

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

**Title: Monday, April 30, 2007**

**1:00 p.m.**

Date: 07/04/30

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

head:

### Prayers

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, please remain standing for the singing of *O Canada* after the prayer is done. Shall we bow our heads.

On this day let each of us pray in our own way for all those who have been killed or injured in the workplace. Life is precious. When it is lost, all of us are impacted. In a moment of silent contemplation may we now allow our thoughts to remember those taken before their time, those who have suffered through tragedies, and reach out to the families, friends, neighbours, and communities most immediately impacted.

### Hon. Members:

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

**The Deputy Speaker:** We'll continue with the moment of silence. May God provide them eternal peace. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

### Introduction of Visitors

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

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it's a pleasure for me today to introduce His Excellency Smail Benamara to all members of the Assembly. He is the ambassador of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria.

Just as in Alberta, energy is such an important part of the Algerian economy, with over \$75 million per year being exported to Algeria from Alberta. It's my pleasure to introduce His Excellency. I'd ask our honoured guest to rise and receive the warm welcome from the members of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this House three very special guests: Mr. and Mrs. Zile Singh, accompanied by Neena Amarashi. Mr. Singh is the deputy consul general of India in Vancouver. He is moving to North Korea as an ambassador for India there. Before coming to Canada, he was the Indian consul general in Herat in Afghanistan. His previous postings were Laos, Nepal, Panama, Finland, Philippines. Neena Amarashi is owner of the IT firm Acrodex. She's from Vancouver. I would like to thank them for coming to the Legislature. They have already risen. I'd ask everybody to give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

head:

### Introduction of Guests

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly several people who are closely associated with Alberta's organ and tissue donation program. They're seated in the members' gallery to remind us all of the importance of talking to our loved ones about organ and tissue donation and the positive difference that it can make.

I would ask our guests to stand when I announce them. First, we have Erik Williams. Erik is the program educator for Capital health's Comprehensive Tissue Centre; Tracey Clare, a donor coordinator with Capital health's human organ procurement and exchange, or HOPE, program. We're also honoured to have with us Stephanie Ostrander. Stephanie is the wife of an organ and tissue donor. Her husband, Greg, tragically passed away in December 2003. Through many conversations with her spouse Stephanie knew that Greg wished to give the gift of life. We also have with us Beth Tchir. Beth is the mother of a cornea recipient and an active public advocate for organ and tissue donation. She has seen first-hand the difference that a donation can make to the life of a loved one. All of our guests are standing. I'd like to thank them publicly and ask the House to give them a traditional warm welcome.

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

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 33 of the very brightest young minds in the entire province. Of course, they reside and attend school in the wonderful constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford, and they are from Duggan school. I'd like them to please rise along with their teachers that are accompanying them today, Mrs. Nancy Adamson Cavanaugh, Ms Bonnie Eliuk, and Mrs. Carlene Wong, and parent volunteer Mr. Greg Randall. They are in the public gallery. If they could please rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour and privilege to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly Ms Jennifer Harris. Jennifer is actually back in Calgary, which is her home turf, after studying for a PhD in speech pathology in Cambridge, England. I would ask Jennifer to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

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

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 61 wonderful students from Mary Hanley school in Edmonton-Mill Woods, who are accompanied by teachers Mr. Steve Bain, Ms Philomena Bruch, and Mrs. Lorraine Williamson and parent helpers Mrs. Cheryl Schneider and Mrs. Susan Stein. I'd like to ask the students and staff to rise and please accept the warm traditional welcome from the Assembly.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of this Assembly guests from the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. We have in the public gallery today seven residents from the Ottewell lodge, which is operated by the Greater Edmonton Foundation. They are accompanied by one staff member and also an individual who is gracious enough to volunteer some of her spare time at the lodge. I would now ask them to please rise. They're in the public gallery. They enjoy politics, and this is their first visit to the Legislative Assembly to observe our proceedings. Welcome.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three introductions today. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Brent Southwell. Brent lives in my constituency of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and has been a member of the plumbers' and pipefitters' local 488 for the past 25 years. Brent was seriously injured on the job and has been unable to work since. Despite his injuries Brent continues to play a role in the upcoming May Week and the Arts on the Avenue workers' art show. Prior to his injury he was a volunteer with the Folk Fest for 10 years and has worked on fundraisers for WIN House, the fund for underprivileged children, and the Youth Emergency Shelter. I would ask that he now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The next person I would like to introduce is Mr. Gil McGowan, and he is the president of the Alberta Federation of Labour. Previous to this he worked as communication staff for the Alberta Federation of Labour and played a key role in the Friends of Medicare campaigns on behalf of public health care in this province. He has been the president of the Alberta Federation of Labour for nearly two years. He's been outstanding in his role as a spokesperson for Alberta labour. He's been on the picket lines and working behind the scenes to settle labour disputes at Telus, the CBC, Finning, the Brooks strike, and the Palace Casino strike, which is ongoing. He provides dynamic, new leadership for Alberta labour. He's taken a strong initiative with respect to the safety of workers in this province. I would ask all members to please give him a warm traditional welcome.

**1:10**

My last introduction, Mr. Speaker, is Angeline Moellmann. Angeline Moellmann is the wife of the late Grant Moellmann, who was a member of local 720 of the ironworkers here in Edmonton. He was killed near the end of his 42-year career in a fall from a bridge that now bears his name. The city of Edmonton has commemorated his life by dedicating the bridge by the coliseum that goes over the LRT and the railways as Grant Moellmann Bridge. His wife, Angeline, has been a strong advocate for workers' safety since her husband's passing. She is always willing to speak out on issues around occupational health and safety. I would ask that she please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Nicholas Ameyaw. He's the co-ordinator consultant for the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. He has been working in this role for over 20 years and has done a fantastic job by having

sessions across the province to educate people and companies about human rights. I would like to ask Nicholas to stand and receive a warm welcome.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Hazel MacLeod and Marion Eggen. Marion Eggen, I'm proud to say, is my mother, and Hazel is my aunt. Both Hazel and Marion are farm girls, originally from the Vermilion area. Hazel is now retired from her long career as a teacher in Alberta, and she is a proud grandmother with five grandchildren. I think they're seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them now to rise, please, and receive this warm traditional welcome.

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

**Mr. Tougas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a delegation from the Professional Association of Residents of Alberta. They are Dr. Kathryn Andrusky, Dr. Trevor Chan, Dr. Milli Gupta, Dr. Kerri Johannson, Dr. Eldon Loh, Dr. Paul Belletrutti, Dr. Jen Williams, Dr. Lanette Prediger, Dr. Jessica Minion, Dr. Mike Kalisiak, Dr. Aisha Mirza, Dr. Hughie Fraser, Dr. Ivan Kropyvnytsky, Dr. Martina Puchyr, and Sarah Thomas. I ask that they please rise to accept the traditional warm greeting of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly Darlene Werkman and Francine Willard. Darlene and Francine along with the Palace Casino strikers have been on the picket line for 234 days, thanks in part to this government's failure to put in place labour laws that are fair to working Albertans. Darlene has been a dealer at the Palace Casino for nearly 16 years and is a proud union member. Francine is a slot attendant and has been working at the Palace Casino for five and a half years. Francine originally hails from Montreal but has lived in Alberta for many years. They are joined today by UFCW local 401 representative Don Crisall. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Strathcona.

**Mr. Lougheed:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to the members assembled Dr. Gary McPherson, who will soon receive the Alberta Order of Excellence. Gary is accompanied today by Hazav Man, who is here from Israel on a 39-month working permit. I would ask that the members assembled recognize them.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, do you have another guest?

**Mr. MacDonald:** No. I've already made my introduction. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Are there others?

**Mr. Shariff:** Mr. Speaker, I had intended to introduce a couple of visitors. Unfortunately, they haven't arrived yet. However, I'll take advantage of the opportunity and inform the members of this Assembly that 63 years ago the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills came into this world and is celebrating his birthday, and today he's seated as the Speaker. Hon. members, please recognize the birthday.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I'll have to check the Standing Orders to see if mentioning the age of a member is permissible.

head: **Ministerial Statements**

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

### **International Day of Mourning for Workers Killed and Injured on the Job**

**Ms Evans:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saturday, April 28, was National Day of Mourning for workers killed on the job. Last year 124 people in Alberta died from job-related injuries or illnesses. The previous year there were 143 who died. While there were significantly fewer deaths than in the previous year, 124 deaths are still too many. One death would be too many.

There are no excuses. Everyone – government, employers, and employees – must do a better job to ensure that Albertans can get to work in full confidence that they will return home safe at day's end. We must educate ourselves and make all Albertans more aware of creating a culture of wellness and safety. We need to help Albertans understand the importance of being our brother's keeper. We must look out for the safety of our fellow workers, providing cautions where appropriate. Finally, we should all accept responsibility to lead societal change and move to a more knowledgeable Alberta attitude about the need for a safer workplace in memory of all those we honour and whom, so sadly, we lost.

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

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to pay tribute to all the workers who lost their lives while pursuing a better life for themselves, their families, and all Albertans. Every day tens of thousands of men and women across the province go to work simply hoping to put food on the table and to contribute to the comfort and prosperity of their families and their fellow citizens. A simple wish, one shared by the vast majority of Albertans. Yet every year too many workdays end tragically in preventable workplace accidents. Not long ago four temporary foreign workers were injured and two were killed on the job in a terrible roof collapse at the oil sands project near Fort MacKay. This dreadful accident has deprived the world of two precious human beings and left behind grieving families, friends, and co-workers.

Compounding this tragedy is the fact that these were not the first nor the last workplace fatalities in Alberta. The price of progress in this province is far too often paid by workers who are often forced by circumstance to work in unsafe environments under unsustainable pressure to do the job faster and more cheaply. With Alberta's economy growing so rapidly, we need to rededicate ourselves to workplace safety. A single life lost is too high a price to pay for a few extra dollars in the public or private purse.

We also must not forget the most vulnerable working population, especially our young people. Parents are concerned when their sons and daughters go north to work in the oil sands sector. Mr. Speaker,

one of my sons joined a crew north of Fort McMurray a few months ago, and with only two days of general safety training and no specific safety training for the job he was to do, I was more than a little concerned. I asked him if his job was dangerous. He laughed and said: Dad, the most dangerous thing I do is drive on highway 63. But that did not make me feel better because included among the 124 deaths in the workplace last year were 33 who were killed on our highways.

Many ceremonies took place last Saturday, April 28, the day of mourning. We remembered workers who died because of accidents in the workplace, also through vehicle accidents, and also those who died because of work-related diseases. The stories told by the children and the spouses of those workers left us who were there listening in tears.

**1:20**

This day of mourning is a time for all of us to remember and to give thanks for the talent, dedication, and simple hard work of Alberta's workers. It is also time for us to pledge our commitment to workplace safety and better working conditions for all workers, including vulnerable workers such as young people, single mothers, recent immigrants, persons with disabilities, and our aboriginal population. We need to pledge better support for injured workers and their families and the families of workers who have died on the job. Their sacrifices have made Alberta what it is today. We must honour those sacrifices by taking action ourselves, action that will reduce workplace injuries and protect the working families of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, unanimous consent is required for the third party to participate.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last year 124 workers and 20 farm workers were killed at work or as a result of their work. On April 28 Albertans took time to remember these workers and to express solidarity with the families, friends, and communities left mourning. Members of this Assembly will perhaps be acutely aware of this problem because of the recent deaths of Genbao Ge and Hongliang Liu and the injury of four of their fellow workers. Twenty-seven other workers have been killed in the workplace in the first two months of this year alone.

The labour movement and the New Democrats have stood shoulder to shoulder in fighting for policies that protect workers. Despite the carnage year after year the Alberta government has not taken meaningful action. The false dogma of voluntary compliance combined with a serious lack of inspections have contributed to the intolerable levels of injury and death on Alberta work sites. Until the provincial government adopts a zero-tolerance policy for unsafe work sites, these injuries and deaths will continue. The cost in lives and the devastating impact this has on families of killed workers is already far too high.

Mr. Speaker, this government's responsibility goes far beyond saying a few good words once a year. Safe workplaces in Alberta can be a reality. All that is needed is the political will to act.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner and the hon. Member for Edmonton-

Manning have also expressed their desire to participate, which requires unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head:

### Members' Statements

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

#### Supportive Living Project in Jasper

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise today to congratulate the municipality of Jasper on the sod-turning event we did on April 16, 2007. This event commemorated the development of new, affordable supportive living units comprised of 16 designated assisted living and 21 lodge units.

This was all made possible by a great partnership between three levels of government: Alberta Seniors and Community Supports with a grant of \$1,766,500, the Aspen regional health authority, Evergreen Foundation, plus the Yellowhead county, the towns of Edson, Hinton, and Grande Cache, and the municipality of Jasper. Another partnership of this project will be with the Seton hospital. Being connected to the Seton hospital, food and laundry services will be shared, and seniors will be able to age in place.

This is a project that the municipality of Jasper has specifically identified as being important to the needs of their citizens. We know that people who move into this new project will have their health and accommodation needs met, and here's the most important part: while being in their community. We all know how important it is for our neighbours to remain close to family and friends, their support network. It is important for their quality of life, and it is important for our community. That's what makes this announcement so special. Thanks to all involved.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

#### Dr. Gary McPherson

**Mr. Lougheed:** Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise and recognize Gary McPherson, one of the latest inductees to the Alberta Order of Excellence. Gary is no stranger to members of this Assembly and is a highly distinguished Albertan. He's being inducted for advancing the status of persons with disabilities and building caring communities.

There's no question that Gary has been instrumental in improving the lives of persons with disabilities in Alberta. He served as chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities for 10 years. Since 1998 he has served as the executive director of the Canadian Centre for Social Entrepreneurship in the faculty of business at the University of Alberta. In Gary's words, the centre works to combine the heart of business with the heart of the community through the creativity of the individual. This is an excellent summation of Gary's vision of the potential for our society.

Gary is called upon frequently as a speaker at conferences and public events. His life experiences allow him to speak authoritatively on issues such as health care delivery, home care, disability and sport, volunteerism, and advocacy.

He has received numerous other awards and recognitions for his work in stronger and inclusive communities. He was inducted into the Edmonton and Alberta Sports Hall of Fame for his contribution to wheelchair basketball. In 1995 the University of Alberta awarded Gary an honorary doctor of laws.

Last year Gary participated as a candidate in the Alberta Progressive Conservative leadership race, and Gary added to the debate by

highlighting quality-of-life issues and undoubtedly added to the process with his quick wit and humour.

Gary is an outstanding Albertan, and his investiture into the Alberta Order of Excellence is well deserved. Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members to join me in congratulating Dr. Gary McPherson.

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

#### Education Week

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April 29 to May 5 is Education Week in Alberta. This is a time we traditionally take to acknowledge the contributions of our teachers, our support staff, and our volunteers to Alberta's world-class learning system. Through collaboration and partnerships Alberta's students, whether public, separate, charter, private, home-schooled, or francophone, are benefiting every day from all that our education system has to offer, including a high-quality curriculum.

On April 22 a publication titled Students First made its way into many Alberta homes. This publication illustrates the collaboration that exists in our education system and the positive impact it is having on our K to 12 students. This year's Education Week theme is Innovative, Inspired: Our Future . . . Our Students! Alberta students benefit from an education system that is progressive and engaging. It embraces new technology as a means to deliver Alberta's world-class curriculum.

All across this province students and teachers are involved in Education Week activities. I would like to direct members of this House to the Alberta Education website, [www.education.gov.ab.ca](http://www.education.gov.ab.ca), where they can read for themselves the many school activities occurring in their constituencies this week.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Albertans to celebrate Education Week from April 29 to May 5 and to recognize the teachers, support staff, volunteers, and stakeholders who are making a tremendous difference in the lives of our students.

Thank you.

**The Clerk:** Oral Question Period.

**Mr. R. Miller:** Mr. Speaker, we have a member's statement on this side.

**The Deputy Speaker:** It's 1:30. We'll get to that after question period.

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you.

head:

#### Oral Question Period

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I work with him as much as I can.

#### Emergency Health Services

**Dr. Taft:** Vince Motta's tragic death in 2002 was the subject of a fatality inquiry that resulted in 25 recommendations by Judge Manfred Delong on how to improve emergency services and prevent premature deaths. But four years later, after this government has ignored numerous warnings and missed many opportunities for improvements, 18-year-old Jordan Johanson died after waiting 12 hours for surgery on a ruptured appendix. My questions are to the

minister of health. In 2003 Judge Delong warned that the health system is in crisis and requires dramatic change, not incremental change, but four years later Calgarians are experiencing a record number of code burgundies and code reds as well as staff and bed shortages. Can the minister explain why so many problems continue to plague Calgary's health system?

1:30

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we need to focus on the fact that there's incredible growth happening. Since the Motta inquiry I can say that \$1.4 billion has been put into expanding capacity in Calgary, and that expansion is happening. There was a thorough review of the findings of the Delong inquiry, and many of the things that were suggested have been undertaken. With respect to the latest incident it's a tragic incident, and the Calgary health authority is looking very closely at what happened and what can be done to prevent that type of thing happening. But it's not fair to say that nothing has happened or that there hasn't been progress. There has been considerable progress in Calgary, and there will be considerably more progress in Calgary.

**Dr. Taft:** Well, that progress isn't showing up in the emergency rooms and in the hospital wards. Since 2000 the average wait time in emergency to see a doctor has increased by 45 minutes, and the number of patients who leave the emergency room without seeing a doctor is up by about 10 per cent. Given that so little progress has been made to improve health services in Calgary – and by many measures it has been getting worse, in fact, Mr. Speaker – how does this minister explain this government's failure to act on all of Judge Delong's recommendations?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, much action has been taken. Again, the capacity is being increased. There is expansion happening at virtually every health facility in Calgary. A tower is being built beside the Foothills and a new floor on the Rockyview, so it has expanded capacity. Indeed, the Health Link, where people can phone in and get advice instead of going to emergency, has done a lot to reduce the strain on emergency, but it continues to grow. More work is yet to be done.

