their full-time status and then be appointed as part-time judges, making it easier for the process to unfold.

It also amends the time frame to some extent that judges must serve by loosening it, I believe, to something more like six months rather than to a three-month term. So, certainly, this just seems like a simple and useful way to continue, on a voluntary basis, of course, the wisdom and the skills that judges have developed over the course of their careers and, if they are choosing to do so, to continue to contribute to our judicial system.

5:10

Certainly, it's, I believe, also sending a positive message in regard to options that individuals in other professions might have in regard to retiring or choosing not to retire. We have a tendency in our society here recently to loosen the constraints that have been placed in previous times in regard to mandatory retirement ages. You know, I believe that this is a step forward for people's freedom of choice, and certainly it acknowledges the accumulated wisdom and capacity of long-serving professionals in all different walks of life to continue to contribute to society in a positive way and, in fact, probably contribute in a most positive way.

I have to look no further than my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona just to see, you know, how much wisdom and positive contribution an individual can continue to make long past what some people might consider to be a retirement age. In fact, the University of Alberta just recently lifted their mandatory retirement age . . .

An Hon. Member: It's about time.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Exactly. About time, indeed.

We consider the value that we like to pay lip service to towards wisdom and accumulated knowledge and to all of those things. Finally, we have an actual acknowledgement of that here with the

University of Alberta changing their retirement policy and now, potentially, with Bill 28 in regard to judges.

So, you know, this bill we certainly do support as a caucus, and we consider it to have the potential, as I said before, to alleviate the pressures from our court system. It certainly is part and parcel of other mechanisms by which we could in fact impose positive change on our court system to clear the backlog and to offer other alternatives that perhaps can serve our justice system better.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would certainly once again like to reiterate our support of Bill 28, and I would invite other members to do so as well. Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 28 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 5

Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to speak in Committee of the Whole to Bill 5, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2007. We had an exchange of information during second reading of this bill, and I had made a couple of observations. Essentially, this act is amending five pieces of legislation. For the most part, I have no trouble with what's being done here, but I was a little curious about a couple of things.

The first section, which is amending the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act, removes the requirement for a practitioner to provide permission to the department to review patient records and establishes a penalty for a practitioner who refuses to give this permission. So it's no longer required, and if somebody does actively try and obstruct it, there is a penalty involved. My concern around this is: continuing to protect patient confidentiality. So I was looking for some comment on that and a clarification on how the reviews are currently conducted. I think my primary question around that is: are patients notified when their files are released to the department as a way of checking up on the physician or as a way of reviewing the physician's current practice? I know the Health Information Act well enough. I should know the answer to that, and I apologize for not having it in the top of my head, but if I could get clarification there.

I also had a bit of a concern on that same first section with the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act around the minister's ability to select members of the committee that then reviews the claims that are submitted. I note that some professions are mandated, and others are not. I think that was the reasoning that I was given as to why this change was in here. I'm always a little cautious when I see that kind of control in the hands of the minister without some sort of extra filter there. I think that what was happening was that there were certain professions that were required to be on the review panel but not others. This is removing that now to allow the minister to just select people. I think my caution there is that we should always have members of the public involved in this so that we do have an independent view that's being brought into play.

I've got no problems at all with section 2.

Section 3 was the Health Insurance Premiums Act. This was making it easier for Albertans to opt out of the health care insurance plan. Essentially, if you're going to do it now, you have to do it by a certain date, and you can only do it for a year. This is making it easier for Albertans to opt out of this. My question would be: why on earth would you be doing that? Of course, my suspicion is always that this is making it easier for people to engage in private insurance plans, which of course helps them to proliferate, and I'm not keen on that at all. But, you know, there really are not very many people that would be involved in this. Why are we spending so much time and effort trying to facilitate very few people, really very few people, who are trying to get out of our public health care system? Why would we be trying to be more consumer friendly on this issue? I guess this whole thing has always puzzled me, and I know that the media was interested in it as well. It's really taking a seemingly simple administrative change, and it's making it one of your top priorities. We haven't had that many health bills in front of us. This is one of them, and this is what's part of it, so I'm a bit curious.

The fourth section is mandatory testing and disclosure. Really, that was about capturing the definition of guardian that's contained in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. Ah, a cell phone ringing in the Assembly. How interesting. I think the hon. minister for government services is desperately trying to cover for one of his colleagues.

All right. Capturing that definition that's used in Children's Services to pertain here is fine by me.

There's a clarification in section 5, the Pharmacy and Drug Act, about the authority of Health and Wellness to adopt national drug schedules as they change over time. Of course, I hope what will come with that is the national pharmacare program. Perhaps the way is being paved for that. That would be good news.

Finally, the Public Health Act, which should bring us in line with current policy enabling the adoption of documents that change over time, don't require new regulatory amendments each time a new version of standards is produced. I think that should also help us with some of the pandemic responses that we're gearing up for.

Those were the issues that I had raised. I'm assuming that I can get some answers back in third reading, but at this point I'm happy to exhort my fellow colleagues in the Assembly to give their assent in Committee of the Whole to Bill 5.

Thanks.

5:20

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

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak for the first time on Bill 5, Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, my first time, anyway. Yes, certainly, Bill 5, the scope of it covers a number of technical and administrative changes of less consequence.

However, the thing that struck me and raised my critical interest was the section that deals with the Health Insurance Premiums Act. This was, I believe, on page 5 of this bill as it's printed and section 25(9)(b). This is the part that's talking about streamlining the process by which people can step out of paying health care premiums. In the language of the bill these are called registrants. Then it's extending the time frame that they can do it from 12 months to 36 months and also makes the opt-out effective from the point of filing with the ministry.

So considering, as was just previously mentioned, that there are only a few people that actually do opt out of the Health Care Insurance Act – our count is 255 people last year – just sending the message somehow that we will make it easier for you to do so, I

don't know. It gives a negative impression in regard to the universality of our health care system, first of all, and in my estimation is telegraphing an intention somehow that perhaps some people, if they have the means to do so, should do so because more things are coming down the pipe in regard to privatization and/or making it easier for people to choose to not use universal health coverage.

So I certainly oppose this in a very fundamental way. Although it is appearing as a reasonably innocuous line item in Bill 5, certainly it does raise the ire of people who are concerned about the potential for further privatization in the health care system.

The substantive changes otherwise in this bill lie, again, in the Health Care Insurance Act and where this bill is purporting to establish a reassessment of the claim committee and also seeks to strengthen the investigative powers for the purposes of assessing health care records. We don't particularly have a problem with that.

Premiums account for only 9 cents on the dollar that we spend on health care in this province in general; in other words, 9 per cent of the total health care costs. So by stepping out of paying premiums – really, essentially it's just that 9 per cent of the total health care cost for any given unit on average – then registrants really would have to cover 100 per cent of their costs incurred during the nonpayment period, including, presumably, medically necessary treatments as defined by the Canada Health Act. So I just need clarification on that because there is some ambiguity there. The Canada Health Act outlines minimum conditions on provincial health care for the purposes of transfer payments, and dependents who choose not to opt out presumably become liable for the costs. That includes children? Again, I would like to ask about that because, of course, we have a responsibility to individuals under the age of 18 to provide medically necessary procedures. So I just would like to see how that would work together with this ability for an individual or their family to opt out of the health care system.

So although these amendments only make nonpayment of premiums immediate from filing and extend the effective time for them, it seems to be an opportune time and, in my mind, a moment to raise overall concerns with the health care structure as it stands now. For example, I would like to ask: what, if any, are the ramifications from a user standpoint of opting out of premium payments in cost/accessibility? People opting out of the premiums: are they still insured for medically necessary treatments. Right? So if you have an individual who is perhaps in an emergency situation, I mean, how can you sort of choose? Again, this goes back to the nub of the debate.

An Hon. Member: Will we deny them?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Exactly. Of course, we don't deny. We're legally bound as well to provide that treatment. So, you know, how is it that these people are somehow jumping in and jumping out? It goes back to the old debate that we've been fighting for years and, of course, we're ready to fight any time again.

As well, I would like to ask, then: do we pay for the full coverage of additional services provided by Health and Wellness? I mean, how is that going to work out? Right? According to the current wording of the act, in my mind, dependents choosing to opt out of the registrant's declaration would have to assume the responsibility of paying the premium costs. Right? So, would the registrant's children also be personally liable for the premium costs since they, of course, are dependents? I would like to see clarification on that too. Then, what measures are in place to ensure that onerous financial burdens are not placed on extended family or dependents and such? You know, the whole thing just seems a little bit half baked to me.

My feeling, then, is that, really, without some change to this section, although other parts are probably necessary and technical in nature, I would be tempted to oppose this bill on the grounds that it in fact strengthens a negative view towards public health care by (a) making it easier for people to opt out and stay out of the health care system; (b) downloading all related costs onto these individuals, misguided as they might be; (c) exempting people once they've decided not to pay the 9 cents on the dollar for necessary medical treatment; and (d) somehow downloading costs potentially onto these people's families.

Mr. Chair, cumulatively, just on that section I have some significant, I think, and well-founded concerns about this bill. As I said, certainly we have lots of opportunity to seek clarification on these questions that I'm asking. But I do want each member here today and the public as well just to identify and flag these sections of Bill 5 because, in fact, they do point to something that is potentially quite serious, in my estimation.