**Dr. Taft:** Mr. Speaker, the public isn't buying that line.

Judge Delong cautioned that unless the Calgary health region makes dramatic improvements, an independent commission should be appointed to conduct a public inquiry – a full public inquiry – into the financing and delivery of emergency health services. To the minister: is it this minister's position that Calgary's health system truly has dramatically improved over the last four years, and if not, why has this government failed to initiate that inquiry?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, all that hon. member and any other member on that side who doesn't understand this needs to do is to take a look at the dramatic increase in services that have been provided to Albertans not just in Calgary but right across the province: dramatic increase in heart surgeries and dramatic increase in MRIs and dramatic increase in services right through the piece. Now, sure, there are still issues to be addressed, and we continue to address them. Capacity issues are being addressed. But to suggest that there has been no progress is patently false.

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

### Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall in addressing concerns of teachers the person who is now the current Premier claimed to have "always bargained in good faith," and he said that he wouldn't "prejudice negotiations" on the teachers' pension unfunded liability "before we've even sat down at the table." Yet this Education minister's fumbling attempt to address the unfunded pension liability undercuts the collective bargaining process and deliberately prejudices negotiations. Teachers across this province are feeling used and abused by this government. To the Minister of Education: why has this minister betrayed the words and promises of his own Premier?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, in the budget announcement of last Thursday the government, on behalf of taxpayers of Alberta, initiated an offer of \$25 million that will go to new teachers in Alberta.

**An Hon. Member:** How much?

**Mr. Liepert:** Twenty-five million dollars. If the hon. member has a problem with that, then say so.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education's recent letter to the Alberta Teachers' Association regarding pensions – the one he mentions there – proves that this government's word actually cannot be trusted. Time and again the Premier promised the teachers' pension issue would not be linked to labour negotiations. For example, I quote the Premier from just four months ago. "I would never use such an emotional matter as a bargaining chip in the heat of a labour dispute." To the Minister of Education: did the Premier give this minister permission to break the Premier's promises to teachers?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, there is no heat of labour negotiations. This is a good-faith offer. It starts September 1, 2007, and goes until August 31, 2008. If the hon. member is taking the position of the Alberta Teachers' Association and not of young teachers in this province, then say so.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, what's easy to say on the campaign trail is proving difficult for this Premier to deliver. The Premier promised a fair and lasting resolution to the unfunded liability in the teachers' pension plan, a problem that will cost tens of billions of dollars if it isn't addressed now. The Premier promised to separate the pension issue from salary negotiations. He promised to listen to teachers. He has broken all those promises. This government is playing politics with education over the pension issue. The Premier said that he wouldn't, but he is. To the Minister of Education: will this minister do the right thing, withdraw his misguided offer, and sit down in good faith with the teachers?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, as part of that announcement we also said that we would be creating a small task force that was going to meet with interested stakeholders to find a long-term resolution to this issue. So, again, I challenge the hon. member: if he wants to deny new teachers and young teachers in this province \$25 million in benefits, then say so.

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

### Temporary Rent Regulation

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the government finally released the report from the all-party Affordable Housing Task Force along with their response to it. Having rejected 38 of the task force's 50 recommendations, the Conservatives are clearly saying: everything is just fine here. Well, everything's not just fine. Among the 38 recommendations they rejected was the one calling for temporary rent regulation to protect Alberta's tenants from rent gouging. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who can't honestly believe that the market will prevent rent gouging – the state of the market is precisely what enables it – why did he and the Premier reject temporary rent regulations today? Do you want people to lose their homes?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, I need to say that in the province of Alberta in 1975 we did have rent controls. This government has learned from history that rent controls do not work. When rent controls were in place, what it did do was suffocate the addition of rental units in the province. We've also looked at different provinces in Canada, and different provinces in Canada have the same feeling that we do: rent controls do not work to adjust or to try to deal with the problems of having more rental units on the market.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not having rent controls doesn't get anything built in this province either. The government did accept the recommendation to limit rent increases to one a year, which is a good idea. But because they did it last Tuesday without also instituting temporary rent regulation, many renters woke up on Wednesday or Thursday or came home from work on Friday to find notices of massive rent hikes. Now, if the government had dotted the i's and crossed the t's – and they sat on the task force report long enough that, Lord knows, they had time – you know, this wouldn't have happened. But, no, they just blurt it out in a news conference, don't announce any retroactivity or even an immediate effective start date, bad landlords exploit the loophole, and now they're backpedaling like crazy. To the President of the Treasury Board and Minister for Service Alberta: did he not realize that this would happen?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, what we did learn on this side is that you learn from the past; you don't live in the past. You have to move forward. There is nothing that you can do in a market that will stabilize rents better than build new housing units. The answer is the balance between renter and landlord. Our legislation that will be introduced will be retroactive to April 24. I'm sure the hon. member would like it to go back to 1952.

1:40

**Mr. Taylor:** Actually, no, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't alive back then. Maybe the member opposite was.

Mr. Speaker, I expect that what will come from the backpedaling is that the Conservatives will try to make the one rent hike per year retroactive and then pretend that they never messed this up. But you wonder whether this is just another example of a rural cabinet that doesn't understand and doesn't really care about what city folk go through. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: will this government admit that their ideology has failed the people of

Alberta again and institute temporary rent regulations? Everybody, even renters from the city, needs a home.

**Mr. Danyluk:** Mr. Speaker, I do want to say that when we look at the challenges of growth pressures in Alberta, those challenges are in large centres, those challenges are in Fort McMurray, and they are also in smaller centres throughout Alberta. So when we looked at the Affordable Housing Task Force recommendations, we looked at them in the holistic sense of Alberta trying to address the growth pressures of all of Alberta.

**The Deputy Speaker:** First third party main question. The leader of the NDP.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government promised openness and transparency, then turned around and created a bad housing policy behind closed doors. The rent policy of this government has a loophole so big you could drive a Mack truck right through it. Limiting rent increases to one per year with no limit on the size of that rent increase is an invitation to the gouging of renters in this province. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Since the minister has rejected the recommendations of his own task force for rent guidelines but will allow one increase per year, will he tell renters how big an increase in rent the government is prepared to allow a landlord to levy? Is it \$250 a month? \$500? \$1,000? \$2,000? Is there a limit, Mr. Minister?

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the recommendation to limit the rent increases to one year is to add some stability to renters to give them some predictability on how often rents could be increased. I need to add, also, that this legislation that is being brought forward will, as the Minister of Service Alberta said, be brought back to the 24th of April, when the announcement was made.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. But that won't help renters. We've seen exactly how the landlords are going to respond to this little bit of bad policy by the particular rent increase for the poor woman, a senior, who got a \$400 rent hike. Now, her landlord, unfortunately, gave her a \$20 rent increase already this year, so he can't do this once you're done with your legislation. But those landlords that haven't given a rent increase this year can give an increase of \$400 or \$500 or \$600 or \$1,000, and there's nothing you're going to do to stop it. Why not?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned previously, rent controls do not work. We have had and seen the history. The hon. member from the third party knows that it doesn't work and also that we need to look to the future to make sure that the workers and the individuals that are being brought into our workforce have some place to live and have some place to rent. We do not need to curtail that growth.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, the minister is fairly new, so I'll give him a bit of break, but I'm going to fill him in a little bit. In the province of Ontario, where they've had rent guidelines for 15 years, the construction of new

rental units exceeds Alberta's dramatically. In fact, it's risen dramatically while the construction of new rental units in Alberta, where there are no guidelines, has dropped dramatically. So will the minister go back and confirm my statement and come back in the House tomorrow and take back his statement that rent guidelines don't work and implement them immediately?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, it's indeed a compliment when the hon. member from the third party suggests that I'm new. But I need to say in regard to the availability: there are more units available in Alberta every day. They may take different forms of rental units, supported units, condos, but we are dealing with the issue of having affordable housing in Alberta.

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

### Municipal Sustainability Initiative Funding

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some problems do take a little while to fix, but some can be done immediately. These are, unfortunately, follow-up questions to two weeks ago, when we needed some urgent action, and none has been taken. The municipal sustainability initiative funding is not working. It's a disaster for municipalities. I asked two weeks ago for the town of Taber. They have tenders out for their water treatment plant. This new funding is not going to address it. My question is to the minister of municipal affairs. Will he sit down and work out something for the town of Taber so that they can go ahead with their water treatment plant? The MSIF is not going to do it.

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the municipal sustainability initiative has funding that was supported for municipalities. That funding is \$400 million.

**An Hon. Member:** How much?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Four hundred million dollars that is distributed to municipalities on a pro-rated basis of the amount of funding that their ratepayers supported to the education tax. So this funding is going back. Will it solve all problems and all big projects? Probably not. Will it help? Yes, it will.

**Mr. Hinman:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't address their problems, and it's not even long term. They don't know whether it's one year, five years, 10 years, and there's nothing sustainable or for sure to plan on. It's not acceptable.

The next problem again goes to the town of Coutts. They had a wall put up in their town two years ago. It only took 28 years for Germany to take down their wall, but this government has failed to address it. They need to take the wall down or put the gate back in to access that town. It's economic disaster for them. They haven't reacted. The hon. Premier said that he would respond and get back to us immediately. It's been two weeks and nothing. So my question would be to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. When is this government going to address the problem in Coutts and open up a gate or take down the wall?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, the minister of municipal affairs wants to respond to this one.

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to say: you know what happens? There's too much mayonnaise, the bologna's too thick, the bread is too dry, and of course the

milk is too warm. But the municipal sustainability initiative has a 10-year window in it, and that window will be for the addition of \$1.4 billion to municipalities. That's \$1.4 billion.

**Mr. Hinman:** Well, that didn't answer Coutts' problem, and I doubt that the government is going to do anything. What the cities are going to get from year to year is for one year, and it's arbitrary. It's not acceptable.

The third one to the Minister of Environment. The Snake River ranch is being cut off. B.C. is going forward, and they are addressing flood control and putting in rip-rap to control the banks before flooding out. This government needs to act. They've failed to act. Are they going to prevent the washout of the bridge and the road, or are they going to let it go by and then spend millions to try and repair it? Will they act for the Snake River ranch?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, I'm not familiar with this specific instance. It hasn't been brought to my attention. I'll be more than happy to look into it and provide the member with an appropriate answer.

**The Deputy Speaker:** First main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

### Safety of Temporary Foreign Workers

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A fatal accident that occurred at the Canadian Natural Resources Limited's Horizon oil sands project last week has raised serious questions about the safety of temporary foreign workers in this province. Currently it is not required that employers inform foreign temporary workers about their legal rights, and restrictive visas that tie workers to a single employer make it very difficult for them to speak out or to refuse unsafe work. My question is for the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Will the minister implement policies to ensure the safety of all workers, or will this incident be just one of many international embarrassments?

1:50

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, may I first say that any time we have an injury or a death on a work site is a sad and tragic day. I feel huge sorrow for the families and have sent a letter expressing to the Chinese government my sincere regrets about the deaths of both workers and the injury of the others.

I think it's unfortunate to make an automatic link relative to their placement on this job site in Alberta. We administer the law, the Employment Standards Code, in Alberta the same way no matter what Albertan, no matter what worker is working on a site. There is an investigation that's taking place. We had four investigators and a manager originally, and they are completely investigating the incident.

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

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Internal documents from CNRL provide detailed safety requirements for the construction of tanks on-site and actually raise concerns that wind in the region could pose an additional risk to worker safety. Albertans need to know if safety requirements were followed. Can the minister tell us when the last on-site inspection of the Horizon project occurred and whether or not basic safety standards were met?

**Ms Evans:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that is the very reason we're doing an investigation. I can neither provide the history of the safety

inspections on that site nor on Horizon's work sites at this time. But at such time as we have a complete investigation, gathering all the facts, then we will release it. There has been misinformation provided. For example, there was a suggestion that fall protection is not mandatory for workers on this type of setting, and fall protection is one of the safety standards. So rather than give any bit of information, we'll wait until the investigation is complete and provide it in a very transparent fashion both to the government itself and also to Albertans.

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

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The temporary foreign worker program is supposedly in place to address the labour shortage, yet letters from federal union officials show that qualified Albertan workers were available to work on the Horizon project. Local workers have the necessary safety training, professional credentials, and union representation to ensure that the work is done safely and efficiently, but the company prefers to employ temporary foreign workers, presumably to cut costs. This is just one example of how the program is being abused. To the same minister: will this government stand up and support Alberta's existing workforce or continue to promote the temporary foreign worker program, which has a growing record of safety concerns?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, in this Assembly I have spoken before on the temporary foreign worker program. It is a federal government program. It is not administered by our government. However, in the labour market opinions that are done before any foreign workers are allowed into the country, there is an analysis that is completed about whether or not there's an availability of Alberta workers to do the job. We believe Albertans should be employed first. All that means is that every Albertan should have an opportunity to work. If a company is able to demonstrate that it was not able to get sufficient workers for a particular job site to do a particular task, then they are successful in receiving an opportunity to bring in temporary foreign workers.

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

#### Electronic Health Records

**Mr. Cao:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lots of public money has been spent on the electronic health information system, but my constituents have been frustrated by having to repeat filling in forms and providing the same information for various health service providers. It seems like there is a lack of information sharing, that causes inefficient health care operation. My question today is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the state of our Alberta health information system?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Health and Wellness is currently on target with the health authorities to meet the goal of having every Albertan on an electronic health record by 2008. We currently have 17,000 health professionals from each corner of the province now registered and trained to use Alberta Netcare. Doctors, nurses, and pharmacists using Netcare in their practice say that the technology is making a real difference in terms of the quality of care that they're able to provide to their patients. Through Netcare our health care providers have health information at the point of care, when they're seeing each patient in their office, clinic,

or in a hospital. In short, we're hoping that those frustrations that the hon. member refers to will soon be over.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the case of my constituent who has been referred by her family doctor to one hospital and a specialist doctor from that hospital referred her to another specialist in another hospital – it resulted in her having to repeat medical tests and being scheduled for surgery at both hospitals. So this has not only caused worry for my constituent but also brings up the question of how our health care's precious resources were used. My question is to the same minister. When can we see something like the personal health care card so patients will not be subject to this inefficient process?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we should be seeing progress even as we speak. The Calgary health region has just brought up a new electronic front end so that tests can be ordered online. The pharmacy information network is up and running, and as I said, we have the goal of having every Albertan on an electronic health record by 2008. That should cover some 75 per cent of lab tests and diagnostics. So it won't at that stage still have everybody on it, but we'll have the level of information sharing that should resolve the type of frustration that the hon. member refers to. More timely patient information leads to better care decisions and better and safer outcomes and a more effective use of the health system, and the purpose of the electronic health record is exactly to reduce that duplication of testing and that extra use of the health care system's time.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's public spending on the health care system has surpassed \$12 billion – that's 36 per cent of every public dollar spent – a cost-efficient improvement of nearly 1 per cent means that \$120 million can be spent on new and better things. So my question is to the same minister. What are you going to do to drive the process of re-engineering our health care operation to make it economical, effective, and efficient for patients and workers?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The electronic health record will be the backbone of the re-engineering of the service delivery process. Much of it is in place. There's more work to be done to make sure that the systems work together. We've got the electronic health record, which, as I said, will be in place by 2008. We've established the physician office system programs, and the new agreement with the AMA will help us further that, so even more physicians' offices, with the ultimate goal of all of them being on the system. We have the new clinical information systems, health technology in the regional health authorities. So innovation of technology and the electronic health record and, particularly, being able to share diagnostic results, being able to share health records among service providers are absolutely critical to re-engineering the system and flattening out the increase in the costs of the health system.

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



### Physician Supply

**Mr. Tougas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government recently, finally, removed the requirement for medical students to pay interest on their student loans while pursuing their residency program. Now, we're glad they did so because we've been advocating such a move for some time. Of course, all this does is defer these payments, and what huge payments they are. This mountain of debt deters potential students and imposes additional stress on an already challenging profession. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Will the minister commit to lowering the cost of medical education in Alberta so that students and later residents do not face such a daunting mountain of debt?

**The Deputy Speaker:** The Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, as we are entering a huge crunch in the development of our province, we have to manage these growth pressures of this huge number of people coming into play. So it isn't one sector of the health workforce that we're going to concentrate our efforts on. We have a co-ordinated strategy that is being developed through three ministries to work on the total gamut of the health workforce strategy and all health care providers.

As it relates to physicians, obviously we have added a number of spaces to the clinical spaces. First-year physician spaces are up to 257 spaces. That's a double-digit increase. We're going to continue to do those sorts of things that help make our postsecondary education system affordable to all classes and all categories of our students and in a co-ordinated, co-operative fashion with the postsecondary institutions.

2:00

**Mr. Tougas:** Well, Mr. Speaker, with so much at stake we need to ensure that our medical students get the best training possible. We can achieve this goal predominantly by the hiring and retention of the very best medical educators. Without excellent teaching, our residents and our undergraduate medical students will not be able to reach their full potential. To the same minister: what, if anything, is the government doing to ensure that the best educators from around the world are coming to Alberta and staying here?

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a very good question. Contrary to, perhaps, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, who believes that I'm a rural cabinet minister with a very narrow view, we do have a very international view in our department and in our government. We are looking at bringing in instructors from all over the world. We are looking at ways and means that we might be able to actually grow those instructors here in Canada. We're looking at ways and means to incent instructors and physicians, I might add, who are going to be required in this training process, to create those spots. That's all part of the health workforce strategy that is coming forward and in some cases being implemented in different spots right now through the three ministries in government.