So thank you for the opportunity.

The Deputy Chair: Any others?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 5 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 22

Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to get this opportunity to discuss Bill 22 in committee. Certainly, I would like to express my appreciation to the Minister of Finance for providing detailed answers not only to the questions I had in regard to Bill 22 and how it's going to affect the heritage fund. How will the Alberta Investment Management Corporation be affected by Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act? Will the Alberta Investment Management Corporation be subject to the Conflicts of Interest Act? It was great to see a response to that. It was really comforting to finally discover that Alberta Finance has consulted with the clients. Hopefully, the letters of support for Bill 22 from these respective pension plans can perhaps be tabled, if they have not already been, in the Assembly. On the role also, Mr. Chairman, of the government's chief internal auditor: what role will he have with the corporation? I'd appreciate that as well.

5:30

Now, certainly, when we're talking about the Alberta Investment Management Corporation and their work with the University of Alberta to train students who might want a career with the organization or with the industry – the hon. minister talked about that earlier this afternoon in second reading – hopefully through the School of Business at the University of Alberta this will be more than just a

work in progress. I think the entire province would benefit from that initiative.

So I would just like to be on the record. I appreciate these answers, and I appreciate the time that they came in.

The report that was tabled by the hon. minister earlier during this session – and this is from Capelle Associates. Hopefully there are more detailed studies somewhere in the department to support Bill 22. If there are, I would certainly appreciate it. They also could be tabled not only for the benefit of this member but for all members of the Assembly.

Now, Mr. Chairman, certainly with Bill 22 I have been following the debate, and I have been reading with interest a number of things that are going on. We can go back to previous annual reports from the government of Alberta. We can go back and we can see where in December of 1999 the Minister of Finance at the time, the hon. Stockwell Day, is talking about investigating a separate pension plan for Alberta and improving CPP, not only for Albertans but for all Canadians. That was one step, and then the second step was a pension plan for Alberta.

I would like to know how Bill 22 could possibly fit into any future plans the government has for an Alberta pension plan. Perhaps it hasn't been thought about, but certainly it was discussed in the leadership debate last fall, as I understand it. It's not the first time that this has come up, and my research indicates that the former Treasurer certainly had some interest in this proposal.

Now, earlier in the Assembly today, Mr. Chairman, I tabled a letter that I wrote to the Premier last Friday. I was alerting the Premier that I would be presenting an amendment to the Legislative Assembly on Bill 22, and I would like to do that at this time, please.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, make sure you forward the original copy to the table.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we have an amendment before us which is being circulated. The amendment shall be referred to as amendment A1.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you may proceed.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. This amendment to Bill 22 as it has been circulated would read that the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act be amended in section 2(5) by striking out "Alberta" and substituting "the City of Edmonton." This amendment would permanently place this 70 billion plus dollar corporation, and I can see the assets of the corporation growing significantly well beyond \$100 million and, hopefully, at some point in the near future even beyond \$200 million. This Crown corporation would be an ideal fit to the corporate community in this city. If this amendment was to be accepted, it would be an endorsement by this current government of this city. I would really encourage all hon. members to have a look at this amendment and give it serious consideration because we talked about this before, if this asset base were to remain in the city.

We look at the consultants' report. They talk about the difficulty there is in recruiting people to manage these funds. Well, we can start training our own. If we're confident that this asset base will remain in the city, we can work in conjunction with the university to train individuals, and hopefully they will have long professional careers, successful professional careers, managing this fund in this city.

Certainly, if we look at the Alberta Treasury Branches, it's sited in this city. This is the capital city. We need to increase the corporate base within Edmonton, and this is an ideal start. In fact,

last week the Premier made a commitment to the city of Edmonton in his speech at the Shaw Conference Centre, at his leader's dinner, and this would be the first commitment to the city, by supporting this amendment.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I would cede the floor to any other hon. colleague who would like to participate in the debate on amendment A1. Again, in conclusion, this is good for the city of Edmonton, and it's also good for the province of Alberta. I would urge all hon. members to accept my amendment to permanently site the head office and principal place of business of this corporation in the city of Edmonton, the capital of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I certainly recognize the hon. member's intention, and indeed it is our intention that AIMCO be placed in Edmonton, that it be resident in Edmonton, that it spin off its financial benefits, as the hon. member talked about, in Edmonton. I would not, however, support this amendment and say that it must be in the physical constraints and physical boundaries of the city of Edmonton. I will not take away the flexibility from this corporation. It does have to be in Alberta, but it could just as easily be in Sherwood Park. It could just as easily be in St. Albert. It could just as easily be in some of the other communities around. [interjection] Not Lethbridge, unfortunately. Edmonton is the place where it will be.