**Mr. Tougas:** Mr. Speaker, there simply aren't enough doctors in this province to go around. The situation is already serious and destined to get much worse. My final question to the Minister of Health and Wellness. The ministry's business plan calls for 148 extra postgraduate medical seats. Does the minister consider this increase to be sufficient to alleviate this critical shortage?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously we want to work very closely with the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology to make sure that there are spaces available for every Albertan who wants to advance their education. But with respect to the seats that we have, there won't be sufficient seats until we've filled the full capacity that we need. That doesn't just come from expanding places in our universities and making it possible for Albertans to get educated here. It means supporting Albertans who have gone elsewhere to get their education, helping them to come back. It means helping others who want to come here find their places. So it's not a simple, single approach to making sure that we get the doctors and other health care professionals we need but a full health workforce strategy, which the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, and myself are working forward and bringing through the process and which we discussed with stakeholders on April 13 to see whether we are going in the right direction or whether we could take this further.

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

### Organ and Tissue Donation

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week is held every year in April to recognize the importance of organ donations to improve quality of life for many Canadians. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister bring the House up to date on the state of organ and tissue transplantation in Alberta today?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a very strong organ transplant program, but there's a lot more to be done. Three hundred organ transplants were performed in our province in 2006. The University of Alberta hospital is one of the top transplant facilities in North America and performed 244 organ transplants and more than 1,300 tissue transplants last year. Statistics show that the number of Albertans who are organ donors has increased from 31 per million in 2003 to 41.6 donors per million in 2004, the highest rate in Canada and above the national average of 27.7 million. Regrettably, there are still cases where appropriate matches cannot be found in time to save lives. In 2006 40 Albertans died while awaiting transplants. There's more to be done.

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

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. While there's been some good work going on, the wait is still very long for many individuals. Can the minister tell this House what is being done to reduce the number of Albertans waiting to receive organ transplants?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct. The shortage of organs and tissues for transplant is a longstanding national issue. Over 400 Albertans are on waiting lists to receive an organ transplant, with more waiting for tissue that can restore sight, restore mobility, or improve quality of life. There are factors leading to the need for transplants that we cannot prevent, such as genetics and viruses. However, there are many factors that can be prevented, such as high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes,

burns, injury, alcohol and tobacco use, all of which contribute to the need for transplant. Our department is currently working on a number of health promotion activities and initiatives that focus on healthy eating and active living, which will prevent the need for an organ transplant, and we're working on funding for specialized equipment and expansion of programs so that the need to get tissue from sources outside of Alberta is decreased.

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

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. What can Albertans do to increase their awareness and help reduce waiting lists so that more people who are ill can receive this great gift of life?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's something very simple that every Albertan can do. Eighty-one per cent of Canadians have said that they're willing to donate, but only 65 per cent of them advise their families of their wishes. Albertans need to talk to their families about their wish to donate. They should also take the time to sign the universal donor card on the back of their Alberta health care card, as I have done and, I know, everyone of you in this Assembly will have considered doing if you haven't done it already. We need to take personal responsibility very seriously and do what we can to be healthy and prevent injury. We are going to be distributing these green ribbons that I'm wearing. I'd ask members to wear them this week. We've missed organ donor week, but wear them, and have people ask you what you can do, and then tell them: be prepared to donate an organ.

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

#### Royalty Revenues

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Energy tabled this document – it's an extensive review of our royalty structure between 2005 and 2006 – in this House on April 16. After reviewing an uncensored copy of one of the reports within this tabling, it is clear that this government is too embarrassed to share the truth on our royalty rates with Albertans. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why was the chart from the Wood Mackenzie report showing that the Alberta government collects less in royalties than six oil- and gas-producing U.S. states censored from the record of this House?

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

**Mr. Knight:** Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. First of all, we did table the information so that all Albertans have an opportunity to read the information if they feel like they want to read it. There are pieces of information in any report that may be fundamental bits of information that are required for the government's purposes that are not allowed out in public. I'm not embarrassed about any of the information that we have provided. We'll continue to provide the information they require, and we will continue with the royalty review that's being conducted under the auspices of the Minister of Finance.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That certainly was a valiant attempt at an answer.

Again to the same minister: who in cabinet ordered this proof of the government's failure to collect a fair share of royalties to be censored from the public record? Documents were censored from the public record. Why?

**Mr. Knight:** Mr. Speaker, there is nothing in any of those documents that would indicate to anybody that we have not collected a fair share of royalties for Albertans.

I must also add that that was a grand attempt at a question.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Again, Mr. Speaker, the reason why the minister and this government should be embarrassed is because through section 24 in this report you censored the fact that the province of Alberta collects significantly less in royalties than six states in the lower 48 oil- and gas-producing states. You should be ashamed of yourself. Why did you do that? Why did you censor this document?

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

**Mr. Knight:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the situation is this, and I've explained this to the gentleman opposite on other occasions, particularly just last week. You can take a snapshot of a royalty from any place in the world and compare apples to oranges. The royalty structure in the province of Alberta has served Albertans very well for many, many years, and it will continue to do so. Under this government we are building a stronger Alberta, and the royalty review will prove that.

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

#### Climate Change

**Mr. Eggen:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. If the federal plan to reduce climate change emissions can be best characterized as a total fraud, then our much more modest Alberta plan is at least a total fraud times three. Under this government's mismanagement we will suffer climate change emissions at least 44 per cent above 1990 levels in the next three years, yet it would take a premium of just a dollar per barrel and perhaps a little backbone to achieve absolute reductions. We are living on borrowed time, and I for one refuse to visit the dreadful consequences of inaction upon our children. When will the Minister of Environment do the right thing and put in place meaningful absolute reductions to carbon emissions?

**Mr. Renner:** You know, Mr. Speaker, I often wonder why it is that those who have all of the answers to complex questions never have to be accountable for actually implementing them.

The plan that we have in place is a plan that makes sense. It's a plan that will create the environment so that in the medium to longer term we will in fact have absolute reductions. We don't make projections that we don't know we can keep. We make regulations and policy that we know we can implement.

2:10

**Mr. Eggen:** Mr. Speaker, it's perfectly reasonable to make absolute reductions if you have the political will to do so. I refuse to have you saying that. Part of the new federal clean air plan is to impose absolute reductions on noxious air pollutants such as particulates, nitrous oxide, and sulphur dioxide. Again, this government has let the pollution standards in this province slide to the point where we're facing a crisis with respiratory problems and a burden on our health care system. Are we going to sit back, then, and wait for the federal government to salvage air quality in Alberta, or are we going to let the government get ahead of the game for once and put in place provincial measures to realize absolute reductions in toxic air pollution?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, once again, Mr. Speaker, we have a situation where someone is taking something totally out of context and not understanding what he's talking about. The fact of the matter is that in this province we have been regulating the issue regarding pollutants, NOx, and SOx well in advance of anything that the federal government ever contemplated. This legislation, quite frankly, makes more sense to Ontario than it does to Alberta. Alberta's been there, and we'll be ahead of the pack for a long time to come.

**Mr. Eggen:** Mr. Speaker, that's just absolutely, patently not true. The federal air quality plan would allow the trading of pollution credits across this country. This is unacceptable and illogical. Particulate matter, sulphur dioxide, and smog must be dealt with where people are forced to breathe polluted air, like here. Will the Environment minister fight to ensure that we will not allow the trading of dirty air credits so Alberta industry can continue to pollute and affect the health of Albertans while we pay for the clean air in Ontario or Quebec? Are you going to allow the trading, or are we going to deal with it here?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, I think I answered his third question with my second answer, because I indicated to him that we are ahead of the game. We have already been dealing with NOx and SOx. We talked about how we're going to continue to deal with them, and I've also been quite public in the discussions that I've had regarding the need for us to develop a policy around cumulative impact. Mr. Speaker, that policy around cumulative impact is exactly the issue that this member is referring to.

**The Deputy Speaker:** It's nice to see so much energy that has evolved since the week in the constituency, but perhaps we could tone it down a bit before I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

#### Regional Municipal Planning and Development

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sturgeon county is expecting sudden industrial growth within the county partly because of an onset of upgraders and refineries, and recent reports indicate that the county itself will require some \$600 million of infrastructure just to support that growth. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: is it expected that the entire capital region now come up with that \$600 million to service that growth, which must be serviced because, otherwise, it'll detract from investment and diminish quality of life, or will this bill be footed by the province?

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say that the emphasis really needs to be on planning. We need to have the municipalities working together in regard to planning. We as municipalities need to communicate and collaborate and co-operate together in what's best for the region. In the municipal sustainability fund, what does take place is that it promotes and provides municipalities with the initiative to work together towards a common goal so we don't have the duplication, so we don't have planning going into silos or individual stovepipes. So I want to say that as far as the support for the funding that is necessary, we need to look at it on a regional basis.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Well, I'm glad to hear that the minister is a supporter of planning. In that case, can we expect some mechanism

to be in place to support the growth and the management of growth in the region?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, I will say that the growth pressures of Alberta are a major challenge for all municipalities. That is why this government is and has looked at the 10-year sustainability plan that adds some predictability to municipalities so that they know the support that municipalities will get from this government, and right now, Mr. Speaker, it has been said many times: ramped up to \$1.4 billion per year for 10 years.

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

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In that case, can the minister assure Edmontonians and the entire capital region that a decade from now we will not be feeling some of the growing pains that are now felt in Wood Buffalo?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, I think, Mr. Speaker, the key, as was mentioned before, is to have planning so that municipalities can work together and look towards the future to see how they can plan together for the growth pressures and the growth that's going to take place, not only in one municipality but all municipalities on how they can work together to address those growth pressures.

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

#### Major Community Facilities Program

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is more concerned about photo ops than being accountable with taxpayers' money. Although this government hasn't even figured out how to run its current grant programs, that hasn't stopped it from launching another one, the major community facilities program. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture: given that the guidelines for this new program are not yet complete, will this minister inform this House if top Tories will have easier access to the money than hard-working Albertans?

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

**Mr. Goudreau:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, like all of our other programs that are on the Internet and people are aware as to where the money goes, this new program will be the same. We will try to be as equitable as possible to all regions. Certainly, there are dollars that have been identified for the various cities. There are dollars that have been identified for rural Alberta. We're going to try to spread those dollars around right across the province to meet the growing pressures that have been identified across the province.

**Mr. Agnihotri:** To the same minister: why did this government in an election year give its grant department a 66 per cent increase in funding and its Environment department only a 6 per cent increase in funding? Why?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, the members opposite would be the first ones to ask us to respond to increasing pressures. Initially they were asking to spend additional monies in health. They're asking for additional money in education. Now, you know, certainly, they're concerned about the additional monies that we are putting to meet the recreational facilities, the sports facilities, the arts facilities that are desperately needed in the province of Alberta. We're

responding to those increased pressures to meet those particular needs.

**Mr. Agnihotri:** To the same minister: why is this minister taking so long to table the names of the 43 grant recipients that broke CIP rules? If they have the proof, if they have the information, why don't you table right now?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, I am really pleased that the member opposite is environmentally concerned. He's recycling some of the questions that we had a few weeks ago. I indicated that we've got many thousands of applications to go through to be able to pull out those 40 applications that he's alluding to. We are reviewing those, and we are making sure that no mistakes have been made. As I indicated in the past, we don't believe that any mistakes have been made, but we are looking at them.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, we did 78 questions and answers today, a little short. I attribute that to the excessive enthusiasm that we showed today.

head: 2:20

### Members' Statements

(continued)

#### Organ and Tissue Donation

**Mrs. Fritz:** Mr. Speaker, as we heard earlier in question period through our hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, we are paying special tribute this week to national organ donor and tissue donation. I'd like to take this opportunity to further address this very important issue as it touches many of us, our families, our friends, and our loved ones here in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we do have some of the best transplant technology in the world. We have some of the most highly skilled surgeons and some of the most prestigious transplant hospitals, yet there are never enough organs. Did you know that approximately 15 out of every million Canadians are organ donors, putting us as a country in the bottom half of all the countries in the western world where transplants are performed?

Giving the gift of life is a phrase often heard when speaking about organ donation, but the full consequences of what that really means may not be heard. Organ donation is a sensitive subject for family members to discuss, Mr. Speaker. We are reluctant to acknowledge that sudden, tragic deaths occur and could possibly touch our families. If a sudden tragedy does happen, grief can be overwhelming, and the opportunity to discuss organ donation has passed.

Many donor families have shared that the act of donation helps to ease their grief. Nothing can replace the loss of a loved one, Mr. Speaker, but donation often allows family members to feel that something positive has resulted from their tragedy. Organ donation is the ultimate example of sharing one's gifts that will make the difference between life and death for someone else.

So on behalf of my colleagues I urge all Albertans to discuss organ and tissue donation with their families. But more importantly, as our hon. minister said, please sign the organ donation declaration on the back of your Alberta health care card. Don't leave your families to make that hard decision for you in a time of tragedy. Plan ahead, as your gift can save a life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### Provincial Education System

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the first day of

Education Week, a time for all of us to reflect on the importance of education in our lives and how we as public servants can improve the quality of education in our province. We are very fortunate in Alberta to enjoy the talents of some of the most talented and committed teachers, administrators, and support staff in the entire world along with students of remarkable gifts and potential. Put Alberta kids into a learning environment, and you guarantee that Alberta's future prosperity and social growth will lead the world for years to come.

However, the education system in Alberta remains far from ideal. Teachers and the public face millions of dollars in debt thanks to the unfunded pension liability. Parents are paying out of pocket for more and more items that were once considered essential, threatening the education prospects of children of poor and middle-class families.

My private member's bill, the School (Restrictions on Fees and Fund-raising) Amendment Act, 2007, will alleviate some of this pressure on Alberta families. Children in Calgary are forced to wait for hours on end because there aren't enough school buses. Schools are literally falling apart because they've been forced to wait for years for maintenance. How can we expect students to learn when they're facing these very difficult obstacles?

Mr. Speaker, we could and should do much more for education in this province. We should start a publicly funded school enrichment program. We should institute a junior kindergarten program to help children learn during those very critical years. But most importantly we should treat education not as an expense to be tolerated but an investment to be celebrated.

The world we live in faces huge challenges. Challenges can only be met by the most creative and well-educated minds. Mr. Speaker, we need to invest in education today. We need to invest wisely, with a long-term vision for the future of education in this province, with stable, sustainable funding and a commitment to the principles of public education. A quality education for all now and forever: that would sure be a legacy to build for tomorrow's Alberta. It's an ambition we should measure when Education Week returns this year and every year thereafter.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### Provincial Budget

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Budget betrayal. The Premier and his new/old cabinet appointees' honeymoon ended on budget day, Thursday, April 19, 2007. On that day any hopes that Albertans had that the new government would be demonstrably more transparent, more accountable, or more responsive to the needs of Albertans were dashed. With the exception of Edmonton Mayor Mandel, the budget was roundly condemned by many former Conservative supporters for its lack of vision, for its lack of a savings plan, for its patriarchal, red-taped, strings-attached micromanagement of municipal affairs. This was a short-sighted Conservative grasshopper budget of play now, pay later rather than a provincial Liberal ant budget of planning and setting aside for future needs. It appears that the only plan this government has is to worship the market by buying a ticket on its roller-coaster ride of boom and bust.

The greatest disappointment of all for the increasing number of Albertans living a hand-to-mouth existence one paycheque away from the street was the Premier and his municipal affairs minister's rejection of the Affordable Housing Task Force's recommendations of the need to place at least a temporary inflationary cap on rents and consider slowing down the pace of condo conversions. By refusing

to implement any of the main recommendations other than meaningless tinkering which limited unscrupulous landlords to only gouging at whatever rate they wish annually as opposed to every six months, this government proved what many Albertans already knew, that besides having no plan, it is devoid of a social conscience.

Albertans want a government that is inclusive, that listens, that acts on its findings for the benefit of the many, not the profits of the few. Unfortunately, Albertans will have to wait until the next election to select a government with a conscience and a vision.

head: **Notices of Motions**

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to give notice of a Standing Order 42. It states:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly refer Housing First, the report of the Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force, and the government's response to that report to the Growth Pressures policy field committee constituted under temporary Standing Order 52.01(1)(c), with specific directions to consider and report back on the advisability of introducing temporary rent stability guidelines.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

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

**Bill 33  
Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh  
Water Authorization Act**

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 33, the Town of Bashaw and Village of Ferintosh Water Authorization Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will allow the village of Ferintosh a safe, secure, and long-term water supply by building a regional waterline that would transfer water from the town of Bashaw.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a first time]

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 33 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased today to table five copies of a publication titled Students First. This is filled with positive stories about our kindergarten to grade 12 education system. This publication is being distributed across the province and is a small sampling of the collaboration that exists between our education system and has a positive impact on our K to 12 students.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter signed by 224 Albertans.

The letter warns of a looming housing crisis, notes the rapid increase in rental costs, and calls for rent guidelines and rent stability.

Thank you very much.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is the entire uncensored document I referred to in question period today. It is titled Fiscal Terms Report for Alberta Energy, prepared by Wood Mackenzie, May 2, 2006. In here you can see for yourself the Texas/Alberta government take, and this was excluded under section 24 from the document that was tabled by the hon. Minister of Energy on April 16. Also, there is a chart in here on the last page of this report which was excluded under section 24 from the report that was tabled in the Assembly. Again, it's a government take, and it clearly shows that Alberta is getting a lot less in royalties than those states down south.

The second tabling I have today is an internal memorandum to the Auditor General, and it's in regard to the Public Accounts Committee authority to call witnesses. It's most interesting to read.

Thank you.

2:30

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

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I attended the 2007 Alberta film and TV award night. I'm pleased to table five copies of the program and names of those nominated for the awards. I'm sure we all can be very proud of our Alberta film and TV industry.

Thank you.

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

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of notes from a Canadian Natural Resources Limited meeting from February 2006. The meeting notes include detailed safety requirements for the Horizon oil sands project.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

**The Clerk:** I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Education, the responses to written questions 31 and 32, asked for by Mr. Chase on behalf of Mr. Flaherty on August 28, 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Dr. Morton, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, return to orders of the Assembly MR 27, 28, and 29, asked for by Mr. Chase on behalf of Mr. Bonko on August 28, 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Melchin, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, response to Written Question 2, asked for by Mr. Bonko on behalf of Ms Pastoor on April 16, 2007.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, the College of Chiropractors of Alberta radiation health administrative organization annual report for year ended June 30, 2006, and the attached financial statements, College of Chiropractors of Alberta, dated June 30, 2006; Alberta Veterinary Medical Association radiation protection program 2005 annual report with the attached auditor's report on the radiation protection program dated November 11, 2005; the Alberta Dental Association and College 2005 radiation health and safety program annual report, January 1, 2005, to December 31, 2005, with attached financial

statements of the Alberta Dental Association and College radiation administration program dated December 31, 2005; the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta radiation health administrative organization annual report for the period of April 1, 2005, to March 31, 2006; the University of Alberta authorized radiation health administrative organization annual report, 2005-2006; the University of Calgary authorized radiation health administration organization annual report for the period April 1, 2005, to March 31, 2006, with attached financial statements for the years ended March 31, 2006, and 2005; pursuant to the Alberta Economic Development Authority Act the Alberta Economic Development Authority 2005-2006 activity report; pursuant to the Northern Alberta Development Council Act the Northern Alberta Development Council annual report 2005-2006; pursuant to the Regulated Accounting Profession Act the Certified General Accountants Association of Alberta 2006 annual report; pursuant to the Veterinary Profession Act the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association annual report, 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Dr. Oberg, Minister of Finance, responses to written questions 1 and 4, asked for by Mr. Miller on April 16, 2007.

### Motions Under Standing Order 42

**The Deputy Speaker:** We have before us a motion under Standing Order 42 which we'll deal with now. I'll ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to make his arguments on the issue of urgency at this time.

#### Referral of Affordable Housing Task Force Report

Mr. Martin:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly refer Housing First, the report of the Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force, and the government's response to that report to the Managing Growth Pressures policy field committee constituted under temporary Standing Order 52.01(1)(c), with specific directions to consider and report back on the advisability of introducing temporary rent stability guidelines.

**Mr. Martin:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. All members have a copy of this notice, so I won't repeat it. Basically, what the NDP is proposing is that the Assembly refer the report of the housing task force and the government's response to the policy field committee on managing growth pressures.

Mr. Speaker, I would note that the new Standing Order 52.07(1) states that "a Policy Field Committee shall inquire into, consider and report on any matter referred to it by the Assembly." Clearly, this motion is in keeping with the spirit of the House leaders' agreement and the Premier's desire to create all-party committees which will allow vibrant, open debate on important issues of the day.

This is urgent in two senses. The most obvious, of course, is the urgency for renters and for people seeking rental accommodations. Last week it was reported that people received several-hundred-dollar increases to their rent within hours of the housing task force report being made public. It is by sheer luck that the landlord had already imposed a much smaller increase recently, so the larger one has been delayed. However, many other renters will not be in this good position. We have had a flood of phone calls, letters, e-mails from angry and upset constituents. People are being put under significant and unnecessary stress because of the possibility of unreasonable and unaffordable rent increases. This continues to hang over their heads, Mr. Speaker.

However, the House rules require another kind of urgency; namely, that there will be no other opportunity to debate this motion. I would note that the changes being proposed by the government will

be done through regulation, which means that the discussion will once again be behind closed doors, away from *Hansard*, away from opportunities for the public to watch and even participate in the debate. There is no other opportunity to discuss the content of the report. The Committee of Supply does not seem appropriate as this is an issue of regulation and not just expenditure. Also, the new system for Committee of Supply is moving away from all-party participation.

Which brings us back, Mr. Speaker, to the policy field committees. I know that all the caucuses and even the table officers are still trying to get their heads around how these committees will work. I also note that there has not been any indication from the chairs of when these committees will begin to meet. Therefore, a motion under Standing Order 42 seems to be the only way that a private member can at this time get a highly important and urgent issue before one of the committees. There is no other provision for this to happen.

I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that this is not only a matter of some urgency but also a test of how these committees will work. The government itself has created high expectations for how important policy decisions will be made in this province. When the Standing Orders that created the policy field committees were debated, the Government House Leader went on at great length to explain how these committees would be different from the all-Conservative standing policy committees. To quote briefly from *Hansard* at page 611, the Government House Leader was speaking about a problem with the old standing policy committee structure, which 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.

Well, Mr. Speaker, here's the test. When this Assembly created the policy field committees, was it serious about taking important issues there for debate, or did the government members imagine that the committees would be only used for easy apple pie and motherhood issues?

To conclude, then, Mr. Speaker, I hope that we can have unanimous consent to consider this motion. There's no other opportunity for us to thoroughly debate the need for substantial revisions to the government's response to the housing report, and there's no better opportunity for us to test this government's claims to integrity and openness.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head: 2:40 **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

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

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

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

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

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

[Motion carried]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than  
Government Bills and Orders  
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, we shall call the committee to order.

**Bill 203  
Service Dogs Act**

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

**Mr. Lougheed:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and start the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. I'm appreciative of the support the bill has received so far in the discussion in second reading and support, I might add, from both sides of this Assembly.

I would mention a couple of things before we get into the Committee of the Whole, and these are comments that were made during second reading debate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre raised concerns about the clear tests for certifying the service dogs. I'd like to point out that there are very good standards that are set out by the Assistance Dogs International group, and the Western Guide and Assistance Dog Society is currently being accredited to train service dogs. This accreditation is a five-year process where trainers must meet standards related to dog handling, dog selection, and compliance with relevant laws. Since the ADI is an internationally recognized service dog training organization, the regulations that come out of this act will reflect those ADI standards.

Now, the member was also concerned about access to employment, accommodation, and also government services and programs. There's a specific clause dealing with occupancy which parallels the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act, and section 3 protects individuals from discrimination in the workplace and from service providers.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview also raised some concern about the potential of individuals not having ID but actually using a service dog. Certainly, there is going to be a need to consider grandfathering of service dogs that are currently in use but don't have the specific training or the certification. So that will have to be considered and paid attention to as was done with the Blind Persons' Rights Act. Generally speaking, to preserve the integrity of this legislation and the intent of it, individuals will have to have their ID with them at all times. If they lose their ID, there'll be a temporary ID issued; not unlike if one of us loses our driver's licence, we have to end up getting a temporary driver's licence. So a temporary identification card would be issued in those cases.

Now, the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner also raised concerns with respect to allergies, and with respect to guide dogs this has not been a major issue. Accommodations are being made all the time for different situations like this where there may be sensitivity to animals. There could be some additional problems if there was an amendment that did allow public institutions or employers or businesses the right to not serve persons with service dogs or guide dogs with the intent that they say that there are allergies and concerns in that regard.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity and the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East brought up the point about the need for public information and public education to promote the role of service dogs should this bill be passed by this Assembly. That's been discussed.

It's certainly something that's very important both with respect to guide dogs that are currently used and in the future if service dogs are also permitted through the passing of this act in the Assembly. So the ministry, the department, is going to have to take on the role of advising the public more and letting people know about the use of service dogs as well as reminding them about the appropriateness of guide dogs.

So, Mr. Chairman, at this point there are two amendments that I would like to move with respect to Bill 203.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. member, we need to have the amendments at the desk and also circulated to other members. Make sure that the original is brought to the desk. Hon. members, we shall refer to this amendment as amendment A1.

Hon. Member for Strathcona, you may proceed.

**Mr. Lougheed:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Now, these amendments deal with section 1 of the bill. Section 1(a) would be amended by removing the word "physical" in the definition of a disabled person. Section 1(c) will be amended by removing all the words after "regulations." With the amendment section 1(c) would read: "service dog" means a dog trained as a guide for a disabled person and having the qualifications prescribed by the regulations."

The first amendment reflects concerns heard in the Assembly here and also when talking with persons with disabilities. Generally speaking, the amendment clarifies who can have a service dog. We want to be sure to include all persons who have cognitive disabilities or other functional disabilities as well as people who have physical disabilities, and this will clarify that intent. Many individuals ask about the use of service dogs by persons with autism. Some time ago in talking with one individual whose son has autism and uses a service dog, he described the use and the benefit of the service dog to him. So this would help to clarify and not exclude somebody like this young fellow. He was six or seven years old, and the family appreciated the use of the service dog to protect and keep safe this young boy. This will clarify that somebody like this six- or seven-year-old would be able to have a service dog. So we would not have any restrictions that way.

The amendment also addresses concerns raised by the Member for Edmonton-Centre, who commented that 1(a) seemed to be a narrow definition. To those who may be concerned that the definition will be too broad, it's now important to note that the ability to have a service dog is contingent upon the dog being certified through an accredited process, a complicated and difficult and expensive process to go through to get the dog certified. The process of training, of course, is very lengthy, very costly, and it's going to limit the number of individuals who would pursue that route.

2:50

The second amendment strengthens the definition of "service dog." It deletes all the words after "regulations." It allows Bill 203 to be consistent with the approach in the Blind Persons Rights' Act. It simplifies the language of the act and ensures that the certificate process will be described in the regulations, and it broadens the range of people with disabilities who have access to the services and narrows the qualification criteria for the dog.

I believe that the amendment improves the intent of the legislation by giving greater clarity to the definitions of "disabled person" and "service dog" within Bill 203, and I ask for your support on these amendments.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. A little bit of clarification, if you wouldn't mind. Do we not have to address each of the amendments separately and vote on them as such, or can they be dealt with in package format?

**The Deputy Chair:** No. As far as the chair is concerned, this is an amendment that is being dealt with as amendment A1, unless it's the desire of the Assembly to split it into two.

**Mr. Chase:** No, there wasn't a desire. It was strictly for clarification. In that case I'll speak to both amendments.

I very much appreciate the hon. mover of this bill strengthening what was a good bill to begin with by getting rid of any clarification concerns. Sometimes the term "disabled" has a negative connotation to it, but the reality is that the person is not able to carry on as a fully able-bodied individual would be able to do. Recognizing that, people who have disabilities that are not just of a physical nature but more of a mental nature – and I would suggest that autism fits into that category – are covered by increasing the definition. In other words, by adding this amendment, it becomes a more inclusive bill, and that's exactly what we're trying to do: include people with disabilities into our regular society with as few difficulties as possible.

When I spoke earlier of my enthusiasm and support for the bill, I also referred to a young gentleman who I believe was initially prevented from taking his service dog with him to school. If my memory serves me, this young individual was suffering from a degree of autism as well. By clarifying and further defining the notion that disability was not just limited to physical, this is a very forceful and inclusive amendment.

With regard to amendment 2, the definition of a service dog, it removes the statement reading: "or for which an identification card or other certificate has been issued under section 4." Again, when praising the bill formerly, I spoke of the confusion that a disabled student at the University of Calgary went through because of the classification of her service dog, which was basically for carrying the books based on the injuries that she had received.

Now, my belief in the second amendment is that it's broadening the qualifications of a service dog such that specific limitations are no longer applied, that dogs and their various talents are recognized, and the qualifications that are required are more of a general nature. This is the impression I got when formerly speaking to the mover of the amendment, and if that is the case, broadening the qualifications of a dog so that individuals in need are supported, then I very much support the amendment and again congratulate the hon. mover of the bill for his insightful amendments.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'll be brief. I would just like to echo the comments of my colleague from Calgary-Varsity and the hon. Member for Strathcona, particularly in reference to part (a) of amendment A1 where we're taking out the word "physical." I don't think members of this Assembly need to be reminded that not all disabilities are necessarily easily observed by the human eye, whether we're talking autism or we're talking – a great example, actually. I had an impromptu visit from a young lady with a service dog in my constituency office on Friday. This lady is hearing impaired, and the dog has been trained to help her in situations. For instance, it will wake her up when the alarm clock rings in the morning. Or if the doorbell rings, he'll respond in a certain way. If the telephone rings, or if somebody else in the

household calls her by name, the dog is trained to respond in a number of different ways to inform her as to what is taking place audibly, things that she's not able to hear herself. To meet her on the street and, quite frankly, even to talk to her, Mr. Chairman – she does wear a hearing aid as well – you would not necessarily clue in to the fact that she was suffering any sort of a disability at all. Taking the word "physical" out of here I think does make this bill that much more inclusive, and that has my full support.

I just wanted to add those comments as well. Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Edmonton-Mill Woods.

**Mr. Martin:** Well, thank you. Very quickly, Mr. Speaker, this is a good bill, and the amendments certainly make it better. I appreciate the fact that it would be grandfathered in because this takes time. A lot of people would not know how to go about getting identification. We know how bureaucracies sometimes work. I guess the question that I would have – I think the member alluded to if it was lost, that it hopefully could quickly be retrieved. But what does "quickly" mean in this day and age? That could be a real handicap if a person did lose it, and it takes a couple of weeks or three weeks. Pretty well, that would be it for him.

I would hope that this means that the fact that they don't necessarily have identification does not abrogate their rights under this act if it goes through. Because if there was the case where a person didn't have it, through loss or whatever, I doubt that they could get it the next day. Knowing how bureaucracies work, it could be a fair length of time if you lost it. So I would take it that it would be the case that while they're getting identification, they would still have the rights under this act. If the member would mention if that's the case. If not, do we need to do some work in that area?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Once again I'd like to thank the Member for Strathcona for bringing this forward. I really do appreciate the amendments. I think that the intention was to prohibit discriminatory practices towards individuals with disabilities or trainers who are accompanied by a service dog. There was the identification process for service dogs involved in the original act. I see that these amendments will do more for the original intention to bring greater autonomy to individuals with disabilities of any kind and facilitate their social integration by prohibiting discriminatory behaviour against anyone using or training a service dog. So I believe that this bill provides for dogs who work with humans to be able to do their job more effectively without hindrance and helps to eliminate discrimination towards people who are depending on those dogs. Our passing it puts us on a road to a more human society and one that we can be proud of. I'm happy to support it.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Strathcona.

3:00

**Mr. Lougheed:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the comments by the members who spoke just now to the amendment. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity brought up the student in Calgary. It's interesting that about the time we were developing this bill, that issue came forward and really helped to clarify that they can find their rights under the multiculturalism act, and they can find their rights in different ways. But this will help to clarify it and put



forward clearly that this young man wouldn't have had to spend I think it was two weeks at home before he got into school.

There were a couple of other comments. One that I would comment on as well is with respect to the ID card. I appreciate that that would be a huge problem if they didn't have the ID card and something had happened. Currently, I believe the bureaucracy is very quick to react to those circumstances. I've heard of no complaints under the Blind Persons' Rights Act about guide dogs' identification not being replaced quickly. So it's something that's a concern. I must say that there aren't a huge number of these dogs around, and the person that is in charge of the program has been able to react quickly to concerns of that nature. I believe that they would continue to be taken care of in a very quick manner.

So with that comment, I would ask that all members support this amendment and ask for the question on the amendment.

**The Deputy Chair:** Are you ready for the question?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

**The Deputy Chair:** Anybody else on the bill itself? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the clarifications and responses that the hon. mover of the bill brought to each of us who expressed not necessarily reservations but were looking for confirmation. I appreciated the acknowledgement that there will be a great need for education in order for this bill to truly have its effect. My hon. colleague from Calgary-Mountain View frequently speaks of the need for light and heat in order for things to change, to evolve. For this Bill 203 to evolve and come into effectual practice, what is needed is light in the form of education and heat in the form of enforcement.

For the stigma associated with a disability and the stigma associated with dogs, for which many people have a natural fear, a tremendous amount of education is going to have to be provided so that the dog, like the individual who is in need, is accepted by the larger general public.

The second part of the analogy, the light and the heat analogy, is the heat. Those individuals who through ignorance of the law or lack of an inclusive nature for whatever reason have a prejudice will have to be dealt with in a firm but fair manner. We can no longer have restrictions placed on individuals entering public places or going on public transit or for that matter taking a taxi as has been the case previously, which is, I'm sure, one of the motivations for the hon. member to bring forward this great piece of legislation.

So, as I say, in order for this to be acceptable, we need to apply the light, the education, and we need to apply the heat – and that's the enforcement – to make sure that the intention of this bill is carried out in the realm of reality of public life.

Again, thank you very much to the mover of the bill.

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

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise to join the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. During second reading of this bill the Member for Strathcona received a tremendous and unprecedented amount of support from all parties. It was recognized that this sort of legislation is very much needed as it would benefit individuals with disabilities.

Furthermore, Mr. Chairman, thanks to the debate and the sharing of ideas, two amendments to definitions in Bill 203 have been introduced. These are, of course, sections 1(a) and 1(c). These amendments to definitions strengthen the Service Dogs Act by adding clarity to the proposed legislation.

During the second reading debate the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre expressed concern regarding the definition of disabled persons under Bill 203. The member thought the definition was narrow. The Service Dogs Act covers individuals defined in the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act as having any degree of disability except blindness or visual impairment and who are dependent upon a service dog. Also, the amendment to the definition of disabled persons in section 1(a) further increases the spectrum of individuals who can gain from this legislation because it now clarifies that this bill is intended to include people who have cognitive disabilities and other functional disabilities as well as those who have physical disabilities.

Mr. Chairman, section 3 of the act clearly states that discriminatory practices against individuals who use service dogs are absolutely prohibited. The clarity of the legislation will help eliminate any ambiguity the public faced regarding the rights of those with service dogs.

The amendment to section 1(c) will also help Albertans understand that identification cards may only be issued to persons with qualified service dogs.

Section 3(1) states that it is prohibited to deny any person or to discriminate against any person with respect to the accommodation, services, or facilities available in any place to which the public is customarily admitted "for the reason that the person is a disabled person accompanied by a service dog." With this bill there will no longer be any sort of confusion about not allowing someone with a service dog to enter a restaurant, to rent a hotel room, to go to the dentist, to take a flight or bus, or to go to an athletic facility, for example.