I will go on record as saying that my intentions are that this corporation will be housed in Edmonton, will be centred in Edmonton, but I will not second-guess the market when it comes to where the best value is for rental space. It makes all sorts of sense to be housed in the capital community, in the capital city, Mr. Chairman, and I'll give that as my intention, but I do not want to inhibit, to allow them to make bad decisions if at some time in the future there is a need to move to Sherwood Park or a need to move to St. Albert or a need to move to Spruce Grove.

Mr. Chairman, the importance is – and we have to remember it – that this is a Legislature for all of Alberta. I have the full intent to house this in Edmonton. I think it's a good fit here. But I do not want to state in the legislation that it must be within the physical constraints of the city of Edmonton, and I would urge members not to support this amendment.

5:40

Mr. Eggen: Well, I am rising to voice my support of this amendment to Bill 22. Certainly, when we're talking about the intention of placing something into a certain place, we've had a long experience here in the city of Edmonton where you have an intention for something to stay where it is. All of the good intentions in the world certainly didn't stop the telephone company from leaving our fine city and even our fine province in very short order. You know, we can look at a whole long history of these things. I appreciate the minister's comments in regard to that we're perhaps not anticipating where we're going to be in the future, but certainly one thing that we know will be in the future is that Edmonton will remain the capital of the province of Alberta.

This is a very large fund that administers public monies for the province of Alberta. To have it connected to the city of Edmonton is not just perfectly reasonable; I think it's absolutely essential. Of course, Mr. Chair, I am supportive of Bill 22 in most ways, but I can't help but have some reservation just because of the magnitude of the money that we're dealing with here. We're talking about creating one of the largest investment funds in Canada. You know, to have that in the capital city I think is absolutely essential.

One of the big items that we've gone out of our way to stress with Bill 22 is to keep the political machinations or influence out of the

investments that we make with this fund. You know, moving the hundreds of people that might be associated with the management of this fund hither and yon at some political whim in the future, whoever the government happens to be, I think, again, would be quite a major disruption to the integrity and the security of one of the largest investment funds in the country.

I think it's not unreasonable at all, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, to just emphasize the importance of having this fund located in the capital city. We, in fact, are the capital city of this province, where it is all located. So I certainly do support the amendment, and I encourage all other members to do so as well.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Any others on the amendment? Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, you wanted to speak on the amendment before us?

Mr. R. Miller: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: You may proceed.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Just very briefly, the Minister of Finance has outlined his concerns and made a commitment to keep the head office and the base of the operations of the corporation in the capital region. I'm wondering if there might be some consideration, then, to amend the amendment to reflect the capital region as opposed to the city of Edmonton, and if that would be favourable to the government, perhaps we could go there. It would accomplish both the intent of amendment A1 and also the concern that the minister has expressed. I think that might be a way for us to wiggle out of this particular situation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would suggest that the answer to that is no. I will not prejudge. I'm hoping that this fund will be there a hundred years from now, 150 years from now, and that it will indeed be \$200 billion, \$300 billion, \$400 billion. It's fully our intent to have it in Edmonton. It makes all sorts of sense to have it in Edmonton. A lot of the employees are going to be centred in Edmonton, so everything is pointing to Edmonton.

I don't believe that we should inhibit in any way this corporation by saying that it must be within the physical constraints of the capital region or Edmonton in general. Is that our intent? Yes, it is. Will I shackle future governments on saying that that is their intent? No. I think each government has to stand on its own merit, and the merit of this corporation is for it to be in Edmonton.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, this government has put such a great and, I might add, wise effort into extending SuperNet across this province. The last time I checked, we had telephone access to all corners of our province. I'm wondering why the hon. member didn't suggest the great municipality of High Level in my constituency in which to locate this.

An Hon. Member: Bring money to a higher level?

Mr. Oberle: Yeah. Bring money to a higher level. I mean, I cannot fathom why that municipality was not considered in this amendment.

The structure of this organization has to be around management reporting relationships. It doesn't matter what town it's located in. It's got to be located in our great province of Alberta. End of story.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:47 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Backs	Hancock	Miller, R.
Blakeman	Lukaszuk	Pastoor
Eggen	MacDonald	Zwozdesky
Elsalhy	Mather	

Against the motion:

Boutilier	Groeneveld	Mitzel
Calahasen	Haley	Oberg
Cao	Herard	Oberle
Danyluk	Hinman	Ouellette
DeLong	Horner	Pham
Ducharme	Johnson	Renner
Dunford	Lindsay	Rogers
Evans	Lougheed	Snelgrove
Forsyth	Lund	Stevens
Fritz	Mar	Strang

Totals:	For – 11	Against – 30
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the committee shall now rise and report Bill 28 and Bill 5 and will report progress on Bill 22.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 28, Bill 5. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 22. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