Mr. Chairman, section 3(2) states that it would be absolutely restricted to deny any person or to discriminate against any person with respect to any term or condition of occupancy of any self-contained dwelling unit for the reason that the person is a disabled person accompanied by a service dog. Individuals requiring service dogs would clearly be able to rent any apartment or buy a condo which bans dogs.

With regard to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act, as was previously discussed during the bill's second reading, discrimination against individuals with service dogs was prohibited, but the lack of clarity impeded the justice system. Bill 203 provides efficient mechanisms to protect individuals against discrimination committed based on their service dog. If individuals with a disability feel that they have been discriminated against because of their service dogs, they could confidently seek redress through the Service Dogs Act. A clear resolution will be made in a more expedient manner. The decision on the complaint will be made with clear guidelines and standards, and, Mr. Chairman, I believe that is a wonderful thing. As an alternate avenue individuals with grievances could also bring their complaint to the human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism commission.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased with the two amendments of definitions which have been brought forth. They solidify Bill 203 because the Service Dogs Act will allow people with disabilities the right to be accompanied by an accredited service dog everywhere the general public is admitted free from discrimination. I support Bill 203, and I urge all hon. members to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by West Yellowhead.

3:10

**Mr. Herard:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to join the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. Bill 203 is a step forward in the protection of persons with disabilities in Alberta, and I'm very glad to see the support that this bill appears to have from members from all sides of the Assembly.

I was also very pleased to see the amendments that the hon. Member for Strathcona has brought forward that have already been passed here today. I was already very supportive of Bill 203, but those amendments certainly improve the act, and it's very clear that any ambiguities related to persons with disabilities and identification cards have been removed. The amendments reflect the principle of allowing persons with disabilities unfettered access to public services in a manner that is free of discrimination. This is also embodied within section 3 of the act.

Public transportation is critical for many people to get to work, to go shopping, to go to stores, medical appointments, and social events. Public transportation is oftentimes more important to persons with a disability because that is often the only form of transportation they have access to. Amending section 1(a) will have the effect of broadening the number of persons with disabilities that can access public transportation with their service dogs free of discrimination.

People with disabilities in Alberta can already access many forms of transportation. Seventy-nine per cent of Albertans live in municipalities where specialized transportation is available. Fifty thousand Albertans are registered for specialized transportation. For the most part, Albertans with disabilities have the necessary services available for transportation at present, but without the protection under Bill 203 individuals with service dogs could be refused service on a transit bus, for example.

Now, I understand that both Calgary and Edmonton allow service dogs by policy, but having it in legislation I think takes away all of the issues where you might have a municipality, for example, that would not have that policy. In the case of Edmonton and Calgary service dogs are allowed as a matter of operating policy, but it would be much better to have legal protection provided by provincial laws, and that's what this bill does.

Persons with disabilities also use taxi services, and there is no guarantee that taxi companies currently would permit service dogs in their cabs. Unlike bus drivers taxi drivers refuse service dogs in their cabs because of the ID provisions for the guide dogs in the Blind Persons' Rights Act.

The impact of section 3 and the fines associated with the discrimination of users of service dogs will act as a deterrent for transportation providers who do not wish to give rides to persons with disabilities. This is a positive action as persons with disabilities have felt helpless in dealing with their situations. Fines for offences as proposed under Bill 203 will be a deterrent to the discrimination of persons with disabilities. As a result, Bill 203 will protect persons with disabilities. So with this positive piece of legislation I believe that section 3 will help persons with disabilities access transportation services free from discrimination.

I would certainly urge all members to vote in favour of the bill. Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for West-Yellowhead, followed by Calgary-Fort.

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's great to speak in committee on the Service Dogs Act as amended, extending service dogs protections similar to those that the Blind Persons' Rights Act extends to guide dogs. These are important protections for people with disabilities. While this act offers this protection to the person with the disability, it also protects the interests of the general public. Section 1(c) as amended makes it clear that the service dog is a dog that has been specifically trained as a guide for a disabled person and has the qualifications established by regulations by the responsible minister. The minister will not be starting from scratch in developing these regulations.

One organization that has already developed standards for training and conduct of service dogs is Assistance Dogs International. Part of ADI's mission is to "establish and promote standards of excellence in all areas of Assistance Dog acquisition, training and partnership." Members of ADI meet regularly to share ideas, attend seminars, and conduct business, regarding such things as educating the public about service dogs, legal rights of people with disabilities partnered with service dogs, setting standards and established guidelines, the ethics of training of these dogs, and improving the utilization and bonding of each team.

The standards set by ADI are basic guidelines that members must follow, which they are encouraged to excel in. The training standards are high. Many dogs fail training because they do not have the temperament to be good service dogs. These include stipulations that the service dog responds to basic obedience and skill tasks commanded 90 per cent of the time at the first ask in both public and home environments.

Every once in a while there is a news story about a dog attacking a person. The public need not worry about aggressive service dogs. One ethical standard that members of ADI must adhere to is the public right to expect an assistance dog to be under control at all times and that these dogs exhibit no inherent behaviour in public. Section 3(4) of the bill holds that standard, withholding protection for service dog teams if the dog is not well behaved. Service dogs are taught to remain in their handler's control at all times. Service dogs fail the training process if they bite, snap, growl, or are otherwise aggressive or if they bark inappropriately. The regulations of the service dog qualifications in section 1(c) of the act ensure that Albertans with disabilities will benefit from service dog training to the highest standard and assure all Albertans that they should feel comfortable about service dog behaviours.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

**Mr. Cao:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise today to contribute to the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. Through a very positive second reading debate two amendments to the definitions within the legislation have been brought forth to strengthen the bill. The debate was characterized by two common themes among many: members sharing stories of their constituents and friends who stand to benefit from Bill 203 and also members of this Assembly agreeing that the Service Dogs Act should be supported because of the positive impact it will have on people's lives.

One of the main reasons that this act has been so successful in the House is that it seeks to enhance the quality of life of Albertans. When a member presents an opportunity to help other Albertans, we are eager to further that cause by lending support to the member. The first proposed amendment to the definition of disabled person

will further enhance the quality of life for more Albertans, and omitting the word “physical” in section 1(a) will clarify that this bill is intended to include people who have cognitive disabilities and other functional disabilities and physical disabilities.

One of many ways Bill 203 will enhance quality of life for more Albertans with a disability is by breaking down as many barriers to these individuals as possible. Mr. Chairman, unfortunately, one of these barriers is not so much based on disability but, rather, the public’s miseducation about service dogs. Section 3 of the Service Dogs Act will ensure that the rights of Albertans with disabilities who require the assistance of service dogs will be protected. In the objective of increased participation the service dogs play an amazing part in many Albertans’ lives. They allow individuals who have limited access to the physical world to be better able to fully participate in the life of the province.

**3:20**

These animals help individuals with reduced mobility to get to places which would have been tremendously difficult for them without assistance. Not only do these people have better access to various locations with service dogs, but specially trained dogs help individuals with disabilities to be more independent. As has been stated before, these types of dogs help individuals with disabilities to get on a bus, to go grocery shopping, to cross a street, and many, many more occasions and activities. So these dogs will reassure Albertans with disabilities about going out and enjoying the province’s social life because they know the dogs will be able to assist them when needed.

The area of removing the barriers. I must say that while service dogs help Albertans with disabilities gain access to locations and events which other Albertans attend, they are still faced with barriers once they get there. Many Albertans don’t know about service dogs. They don’t realize how much these trained canines help individuals in need of assistance. Furthermore, they don’t know about the rights attached to the service dogs. So by educating Albertans about service dogs, those who use them will be freer to go about their daily life without interruption. They will have more confidence. This public awareness will remove barriers which confront persons with disabilities.

So, Mr. Chairman, the amendment to the definition of service dogs proposed in section 1(c) strengthens possible public perception about service dogs. The second amendment ensures that identification cards may only be issued to persons with service dogs having the required qualifications, so this helps Albertans to know that they are safe around service dogs. This goes well with Alberta government priorities. This government is committed to improving quality of life for all Albertans, and there is no doubt that the Service Dogs Act will accomplish this goal for a segment of our society. Both amendments of definitions will further enhance all Albertans’ quality of life by including more Albertans with disabilities within the scope of the legislation and giving Albertans the assurance that service dogs are highly trained canines, because the Service Dogs Act will help ameliorate the quality of life for those with disabilities.

I wholeheartedly support it by giving support to Bill 203 and urge all members of the Assembly to do the same. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The purpose of Bill 203 is to create a new act to ensure that persons with disabilities have the legal right to be accompanied by an accredited service dog in all areas open to the general public free of discrimination. The new

Service Dogs Act will complement Alberta’s Blind Persons’ Rights Act, which in part legally protects the rights of blind persons with guide dogs. Bill 203 will legally recognize other service dogs and extend to persons with disabilities the same protection afforded under the Blind Persons’ Rights Act.

It clarifies the definition of service dog. It’s a dog that is considered to be used by a person with a disability to avoid hazards or to otherwise compensate for a disability. This includes but is not limited to hearing dogs to assist the deaf or hard of hearing, mobility assistance dogs, and seizure response dogs.

If the Service Dogs Act is passed, this means that all persons with disabilities who require the use of dogs will be protected by the Service Dogs Act and the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act. As such, the rights of persons with disabilities will be bolstered as the Service Dogs Act lays out the necessary recourse for individuals with a service dog in the event that they do face discrimination.

The Alberta Liberals oppose discriminatory practices toward any group and fully support increasing accessibility to Albertans with disabilities. We do require strong, effective disability accessibility legislation that would provide a greater level of independence and an enhanced quality of life. I think that today with these amendments we have made a great step in that direction, and I am pleased to support the bill.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It’s my pleasure to rise today and join the discussion regarding Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. I’m proud that our government is moving forward with this noteworthy piece of legislation as amended. The amendments to sections 1(a) and 1(c) emphasize our continual efforts to assist those who are disabled and stress that our government appreciates the complexities of living with a disability.

An integral part of Bill 203 is that it establishes the consequences for violating the rights that are being given to a person with a disability and their accompanying service dog. Bill 203 outlines a number of fines that could be charged if sections of the act are contravened.

There have been several court decisions that have ruled in favour of people with disabilities. The courts were able to set a precedent based on the legislated rights afforded to a person with a disability. Mr. Chairman, the courts can protect the integrity of the bill, protect society, and protect persons with disabilities.

Bill 203 will provide the legislative foundation to uphold the legal rights of a person with a disability and their accompanying service dog. The amendments to sections 1(a) and (c) clarify that the act applies to persons with any disabilities and establishes the identification criteria of their service dog. This is essential in determining offences and charging fines.

Mr. Chairman, last year I attended a community function with persons with developmental disabilities, their annual banquet. The guest speaker was a lady who is on the Premier’s council, who was coming down and nearly missed the event because she had called for a cab and she was waiting out there for half an hour. A lady came out of her apartment building, and they determined that the cab had actually driven up, took a look, saw the dog, and drove away. So they called another cab, and with her there she managed to make it to the event.

I think section 3 of the Service Dogs Act details the rights of a person with a disability and their accompanying service dog. I think this section of the act defines the following and is why I gave that example, Mr. Chairman. No person shall deny or discriminate

against a person with a disability and accompanying service dog who is seeking accommodation, services, or facilities which are available to the public. An individual cannot deny or discriminate against any person with a disability and their accompanying service dog when they're seeking occupancy of any self-contained dwelling unit. A person with a disability has the right to be accompanied by a service dog, and a certified dog trainer has the right to be accompanied by a dog in training. If a person contravenes section 3, they can pay a fine not exceeding \$3,000.

As detailed in section 6(2), a person can pay a fine not exceeding \$300 if they are guilty of contravening the following: how a person is issued an identification card, that the identification card is evidence that the person and the person's service dog are accredited and therefore afforded certain rights, how the person can amend or cancel the identification card, and if they purport to be a disabled person for the benefits provided by the Service Dog Act.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 203 addresses an important issue for the disabled community, and it covers all the logistics to ensure that the rights established for persons with disabilities and their accompanying dogs are respected and enforced. Bill 203 provides clear, consistent, comprehensive, and enforceable guidelines. This act establishes specific penalties, which will ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities and their accompanying service dogs will be protected.

I applaud the objectives of Bill 203 and am pleased to support the amended act. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

3:30

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by Red Deer-South.

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I will attempt to be brief. There's been an awful lot of discussion by most of the members who've spoken this afternoon about education, and I certainly agree that education is desperately required in this regard and not only for service providers in terms of dealing with service dogs, whether it be, you know, a restaurant owner or a taxi driver or a bus driver or whatever but certainly for members of the general public as well in terms of understanding the need for a service dog and the role that they play.

But there's an aspect to education that hasn't been mentioned yet. Although I'm not sure that it would have been possible to include it in the legislation, I think it's important to be recognized, so I'm going to do that right now. That is the need for everybody, once again whether it be for the service providers or members of the general public, to recognize that these service dogs are not pets but, rather, that they're working partners of the person with the disability.

There's always a temptation, I think, for many of us to approach a dog, a friendly looking dog, and say hello, give it a pet, give it some welcoming, and that is something that we should not be doing when these dogs are working. They're trained to be on the job. They're trained to be responsive to their handler, whether it be a trainer or the person with the disability, and interference like that – and I'm sure it always is very well intentioned – can throw the service dog off its intended duties.

I would just encourage all members of the public but particularly members of this Legislature, since we're responsible for passing this piece of legislation – and I'm assuming that it will pass – to do our very best in terms of helping to educate everybody, whether it be the service providers or members of the general public, that when these dogs are working, they should be left to do their job. When they're no longer working – and the handler will always inform you of the fact that they're now no longer working – my experience has been

that they're very receptive to being approached by people such as ourselves and having interaction with members of the public. But when they're working, they're on the job, and it is not wise and certainly not intended to be a part of their job to be approached and interact with members of the public. So I would just ask that all members of the House bear that in mind when we're discussing this piece of legislation with constituents, and certainly if you find yourself in a situation where a service dog is present, bear that in mind as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

**Mr. Doerksen:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise in Committee of the Whole to support Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act, which has been put forth by the hon. Member for Strathcona. It brings me a tremendous sense of accomplishment to see this Assembly seek to fortify the rights of individuals with disabilities.

I want to just make a couple of positive comments about the sponsor of this bill, the hon. Member for Strathcona, for bringing this forward because he acts in a very responsible and proactive manner not only on issues that he believes are very important but also because he is chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, and he is to be commended for continuing to promote those issues.

I also want to pay special tribute to a constituent, Marlin Styner, who represented the 332,000-strong group of individuals during the leadership campaign, bringing many of these issues to a highlight on a daily basis and certainly at all of the forums we had to make sure that leadership candidates and all Albertans – it wasn't just for the leadership – recognized the issues that they face and some of the barriers that they have that we need to address in this Assembly, and this is just one small part of it.

So those two individuals, Mr. Chairman, I commend highly and have the utmost respect and regard for.

As per the amendment to section 1(a) I am pleased to see that individuals with a disability of any kind could potentially benefit from the use of an approved and certified service dog. In the bill the definition of a disabled person now means an individual who has any disability. The bill would prohibit discriminatory practices against an individual with any degree of disability requiring a service dog.

Section 3(1)(b) would prohibit discrimination "against any person with respect to the accommodation, services or facilities available in any place to which the public is customarily admitted." Mr. Chairman, this is a progressive measure in ensuring that Albertans with disabilities will have the access to opportunities necessary to excel in their communities. A highly specialized service dog is immensely valuable in aiding persons with disabilities in everything from successfully completing daily tasks to being productive members in our diverse society. We are promoting understanding in situations where the role of a service dog is not fully understood. We proudly champion this opportunity and must continue to look forward to opportunities like this to empower individuals with disabilities.

With the Service Dogs Act we are reaffirming our commitment to the fundamental principle that all Albertans can pursue a role in the success of this great province. I feel that this piece of legislation is proactive in the empowerment of persons with disabilities rather than a measure that is reacting to instances of discrimination. Those with service dogs have always been protected by law, but this bill will serve Alberta's disability community well and raise awareness of the opportunities that can be promoted with the use of a service dog.

I encourage all Albertans to join with me in supporting our friends with disabilities who currently have or are considering the use of a service dog. Please offer the consideration needed by both the individual and their dog. Whether this is simply interacting with the owner of a service dog on a bus or, if you are an employer, considering hiring somebody with a service dog, please show compassion and understanding.

I'm confident that the certification process and necessary regulatory measures will address any concerns associated with this bill. I'm pleased to see a bill of this nature progress through the Assembly, and by supporting Bill 203 and its amendments, the Service Dogs Act, hon. members are supporting this government in improving the quality of life for a very hard-working and deserving portion of our society regardless of their form of disability.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, hon. Member for Strathcona.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased also to rise to join the discussion of Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. The hon. Member for Strathcona has invested a lot of time in tabling this legislation, and I'm encouraged by the amount of recognition and support that it is receiving.

The amended bill clearly defines in section 1(a) and section 1(c) that persons with physical and mental disabilities will be afforded the right to be accompanied by service dogs with proper identification cards.

The purpose of Bill 203 is to provide persons with disabilities who need service dogs unrestricted access to public facilities and accommodations. The rights afforded in Bill 203 could not be achieved without an adequate mechanism for identifying a person with a disability and their accompanying service dog.

Bill 203 will be effective because the act provides specific guidelines for identification. The amendment to section 1(c) reduces ambiguity and clearly states that identification cards will be issued only to those persons with disabilities who meet the qualifications as prescribed by the regulations.

Bill 203 has three clauses under section 4 addressing identification. Section 4(1) states that the minister or a person designated by the minister in writing can issue to a disabled person and the person's service dog an identification card. Section 4(2) states that the identification card "is proof, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, that the disabled person and that person's service dog identified in it are qualified for the purposes of this Act." Section 4(3) states that "any person to whom an identification card is issued under subsection (1) shall, on the request of the Minister or the person designated by the Minister, surrender the person's identification card for amendment or cancellation."

3:40

The identification card is certified proof that the person with a disability and their accompanying service dog are granted legal access to all public accommodations and facilities. The establishment of a credible identification system is crucial to the success of Bill 203, and the amendment to section 1(c) will strengthen this integral process.

There are numerous benefits to a certified identification card, and they include the verification of the legitimacy of the cardholder and their accredited service dog. It also reduces confusion regarding the rights of a person with a disability and their accompanying service dog, and it serves as a tangible and efficient mechanism for identification.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, service dogs are a necessity for many individuals who rely on them to carry out day-to-day functions. The Service Dogs Act not only establishes the rights of a person with a disability and their accompanying service dog; it provides a practical means to certify that these individuals are afforded specific rights through a proper identification system. I believe that Bill 203 as amended proposes important rights for persons with disabilities and their accompanying service dogs, and that's why I will also be offering my support to this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, did you want to speak?

**Dr. Brown:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to recognize the hon. Member for Strathcona for bringing forward this bill. The purpose of the Service Dogs Act is certainly complementary to what we already have in the Blind Persons' Rights Act. As it states in the Service Dogs Act, "Nothing in this Act derogates from any right, privilege or obligation of blind persons arising from the Blind Persons' Rights Act or any other law."

Mr. Chairman, this bill certainly will ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities other than sight disabilities will be protected in public areas. Section 1(a) of the bill has been amended to define disabled person to include people who have cognitive and other functional disabilities as well as people who have physical disabilities, and this certainly broadens and strengthens Bill 203.

With regard to accessibility to public areas, Mr. Chairman, this legislation would enable persons with disabilities to be accompanied by an accredited service dog in the public areas free of discrimination. I think the word "accredited" is important there. The term "service dog" as defined in this bill in section 1(c) has been amended to clarify that an identification card would only be issued if a service dog has met the qualifications prescribed in the regulations. That would be a proof that the dog has received the necessary training to earn the title of service dog. This is, obviously, necessary because we certainly don't want situations where there are spurious claims that a dog is a service dog. This would be detrimental to those people who are genuinely in need of a service dog and have them properly trained.

Persons with disabilities who are accompanied by service dogs should be able to access in the same manner as a person not accompanied by a service dog, to enter and use accommodation and conveyances, restaurants and food services facilities, lodging places, or any other place to which the public is invited or has access. The Service Dogs Act is certainly a step towards providing that better access to the social, economic, and educational institutions available throughout our province.

People with disabilities currently have the right to access public areas free of prejudice due to the Human Rights, Citizenship, and Multiculturalism Act, and Bill 203 will certainly assist and complement that act and make it clear that service dogs are also legally able to accompany their owner into those areas free of any discrimination. Persons with disabilities will be able to be accompanied by their service dogs into public areas and will retain the assistance that they do provide during the course of their outing. They are depended upon in a number of situations, including in supporting mobility, in walking, in some instances seizure alert or response, in hearing, in rapid and repetitive movements, and many other functions. This legislation would protect the rights of owners to be accompanied into public areas by their service dogs, of course, and would also allow more reasonable accessibility.

I would like to relate a success story that was passed along to me regarding a service dog by the name of Noah. Noah is the canine partner of a woman who is disabled and who had a very severe and progressive hearing loss. Although she used powerful hearing aids and was a good lip-reader, she also had experienced some difficulties while driving, not being able to hear certain sounds, and if people came to her house to fix the furnace or whatever, they would not be able to be heard by her because she couldn't hear the doorbell. So it's an invisible type of disability.

In the case of Noah she obtained a dog that was temperament tested and intensively trained for nearly eight months. That dog was a border collie, and he worked alongside her as a certified hearing and service dog. Noah now goes to work with his owner. He goes shopping with her, lies on the floor in restaurants, and even accompanies her to the ladies' room. You never know when emergencies could be found in a home or when the fire alarm could sound, and that dog would provide some measure of security in such an instance. Also, with things like tea kettle whistles or the doorbell chime, as I said, the dog is able to assist.

A dog that works for a person with a disability, whether it is a service or guide dog, certainly has to be obedient in public. It has to be well mannered. It has to be quiet and unobtrusive. It can't be barking, loud, and aggressive. So the necessity of training for those dogs is obviously an important part of this bill.

Mr. Chairman, in closing I would say that I do support the amendments to the bill. Section 1(a) broadens the definition of people who have disabilities to include cognitive disabilities. Under section 1(c), in order to be qualified as a service dog, the dog must meet certain qualifications which will be set out in the regulations before it receives an identification card. As I said, the bill, like the Blind Persons' Rights Act, will ensure access to public areas and enable disabled people to be free from discrimination in those areas.

Mr. Chairman, it's certainly my hope that all of the members of the House would support the hon. Member for Strathcona in supporting Bill 203.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to carefully consider legislation like Bill 203, the Service Dogs Act. It goes back to a little family history, where a few of my relatives could have used a bill just like this. It's an important, well-advised act that will have benefits for many Albertans with disabilities.

The amended version of section 1(a) clarifies that this bill is intended to include people who have cognitive and other functional disabilities as well as people who have physical disabilities.

3:50

One group who will benefit from the passage of this legislation is Alberta's students. Every Albertan knows about the importance of education, and we do our best to design our schools so that every person can access them. Section 3(1) of this bill is key to ensuring that persons with disabilities who benefit from the use of service dogs have access to whatever school facilities they need to complete their education. This section bans discrimination "against any person with respect to the accommodation, services or facilities available in any place to which the public is customarily admitted . . . for the reason that the person is a disabled person accompanied by a service dog." Well, no citizen should be denied access to a public place because of a disability.

When school started last September, a student in Calgary was told that he could not bring his trained service dog to class with him.

Because of the public outcry this decision was reversed. Section 3(1) means that this simply will not be an issue in the future. The focus in a school should be on learning, not on the use of a dog to assist with basic, everyday tasks. Section 3(1) formally recognizes that a service dog is one way for a person with a disability to be supported. Until now students with disabilities who have dogs assisting them have generally been fortunate that Albertans are willing to collaborate with them to allow them to learn.

Persons with disabilities have the support of current legislation and the goodwill efforts of Albertans. Because of these efforts postsecondary education is a viable choice for a growing number of Canadians with disabilities. A survey back in 1991 showed that 112,000 postsecondary students, which is 7.4 per cent of all students, have some form of disability. With the amendment to section 1(a) all of these students, not just those with physical disabilities, will benefit from protections in this bill.

Alberta's universities have done their best to assist students with disabilities, including those with guide and service dogs. The University of Alberta, for instance, encourages academically qualified persons with disabilities to seek admission to its programs. Through its specialized support and disabilities services office it provides support to students with disabilities, allowing them to successfully complete their programs. Over the years a number of students have used dogs, including a current student who uses a wheelchair with a service dog. The university welcomes dogs working in an official capacity and directly in the service of people or the university, including therapy dogs, seeing eye dogs, hearing ear dogs, and dogs working with the handicapped. There are no limitations on the use of service dogs, and the university has never heard any concerns. I know that my puppy, MacGyver, has asked on a few occasions if he could get a job just like this.

The University of Calgary also recognizes that all students are entitled to an environment of learning, research, and work that accommodates students with disabilities. The University of Calgary supports students with disabilities through its disability resource centre, not to be outdone by the University of Alberta.

Because of section 3(1) of this bill Alberta's schools and universities will be more accessible and friendly to people with disabilities who could benefit from using a trained service dog. This bill is complementary to the excellent efforts of most of our educational institutions. It clarifies the right of all students who have a disability to use a service dog in a classroom. Under Bill 203, if a student needs a trained service dog to complete their studies, it's clear that they are certainly welcome. Because of the amendment to section 1(c), it will be clear that only service dogs with the qualifications prescribed in the regulations will have an identification card.

I want to again commend the hon. member for bringing forward this bill, and I encourage all members to join us in voting for it.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Deputy Chair:** Are there any others who wish to speak? Hon. Member for Strathcona, you wanted to speak?

**Mr. Lougheed:** I'll just make a couple of comments if I may, Mr. Chairman. The importance of education was mentioned by the Member for Calgary-Varsity, and the Member for Red Deer-South also brought it up again. I'd like to comment a little bit on the education aspect because it's two-sided on this. The public needs to know about these service dogs and seeing eye dogs or guide dogs, as they're called, and know that the owners of these dogs, the people depending on them, have the right of access to taxicabs, hotels, and employment just like anybody else.

The other side was mentioned by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford quite nicely, about the challenges of distraction for the dogs when they are working. When they are working, they are to be paying attention to curbs and cars and other situations and helping the person using the dog, and it's quite commonplace for them to be distracted by somebody who comes up and pets them. We see more and more often a bib that the dog wears saying: please do not pet me; I am a working dog. It's important that people recognize that they are not to be distracted.

As was well mentioned, as soon as the collar or the handle that's used by the owner is off, those dogs are just like other dogs. They're running around, getting into mischief and whatnot, but that's okay because they're no longer a working dog. They're just like any other dog at that point in time. So we have to be careful and watch out that we do not distract those dogs.

A comment was made about the dogs being obedient and unobtrusive. I once had to go on a trip with a lady using a seeing eye dog. Of course, she boarded first, and the dog curled up underneath the seat. This was a fairly long flight, four or five hours as I recall. When the plane was unloaded, the fellow passengers were surprised to note that a working dog was there in the plane. The dog never made a sound, didn't have to go to the bathroom. You wouldn't have known that the dog was there.

When we got out into the baggage area, this dog was completely under control, and somebody's pet wasn't under control. In fact, it came up behind this dog, bit it. That was the second time that had happened. As I understand, some months earlier a similar thing had happened. The dog tended to lose attention and was distracted because of these things that had happened to it.

They have to be protected. They are expensive animals, thousands and thousands of dollars to train them. They're well trained. It takes months to do so. The owners have to work with the dog for a couple of weeks in many cases to become qualified to use the dog. These certificates are not given away lightly and easily.

It was mentioned by the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill that there should be no spurious claims of need of a service dog. There are strict qualifications that are required to enable someone to use a service dog. They're well-trained animals. The owners also receive extensive training and have to work with the dog to become proficient. So it's something that's important to many people. It's important that we recognize on their behalf what we can do to help them get around the community better and take part in society and enjoy the full rights of citizenship that all the rest of us enjoy as every person with a disability seeks to be in that situation.

Mr. Chairman, I thank the members who spoke in support of this bill, and I know that people with disabilities who rely on service dogs ask, along with myself, for your support of Bill 203.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Are you ready for the question?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

[The clauses of Bill 203 as amended 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.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

4:00

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 203.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 203. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Hon. Members:** Concur.

**The Acting Speaker:** Opposed? So ordered.

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

**Bill 205  
Environmental Protection and Enhancement  
(Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007**

[Debate adjourned April 16: Mr. Martin speaking]

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

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to have been given the opportunity to join the discussion on the Environmental Protection (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007, introduced by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. I commend for his attention to the land and the environment in his area. I support Bill 205 because it represents an opportunity to further the government of Alberta's commitment to land stewardship throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, as elected officials we have been entrusted with the responsibility of managing the province's public lands and resources carefully and in the best interest of Albertans. This commitment must be kept as we and future generations benefit culturally and economically from the land. We must ensure that all our resources are handled in such a way that benefits as many social, environmental, and economic aspects as possible. Accordingly, as a responsible and responsive government we must do everything within our power to ensure that every opportunity we have to protect our lands is acted on.

Bill 205 is another means of protecting Alberta's rich and diverse land resources. It seeks to ensure that we consider up-to-date environmental and forest management when dealing with well sites that are no longer in use. Mr. Speaker, I happen to have had a long career in the oil and gas industry, so I know about the wells, drilling, and production reclamation. Among other players the forest and energy industries are concerned that there are no clear directions regarding the reclamation process.

Currently, well site reclamation procedures fall under the 1995 reclamation criteria and regulations enacted in 1993. According to the criteria and regulations when reclaiming abandoned well sites, it is important that the sites be returned to roughly the same state that they were in prior to drilling. This ensures that the impact on the land is as minimal as possible. Returning the site to its original state also maximizes the land's efficiency as it will be able to grow to its fullest potential. By doing this, the environment will also be enhanced for future generations, and the land will have the opportunity to be utilized for a variety of purposes.

The long-term goal for the natural recovery of a well site is the re-establishment of diverse native ecosystems that can sustain multiple uses. The short-term goal is the establishment of compatible species that would provide erosion control to protect the soil. At times there are conflicting ideas regarding the best mode to achieve the balance between the long- and short-term goals. Bill 205 would clarify this ambiguity. While the current criteria and regulations outline how the well sites should be reclaimed and managed, these regulations and criteria are not reviewed or updated on a consistent basis. The regulation and reclamation criteria should reflect the movement and the growth of the dynamic forest and energy industries. Much has changed in these industries since 1995. They each are utilizing advanced technology.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 stipulates that the regulations and criteria be reviewed every three years. Furthermore, any review would ensure that current forest management practices are incorporated into the regulations. Consistent revision of these regulations is important to the environment as it would allow for forest practices and contemporary environmental standards to be used, ensuring that our lands receive the best due care possible. The emerging knowledge that we gain every day should be added to the regulations, and it will ensure that our forests are managed in the most efficient manner possible. The reclamation criteria and regulation would be driven by these advances in knowledge and would therefore be continuously evaluated and improved. The provisions of Bill 205 give us the confidence that all actors are applying the best practices and working together toward a common goal.

Mr. Speaker, in correspondence with values of Albertans, the government of Alberta has long been committed to the philosophy of land stewardship and responsibility. Albertans want an environment which they can gain from both culturally and economically. One way to achieve these two goals is to be as environmentally minded as possible when working with the natural resources sectors. This mentality can be witnessed with the untouched beauty of the Rocky Mountains all the way to the harmony that is created between the wheat fields and the oil wells. Bill 205 allows for coexistence between the social and mental well-being all Albertans receive from the forests and economic gains that they receive from the well sites.

Appreciating that land stewardship is an integral part of responsible government, the government of Alberta, in collaboration with multiple stakeholders, is in the process of completing a land-use framework. The government wants to make sure that the province's resources are used and managed in the best possible way to ensure a balance between Albertans' priorities. In fact, land stewardship is held in such a high regard that the government has outlined the framework as one of its techniques to manage growth pressures in Alberta.

#### 4:10

Through this time of rapid expansion the government is committed to growing the province's economy in the most responsible fashion possible to ensure sustainability and increased quality of life for all Albertans. The framework sets forth a plan for managing the land, resources, and the natural environment. The land-use frame-

work is so important that it requires input from eight ministries to achieve its goal of responsible land use. Bill 205 complements the importance the government places on land use by calling for updated practices to ensure long-term economic stability and quality of life and the best environmental treatment of our lands.

Bill 205, Mr. Speaker, also represents a way to address the conflicts over competing use of land. The forest and the energy industries would be pleased to know that both of their interests are being served while both are able to work with the land.

Mr. Speaker, this bill provides a clear and direct vision for an integrated, sustainable land-use approach that balances economic and environmental concerns for the benefit of all Albertans. Again, Bill 205 is very insightful as it keeps in mind the cycle of land use. It appreciates the original forest before it became occupied by a prosperous oil-generating well. The bill also states that all efforts should be made to bring the forest back to its original state so communities can gain from it socially once again.

Furthermore, regular revision of the reclamation criteria and regulations will make sure all resource values are considered to find the best balance. Carefully managing land use today will protect the health of forests in Alberta and ensure that all sectors gain from responsive governing now and well into the future.

Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege of being one of the members of the group . . . [Mr. Cao's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. I rise to speak in favour of Bill 205. I want to first outline the object of the bill and why I support it. The object or purpose of the bill is to add a provision under section 137 of the EPEA to deal specifically with the review of all regulations and practices for conservation and reclamation in the green area of the province. The first part defines specified land for the sole purpose of this section as being exclusively in the green area of the province.

The second purpose of the bill is to legislate the creation of a committee of seven people who will be tasked with a review of any regulation made governing the practices and criteria for conservation and reclamation of the specified land, that being the green area. This committee will have several objectives, including ensuring that the regulations incorporate best forest management practices for land reclamation as well as providing reporting timelines and public disclosure requirements. As well, there is the provision that the committee – and this is one of the main reasons I'm supporting it – will report to the Legislative Assembly if it is sitting or, if it is not sitting, within 15 days of the next sitting. This is the type of progressive legislation that we, being opposition or enlightened members of the government, have been calling for, the type of transparency and accountability, the sharing with the public what we as government land stewards are doing with our legacy.

When I define myself, I define myself first as a grandfather; my next accomplishment is the years as a teacher, considering what the future will be for both my grandchildren and my students; and thirdly, and not necessarily of any less importance, as a spokesperson, the elected representative for Calgary-Varsity.

One of the practices that I hope this bill will accomplish is the protection, the stewardship, that the former member referred to, of land that makes up approximately 51 per cent of this province. If we do this right, which has not been the case up until now, then we leave the legacy for not only my grandchildren but for generations of children to come, and that's where we have to be focused. We have to be focused on the future.



Currently the practice that I have experienced first-hand as a former campground manager in Cataract Creek was that in terms of the order of importance, multi-use was just a term that was thrown about. The first users or abusers of the wilderness area were the potentials of the extraction groups: the oil and the gas, the open-pit mining, the various nonrenewable resource extractors. The second group that had a whack at the forest, so to speak, was the lumber companies.

The third group that seemed to have priority over humans, fish, and fowl was the free-range cattle, that seemed to be able to go through at any time unopposed because the conservation part that this bill refers to wasn't looked after. In other words, the Texas gates or the cattle guards weren't cleaned out, so the cattle could roam freely, without any interference. My experience and that of a number of campground operators in the Kananaskis, again referring to conservation, was that there was no conservation of the fences that separated the park areas from the industrial areas. In fact, these fences, what few remained, were frequently interfered with by resource extractors, a variety of lumber companies. So the thought that we would turn around what has been past practice of putting humans and recreational usage of these green areas second-last, only one step above the wildlife, the flora and the fauna of these areas – any improvement on this past practice will be very much received.

The other aspect that I see as a possibility through the conservation and preservation is the idea of reclamation, and that of course comes under the reclamation aspects of the bill, Bill 205, in brackets "Conservation and Reclamation." The provincial government spends a tremendous amount of time on resource extraction but does not spend near the amount of time on the reclamation of the land that is left after the nonrenewable resources are extracted, and those nonrenewable resources have unfortunately been extended to forests.

Because of the unsustainable practices of clear-cutting, trying to get any regrowth has been next to impossible in a number of areas. Around, for example, McLean Creek in the Kananaskis you go out into the area and the devastation is such that any kind of replanting efforts have basically failed. Similarly, across from Cataract Creek you'd be hard-pressed to find any indication of green. Although the forest was clear-cut back in bits of 2002 and 2003, there's very little evidence of regrowth. So what I hope would be accomplished through this bill is the requirement and the enforcement that the forestry companies that logged the area in the first place and were not required to log in a conservation manner, to selectively log, will at least be required within a reasonable amount of time to get back to the forest that they've destroyed and promote the regrowth of the forest.

Because this is such a large land base, 51 per cent of our province, the part of that 51 per cent that is left for, so-called, in brackets, parks and protected areas should have the highest level of protection because parks and protected areas in Alberta under provincial legislation and control make up barely 4 per cent of the total land-use area. If we can't even protect that 4 per cent, such as the Cataract Creek, the McLean Creek, the Rumsey ecological area, the Caribou Mountains wildlife provincial park, and so on, if we can't look after that 4 per cent, then what hope do we have of looking after the 51 per cent?

4:20

Last year in this Legislature we debated a bill that sort of went along with the idea of the polluter pays, but what it did was allow the person who screwed up in the resource extraction in the first place to go back in and make amends. So I'm hoping that in terms of the conservation aspects, we would require that the companies, whether they're oil and gas or they're lumber or whether they're cattle

ranchers, would be restricted in the development and the usage of the land in a much greater manner than currently is the case.

We have one outfit going in for oil, gas, coal, whatever, building a series of roads, and then on top of those roads we have the forestry companies going in, and by the time we're through, what used to be a forest now looks more like a checkerboard grid of roads. We obviously have to have the fire breaks, but what happens with the resource in terms of the seismic lines and so on, you'd be hard-pressed to find any areas of Alberta that would qualify as old-growth forest. Add to that the very real and present danger of pine beetles and what the government is proposing as almost a pre-emptive strike, and this concerns me because if we go into areas where there is no indication that pine beetles have been or are likely to come in the next number of years and we simply clear-cut, then we've got problems.

I'll look forward to Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

**Mr. Graydon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to join the discussion on the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007, put forth by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. I support Bill 205 because it gives this Assembly the opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to environmental sustainability and responsible land stewardship.

This piece of legislation supports the promotion of environmental integrity and seeks to ensure that the energy and forest industries are working together towards environmental sustainability. With Bill 205 this Assembly is bringing stakeholders to the table and ensuring that both industries are aware of their responsibilities for their respective resources and, too, the environment. While our government has affirmed its commitment to managing growth pressures, this piece of legislation effectively elaborates on this guiding principle.

By addressing the regulatory schedule of well site reclamation, Bill 205 is supplementing the development of a land-use framework. There are various perspectives to consider when discussing responsible land use. Although it is important that we continue to look out for the economic interests of Albertans with sustainable development of the energy sector, it is equally important that we continue to do a top-quality job in managing the effects that that growth has on our environment.

Bill 205 has the best interests of Alberta's environment at heart. Before thinking of our landscape as simply a supply of resources, we must recognize that our environment is an intrinsically valued asset within the cultural and social framework of this province. We recognize that our lakes, rivers, foothills, and mountains are a special part of the Alberta experience. A diverse and ecologically sound natural environment is a priority for this government and is something that our developmental policies must continuously strive to protect.

We must continue to approach our renewable and nonrenewable resources with a balanced approach. Because of Alberta's fortunate energy resource situation there is no doubt that our economy has and will continue to reap tremendous benefits. Record energy surpluses have meant billions of dollars going into the public purse, dollars that are being managed wisely for the good of all Albertans. Much like our responsibility to manage Alberta's finances as a result of a

booming energy sector, our responsibility to effectively manage the environment is equally as important.

Not only does Bill 205 legitimize environmental common sense; it protects the sustainability of Alberta's roughly 38 million hectares of forest. While this government has committed to developing a comprehensive land-use framework, a legislative measure pertaining to the reclamation of well sites will serve as an effective supplementation to this long-term strategy. Currently the regulatory framework for well site reclamation falls under the purview of criteria developed in the mid-1990s. Just as the development of well sites must adhere to strict environmental codes, it is equally important for those sites to undergo a decommissioning process that is as attentive to the state of the surrounding environment. When those well sites are no longer in use, it is important to take note of the process and question whether it is providing forestry and energy firms with appropriate and timely regulations for their closure and the subsequent reclamation of the land.

**Environmental policy.** Land tenure over timber resources for forestry companies on Crown land is currently established through forestry management agreements, or FMAs. When oil and gas activities are undertaken on those lands, it is up to energy firms to work with their counterparts in the timber industry to ensure that any forestry damage as a result of energy activities is compensated. While the current criteria recognize the importance of returning land to its original state, they tend to lack timely updates in terms of clear-cut specifications that are necessary in the reclamation process. Although the current reclamation process is certainly not risking damage to the environment, we must always be looking for solutions that fulfill our obligation to the well-being of the land.

**Managing growth pressures.** The current unpredictability of the timing of reclamation criteria review is likely exacerbated in an economic climate of tremendous growth in the natural resource sector. The intent of Bill 205 is not to impede sustainable growth but to add a proactive component in the safeguarding of our forest. To achieve a best-case scenario for all parties, we must look at all perspectives. We want to ensure that forestry operations are afforded due diligence to their timber reserves as specified in their FMA, we must also allow energy firms to have access to appropriate well sites, and above all we are most concerned with achieving a best-case and sustainable scenario for the environment. Of course, while reclamation is not an instantaneous process, we want to ensure that the immediate concerns of soil erosion and the long-term goal of full restoration are being considered by all parties. As this province moves forward with continued responsible and sustainable development of our economy, Bill 205 presents us with an excellent opportunity to tackle the challenge of managing growth pressures from an environmental angle.

We will work in partnership. The current relationship between energy firms and forest organizations fully supports a dialogue in the ongoing development of appropriate reforestation targets. There are subtleties in identifying who is in the best position to undertake land reclamation work. Bill 205 will take an important step in outlining the environmental ins and outs required in the reclamation process and identifying a time frame in which these regulations should be reviewed. It also demonstrates that this Assembly is ensuring that all of our industries are moving forward as a team within this fast-paced economy, an economy that is open to implementing new opportunities that promote appropriate land stewardship. Bill 205 ensures that our ambitions in industry are suitably met with progressive measures in environmental sustainability. Bill 205 bolsters an effective partnership and facilitates the development of our land in

conjunction with the values of all Albertans. Albertans recognize the multiple business, social, and environmental values that are attached to the land we all appreciate.

4:30

I encourage all members of this Assembly to offer their support to Bill 205. Not only does it take an important step in ensuring responsible land use, but it embraces a level of co-operation between Alberta's resource industries. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Environment.

**Mr. Renner:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to enter into the debate on Bill 205 and express a few of my observations and comments at this stage, second reading of the bill. First of all, I want to applaud the member for introducing this bill. This member perhaps more than any other member – and I say so with the knowledge that some may take offence, but I think it's obvious to anyone who has worked with this member that he takes issues that he deals with in his constituency and gets to the bottom of the issue. Not only does he get to the bottom of the issue and understand what the issue is, but he does what most people don't do. He always takes it that one step further and not only identifies what the problem is but comes forward with solutions to that problem. So not only are we dealing with this private member's bill, but we've dealt with previous bills that have in a similar manner dealt with solutions, not just identified problems.

As others have indicated, the intent of this bill is to ensure that when well sites are being reclaimed, the necessary environmental and forest management practices are taken into consideration. But, more importantly, what the bill does is ensure that those practices are reviewed on a periodic basis to make sure that not only are they taken into account, but the practices that are put into force around that reclamation are the best available practices that meet the standard of the day. So the bill proposes to bring in a periodic review of regulations and guidelines to ensure that they remain current. It also allows us to ensure that regulations and guidelines include the best available forest and environmental management practices into the future.

A timely review of the reclamation standards with stakeholders at the table is important in a normal process for the business development in Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development staff. This is not something that we don't do on an ongoing basis, but I think that the additional safeguards of having the necessary reminders, let's say, in place to ensure that there is ongoing upgrading and perhaps greening of the program is important.

Although I support the intent of the bill, I believe its objectives are best served through other means than amendments to the act. I indicated that this is practice, but perhaps it could be reinforced in a better way than amendments to the act.

There is a multistakeholder committee, and it includes representatives from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, the Alberta Forest Products Association, and the Surface Rights Federation as well as provincial government ministries. Working collaboratively, members of this group have drafted criteria to improve revegetation and reclamation on forested lands in Alberta, and the criteria set out forest management and forest ecosystem practices through either assisted or natural recovery at the time of reclamation. The new requirements for reclamation in forested areas can be supported and enforced under the existing conservation and reclamation regulation that would be managed by Sustainable Resource Development.

The work of the Reclamation Criteria Advisory Group has proceeded in a positive direction with support from stakeholders in the absence of a legislated mandate under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. As such, I would propose that the outcomes of Bill 205, which are very legitimate outcomes and need to be dealt with, are better dealt with by providing an expiry clause in the conservation and reclamation regulation. This expiry clause would ensure that the regulation remains current and is regularly reviewed to include best forest and environment practices without the necessity of an amendment to the act. Alberta Environment also remains committed to ensuring that the stakeholders are engaged in any future review of the reclamation criteria for forested areas, and they have been drafting improvements to the reclamation criteria of forested areas for some time.

So, again, I thank the member for introducing this important topic to the House. I think that the mere fact that we're having this discussion is productive. I support the intent of Bill 205, but I respectfully offer my comments for consideration by all members.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Bonko:** Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I know that I spoke on this once. I just had another pressing question, though, on this particular bill. With regard to reclamation and those orphaned wells or abandoned wells are we in fact going to still hold the parent company or the company at full cost for reclamation even if it's not really at their well site but, say, if it's two or three miles down where there was, you know, a break in the line or where it's deteriorated and then it starts to leak into the ground? We can detect where it comes into the groundwater or something, but it is part of that original line. We're talking about doing some of the testing at the well sites, but there is a line between the site and the hole. It can be miles in some cases. Is there part of this bill to take into account some of the deteriorating lines that are probably happening out there right now? Currently they wrap the lines with a yellow jacket, and it's all sealed at every particular joint, but if it isn't, is this part of that reclamation that can be accounted for underneath the provisions of this bill?

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

**Dr. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to join in discussion on the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007, introduced by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. I believe that Bill 205 will, in fact, further the government's commitment to land stewardship. We certainly have an obligation to see that all of our resources are handled in such a way that there are multiple benefits and that the environment is maintained.

Now, Bill 205 is general in nature, Mr. Speaker. It specifies that a committee would review the regulations governing conservation and reclamation in Alberta's green zone on a periodic basis. However, one of the main purposes of the bill would be to ensure that Alberta considers up-to-date environmental and forest management procedures when they are dealing with oil and gas well sites that are no longer in use. Currently well site reclamation procedures fall under the 1995 reclamation criteria and certain regulations which were enacted in 1993.

When reclaiming abandoned well sites, it's important to know that the sites should be returned to a state approximating that which was extant prior to their drilling. The long-term goal for natural recovery of a well site is obviously the re-establishment of a plant and animal

community that is consistent with the ecosystem which surrounds the site. The short-term goal is the establishment of compatible plant species that would provide erosion control to protect the soil. Those might be, for example, annual grasses such as cereal crops, but in the longer term the objective would be to introduce grasses, herbs, and woody plants into the area which are native to the area in that they would be found in the larger natural environment and which would support an animal community which would approximate that which was found before the resource was exploited.

4:40

Now, Mr. Speaker, it's important to note that the best practices have changed in the past, and they continue to evolve with respect to these matters of reclamation. For example, in years past we had well sites and pipeline routes and access roads which were seeded with fast growing species of grasses, things like crested wheat and brome grass and herbs such as tame clover. Those grasses and herbs, while they achieved rapid cover and they stopped erosion in the short term, were not native to the area, and those seedings, in fact, could have long-term consequences to the ecosystem in terms of what types of plant succession took place in the area. It was often found that those grasses, particularly species like the ones that I mentioned, brome grass and crested wheat grass, could outcompete the native species in the area, and the result would be invasion of the adjacent areas along the roadways or pipeline routes or well sites. So the resultant plant community would be disturbed, and as I said, the establishment of the intermediate and climax plant communities which were native to that area would be inhibited.

The current criteria in the regulations outlining how well sites should be reclaimed and managed are not reviewed or updated on a consistent basis, and Bill 205 stipulates that the regulations and criteria should be reviewed every five years. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that periodic revision of those regulations would be important to the environment as it would allow for the current forest practices and contemporary reclamation standards to be applied, ensuring that the lands receive the best care possible.

Now, as I mentioned, in the past there have been instances where a lot of nonnative species have been planted to prevent erosion and contain the soil. Nowadays it's possible to harvest seeds from native grasses to a far more efficient extent than it was in the past. That should be the new standard in reclaiming these sites and even in maintaining them in the initial instances when they're disturbed, for example, for a new access road.

Mr. Speaker, the provisions of Bill 205 would certainly give us an increased access to best practices and ensure that those best practices are being applied. The government also, I would note, is in collaboration with a lot of stakeholders right now in the process of working on a land-use framework, and we certainly want to make sure that that framework is of an increasing priority as we struggle to manage the growth pressures in the province of Alberta. Particularly in this time of rapid population growth and rapid pressures on our resource industries I think it's important that the government be committed to, in the most responsible fashion possible, ensuring that there is proper reclamation of these sites.

The land-use framework which, as I mentioned, is in the process of being developed right now will set forth a plan for managing the land, the resources, and the natural environment, and I would suggest that this Bill 205 is complementary to that proposed land-use framework because it does, as I said, call for updated conservation and reclamation practices to make sure that there is long-term stability of the ecosystems in the area of these resources being exploited, that it ensures that the land is treated in the best way possible.

Mr. Speaker, in summary, I think that this bill would contribute to a land-use approach that is of benefit to Albertans. The regular revision of the reclamation criteria and regulations will certainly make sure that the resources are considered in a more balanced approach and that they're kept in harmony with the natural environment that surrounds these sites.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members of the Assembly to join me in supporting Bill 205. As I said, I believe that this is an important step forward in terms of ensuring that the reclamation of resource-exploited sites is done in a much more harmonious way consistent with the land which surrounds it. It's certainly much more compatible with preserving the natural ecosystems, the natural plant and animal communities that we have in the province.

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

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to speak to Bill 205, Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, because the idea of stewardship, or living within our ecological means, is becoming more and more of a concern for the majority of Albertans. We are beginning to recognize that long-term economic prosperity depends on the wise stewardship of our ecological resources.

We all need to change the way we are doing things. Solutions, though, will only be effective if we carry them through with the energy and concern of all Alberta's citizens. Alberta can and should lead the way in helping to define the appropriate roles for individuals, communities, governments, and corporations in environmental conservation. The stewardship principle needs to be adopted in every department of the provincial government, the activities of citizens, and in business enterprise. I think that the Member for West Yellowhead should be applauded for bringing forth this bill, that aims to strengthen legislation around conservation and reclamation, and especially for putting such a review in the public domain. This is a good step towards transparency and accountability.

Our land belongs to all Albertans and future generations. Thus government policy should ensure at all times that industry that operates on our land base returns the land to the state it was prior to resource extraction by using best available practices and technology. As well, similar provisions should be incorporated into the act to deal with oil and gas activities in the white areas of the province. This would allow for the committee to ensure that best practices are used across all sectors to reclaim land after resources have been extracted. I believe that the government should have these types of committees in place to review all codes of practice and legislation that deal with reclamation activities by industry to ensure that best available practices are always used. Albertans value our forests, and any step to ensure best available forest management practices to preserve this resource and develop it responsibly is a positive step.

I suggest that the review committee must include public and independent scientists, that we need fundamental change in the pace and scope of development in Alberta based on a plan, based on good science, and based on meaningful public consultation. However, this is an important bill and should be passed to protect current and future generations.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Stewardship of our natural environment is a task that concerns us all. Our current prosperity is

due in large part to the extraction of resources from our environment. We must protect our environment so that this prosperity may be sustained for the future. It is imperative that we do all that we can to ensure that our activities have a minimal impact on our environment. I am reminded of the ecological Hippocratic oath: first, we do no harm.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is a leader in protecting the environment. We are the only province in Canada with legislation that specifically addresses conservation and reclamation of industrial developments. Land reclamation and soil quality guidelines are some of the most stringent in North America and have strict guidelines for levels of benzene, mercury, lead, and barium in our soil.

4:50

Co-operation and collaboration between government, business, and concerned stakeholder groups are very necessary. Mr. Speaker, Alberta's forests are busy places. They're accessed by more people than any other forests in Canada. We have some form of industrial activity in almost 83 per cent of our forests. The government of Alberta works with stakeholders to effectively manage this activity. Many environmentally conscious companies voluntarily collaborate with us and with each other. Alberta does not simply accept voluntary efforts. Unlike some jurisdictions, Alberta requires that reclamation certificates be issued regardless of landowner/industry agreements. Landowners cannot sign off on reclamation liability when a resource company completes their work.

Well site reclamation and forest management must be handled with the involvement of every stakeholder, Mr. Speaker. The interests of each stakeholder do not always perfectly align with the interests of others. Commitment to communication will produce an understanding that works for all concerned. Everyone can agree that it is in the best interests of all to minimize our ecological impact in the short and long terms.

The government of Alberta has a history of collaborating with industry and stakeholder groups to ensure that well sites are properly reclaimed. The Alberta orphan program is now operating as the Orphan Well Association. Since 1992 this industry-funded initiative has financed the reclamation of wells owned by companies that are unable or unwilling to do so. To date, Mr. Speaker, almost \$64 million has been spent on orphan well abandonment and reclamation work. Albertans benefit in two ways, Mr. Speaker. They are protected from any future liability for orphan wells and know that their natural environment is being well cared for.

Another successful collaboration between government and industry is the Alberta Joint Energy/Utility and Forest Industry Management Committee. Mr. Speaker, this came into existence in 1995 because of a conflict over timber damages between a forestry company and petroleum producers. Since the resolution of this conflict the committee's focus has included the standardization and simplification of interactions between oil and gas and forestry companies working in the same area.

The existence and success of this joint committee emphasize the importance of clarity and consistency in our regulations, Mr. Speaker. Every stakeholder knows their obligations and fulfills them to the same standard. There has been much frustration in the past about the oil and gas industry being held to different reclamation standards than the forestry industry. Mandating a review of the standards for well site reclamation in forested areas every five years places all stakeholders on an even footing. Both the forestry and the oil and gas industries support the principle behind this bill. The Alberta Chamber of Resources has already started an integrated land management project that is reviewing government policies to identify areas where regulations can be streamlined.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 is a direct measure by the government to improve forestry management but will have the indirect effect of encouraging private companies to work together even when government is not involved. The Al-Pac/Gulf Surmount project brought Gulf Canada Resources . . .

**The Deputy Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

### Property Taxes for Seniors

505. Mr. Zwozdesky moved on behalf of Mr. Amery:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish a plan with municipalities to phase out the education portion of property taxes for seniors.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not only pleased to rise on behalf of the hon. member, who unfortunately was called from the Chamber to deal with a family urgency, but also to lend my support to this particular Motion 505. This motion, as members here will know, is designed to encourage our government to work with municipalities in order to phase out the collection of the education portion of property taxes for seniors.

The Alberta seniors community has a strong and proud tradition in our province, as we all know. In fact, as Alberta's founders and as some of our earliest patrons, obviously, seniors today have experienced a great deal of change in Alberta. Under the leadership of a variety of Premiers and through economic ups and downs we have our seniors community to thank for a province that stands so firmly as an economic powerhouse and as a society that is always seeking to better itself.

Alberta's seniors continue to enrich the social fabric and foundation of our great province as our parents, as our grandparents, as our co-workers, our neighbours, and so on. Therefore, it's timely for us to look at ways to ensure that Alberta's seniors are able to make the most of their golden years. In a province that is on such a sound financial footing thanks to some very difficult choices that were made a few years back, we owe it to many of our seniors, to our elders, to look at options that will ease the sometimes difficult financial circumstances that those years can bring.

As hon. members likely know, property taxes have been a source of education funding since Alberta became a province back in 1905. Because of their ability to provide a large and stable revenue source for education, these education property taxes have suitably served to ensure that young Albertans are in a great position to lead Alberta in the same way the previous generations have so capably done. While municipalities are currently in control of their property tax structure and their assessments, the province sets its requirements for collecting property tax revenue for education in terms of amounts deposited into what's called the Alberta school foundation fund, ASFF for short. Once the province has these monies, we are then able to redistribute these funds to school boards around the province for purposes of enhancing our K to 12 education system.

Mr. Speaker, what results is that the Alberta government provides 100 per cent of education funding through the ASFF, which draws both from the education property taxes and from the general revenue fund. Interestingly enough, over time the GRF, the general revenue fund, has provided an increasingly larger and larger portion of our

K to 12 education spending needs. Now, over the past 14 years education property tax rates themselves have either been reduced or frozen and today are about 40 per cent lower – 40 per cent lower – than they were in 1993.

Now, although it's been suggested that the education portion of property taxes be abolished altogether, what is being proposed here in this particular motion is a start that has the twofold potential to help phase out this burdensome tax while also alleviating another tax burden from the shoulders of our seniors. Now, I do understand that education is a shared responsibility, that we all have a vested interest in it, that we all benefit from it as a society, that it's critical to have a stable ongoing funding source for our K to 12 education successes to flourish because far too much depends on it. I understand that. However, there also comes a time when we must look at what a burden this is on some of our seniors.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, eliminating this particular tax for seniors, I'm going to suggest, must be accompanied with a second thought, and that is a source that would see those dollars replaced from some other funding pool. We have surpluses in this province, which we're very thankful for. We have a new surplus allocation policy. We have a budget that can be set in advance. In other words, we can predetermine where and how to offset these dollars should this motion succeed and should the government choose to actually enact that decision.

5:00

Secondly, by eliminating this tax for seniors, it ought not result in some additional burden for the rest of us, so to speak, who would have to otherwise perhaps shore it up. Let's not fall into that trap or that debate either, Mr. Speaker. Why do I say this? I say this because back in the 1980s Alberta seniors as homeowners automatically had the entire provincial education portion of their property taxes paid for by the provincial government. Moreover, Alberta's senior homeowners over the age of 55, regardless of their need, their income, or their assets, were eligible for a property tax reduction benefit.

Now, as the province met fiscal challenges and underwent changes through the 1990s, Alberta's seniors were one of the groups required to work with the province to tackle the debt. I know from having door-knocked on several seniors' doors that they went along with it because there was a specific target in mind, and the target was to get rid of the structural deficit of the province of Alberta and tackle the debt. We did both. We did both. Those obstacles are now out of the way.

In 1994 the Property Tax Reduction Act was repealed upon proclamation when the Seniors Benefit Act came into force, which no longer ensured an education property tax reduction for seniors. Like the many sacrifices that they once made in growing a strong and prosperous Alberta, seniors once again sacrificed for the betterment of our current financial situation. Today with the provincial debt gone, I think it is time to rethink this levy because it is causing unnecessary financial hardships on our lower income seniors. We did it with the elimination of health care premiums for seniors, and we can do it with the gradual phasing out of this tax burden related to education property taxes for seniors.

Mr. Speaker, as our baby boomers continue to age, Alberta is experiencing a very rapid shift in terms of its senior demographic. Presently seniors make up about 10 per cent of Alberta's total population, and by 2031, some short 24 years from now, 1 in 5 Albertans will be a senior citizen. This accounts for a sector of the population that is growing at a faster rate than others in our province. Unfortunately, this distinguished group of individuals, who have

worked so hard to build this province, are amongst a demographic that must not be allowed to find themselves slipping through the cracks.

Almost all seniors do receive some income from government transfer payments. Among them, over 40 per cent of these seniors' total income is composed of government transfers, including old age security, guaranteed income supplements, and other social supports. Additionally, statistics show that seniors spend much more per person on health care while having an income that is approximately \$5,000 lower than the average income amongst Alberta's population in general.

Mr. Speaker, there are other statistics that can be added to this debate, and I'm looking forward to the comments from other members. However, before I close, I want to simply say that seniors, as we know – and I realize that it's not all seniors but seniors in the majority – for the most part are on fixed incomes with relatively few opportunities to augment or to supplement their incomes. They're fixed at the level of dollars flowing into their coffers. However, the costs they are facing in terms of housing and rent and food and other amenities and necessities such as heating costs, electricity costs, rentals, and so on are going up rather dramatically, and the burden on our seniors continues to grow.

In conclusion, we should take a look at what other provinces are doing. I note, for example, that in Manitoba education property taxes have been phased out for residential properties for 2006. Perhaps that's a start here as well. Maybe there should be a different approach taken here where, if we can't phase these out, we can start to reduce them. Perhaps eventually we can see them totally eliminated.

My final statement, Mr. Speaker, is simply to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-East for having brought this issue forward. It is a very significant issue in my riding of Edmonton-Mill Creek. I know that I speak on behalf of thousands of seniors when I say that, please, let's have a long and serious thought about what it is that we can do to help these seniors, but let's not do it at the expense of some other programs. Let's plan for this. Let's work with the municipalities. Let's do a sensible phase-in so that there is no short pot at the end of it for anyone.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to suggest to the hon. member across from me that with his excellent presentation and his dramatic form, it's hard to follow that.

If we can just look at the question of education property tax, which was changed, as he alluded to, in 1994. He suggested, I believe, that it was equitable for all school districts across the province. It's my suggestion that in the urban centres it's certainly not equitable in many ways, and we'll address that in the next few weeks. I think, in my humble opinion, that the manner in which we do the property tax issue right now in this province should be reviewed and studied very carefully to see if it is equitable and it is doing the job. I suggest that it's probably not.

Anyway, I think, generally speaking, our side over here suggests to you that we're happy that there's some way of eliminating the education property tax for seniors, and this proposal tries to address that, especially seniors that are often on a fixed income. As the hon member pointed out, costs are rising, and they can negatively affect a person's financial position. Reducing senior tax could provide some relief, and that's very, very important in St. Albert. The property tax for some seniors with low income is very, very hard for them to cope with.

Let's just take a look at what the province is doing right now. It seems to me that there's a seniors' rebate program. I believe it started in 2005. Seniors can apply for a rebate that offsets the increases to their education property taxes after 2004. The value of this program, as we've got it, is about \$5.7 million, possibly spending as much as \$7 million as estimated in this budget year. This program addresses one of the key arguments against making seniors pay education property taxes. The tax is calculated according to the property value and the value of the assessment of their property.

I think the question of this amendment exempting all seniors from paying the education portion of the property tax exempts seniors who are below the low-income cut-off. I'd urge the government to create a fund to pay the education portion of the property tax for seniors who cannot afford the cost. I think that's a positive thing that they're doing.

British Columbia I think has a very interesting model. B.C. has a program in place to protect seniors and people with disabilities from increases in property tax to their homes. In B.C. they have what is called the property tax deferral program. The purpose of this program is to assist qualified B.C. homeowners to pay their annual property taxes. It is a low-interest loan program. The loan must be fully repaid before the home can be transferred to a new owner or upon the death of the agreement holder. A person who is eligible for this program in British Columbia may defer their property taxes on their principle residence if they are 60 years of age or older, a surviving spouse, a person with a disability as defined by regulation. So this is an alternate program, and I think it has some merit. I don't know if the proposer of this suggested legislation has looked at this.

I think it's also important to say that seniors who have the financial stability to pay for the education requisition probably feel that they are able to pay that. I think there are certain members of our population that are seniors who have the dollars. They are saying that they are willing to pay for the providing of education funding, and there is no problem with that. To be clear, there are seniors who easily have the financial stability to pay for the education requisition. They should not be treated the same as those seniors or disabled who do not have the same financial means to support themselves or their families.

5:10

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

As an example, should a senior living in a million dollar home in the best part of town with an income annually of six figures be eligible for the same elimination or educational property tax phase-out that a senior living on a \$20,000 per year fixed income should pay? I think there has to be something done about this, and I think it's commendable that this has come forth as a way of relieving this.

This motion, while we support it in principle, should be altered to make this distinction clear. The language should be along the lines of establishing a plan with municipalities to phase out the education portion of the property tax for eligible seniors or alternately for seniors on fixed incomes below an established threshold. This would be more accurate to ensure that those who need that financial assistance receive it. As stated earlier, a senior whose bank account has a lot of zeroes behind it probably does not need the same assistance as a senior with a couple of zeroes on their bank balance. Let's make sure that we help those who really need it.

We shouldn't forget people with disabilities on fixed incomes. They should also be eligible for an elimination or reduction of their portion of the education property tax. Let's make sure that they are included for help as well.

Generally speaking, I believe we support this, Mr. Speaker, and we hope that some of the alternatives that we've talked about here will be looked at during the debate. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon with some interest to speak on this Motion 505 dealing with the education property tax portion of people's overall property taxes. You know, this is an issue that has concerned me greatly since before I was elected because I have a high proportion of seniors in my constituency of Edmonton-Calder. This combined with a number of other initiatives and breaks that seniors had enjoyed previous to 1993 really not just created financial burden and hardship for seniors on fixed incomes but also added to this sort of idea that seniors were not being looked after somehow, that taking away the break on the education property tax part of their taxation in combination with some other benefits being lost just made seniors across the province feel as though they weren't being looked after the way that they should.

Seeing this motion coming forward, I'm sure that it's an acknowledgement of the similar observations that I've made over the last few years, that seniors are demanding – and I believe deserve to demand – that they, in fact, have some of these benefits reinstated to them in their senior years because, of course, as previous speakers have put forward, we are fixing our income somehow more stringently by the time we retire, so any break or any benefit certainly does make a bigger difference when you're not earning the same income that you might have when you were in your working years. You know, lots of seniors living healthy and proper lifestyles were seniors who enjoyed these benefits previous to 1993 and still feel betrayed somehow that this was taken away from them in the interest, as the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek suggested, to do their part to balance the budget. Of course, now here we are 13, 14 years later with these massive surpluses, and this has not been reinstated for seniors.

My suggestion is that, certainly, the spirit of this motion is good. It's a step in the right direction, but I would venture to say that all seniors deserve to have the education property tax portion of their overall property tax credited. In fact, you know, it's as though you have an extension of benefits to seniors. We want to maintain the universality of those benefits and not exclude people on some sort of a sliding scale. You know, Mr. Speaker, I've seen the sliding scale operate in many other parts of our taxation and finances of this province. It tends to get ratcheted up when there's a perception that there's money in short supply, and then nothing happens unless lots of people complain about it later on. So by maintaining the universality of the seniors exemption from property tax, I think that we would be doing everyone the best possible benefit, because nothing annoys or makes people feel embarrassed as to go back and have to reapply for things as their income might be going up or down, especially in one's senior years. So often I see seniors with that, sort of, often forgotten virtue of modesty choosing perhaps to not apply for a benefit – besides this, other benefits that we might be able to give them – because they feel that, you know, "Oh, well, I don't want to be a bother" somehow.

That's part of why we create a system of universality when it comes to pensions and with regard to health care. Universality is very, very important. So to suggest that, "Oh, well, you know, perhaps that person's saved a few more shekels, and they should just pay for it themselves," I think that considering we are talking about seniors and their portion of the education property tax that most of them have been paying for most of their adult years as homeowners, I don't see why this can't be a universal extension to all seniors here in the province of Alberta.

We're looking at quite a significant amount of money here, the sum of \$1.4 billion being collected through the education property tax system. This, in fact, accounts for 30 per cent of Education's total revenues. Currently, it seems that we're using \$400 million of this education property tax as somehow a strings-attached funding towards housing and other capital infrastructure concerns for municipalities.

You know, municipalities are requiring this money to be used at their discretion. We have to recognize the integrity of the municipal level of government without attaching these strings, and then certainly I think they have the right to collect and distribute the money through their own coffers, in fact. This whole strings-attached mechanism by which some new municipal funding has been made available here is highly problematic, and certainly we don't need it to happen through this education property tax part of the way that we tax people here in general in the province of Alberta.

This is definitely a polarizing issue I'm seeing developing between municipalities that want and require some extended sources of revenue streams. Certainly, we support the handover of the education property tax to municipalities to use as they see fit. However, considering that seniors have borne the brunt of so many growth-related problems here in the province of Alberta, phasing out the education property tax for them is very good and probably will not have a significant impact in the total amount of taxes being collected through this mechanism.

Certainly, I support the spirit of this motion but with the caveat that we believe that the exemption for seniors should be universal and not put onto a sliding scale.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Bonko:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak on 505. It reads: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to establish a plan with municipalities to phase out the education portion of property taxes for seniors."

Now, it was already mentioned that seniors in some cases are some of our most vulnerable because they're on fixed incomes, and this would certainly help them out. I couldn't agree more. If we really wanted to help them out, it would be specific that if we gave them a break on their health care premiums, that would probably be the most beneficial one for all of them.

The other one is: what's to prevent someone who has a parent that's a senior from transferring them to the title of their property and, say, opt out for the next 24 years? I could have my mom go onto my property, sign on as a senior, and that would allow me to get out of the property tax for the school portion and save me about \$120,000. Then, when I turn 65, it would revert back to me, and I've skipped out on 25 years of payments for property tax for education.

Now, is that being considered as to a sleight of hand or a pocket or a loophole for this particular bill? I can see it being able to happen. Someone just has to think about it, which I already have, and the solution's right there. [interjection] That's right. It's a perfect loophole for thousands of Albertans, so maybe this isn't the one-stripe solution to fit everybody because there are definitely loopholes.

People have to become creative because money is becoming finite, and it's becoming tighter and tighter. You've always got to be one step in a municipality. Edmonton already wants to tax citizens for even selling their houses. This is one of these hare-brained ideas that Mandel has, but that's another one. This is altogether something separate. But that's got to be looked at right

there. If we want to give relief, it should be with health care because this other one has got to be a real slippery slope.

Thank you very much.

5:20

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

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to Motion 505, a motion that's directed at eliminating education property taxes for seniors. This is an important issue, and I believe that the issue is greater than this because we need to have a review of our approach to property taxes in this province.

The reason that we have the education property tax, which is a tax paid by property owners that is directed towards the cost of K to 12 education, is that supposedly the revenue from these taxes is directed towards funding the public and separate school systems. The rationale is that all Albertans benefit from high-quality early education through an improved workforce and provincial economy and are therefore expected to contribute directly to its costs.

The province took over responsibility for the education property tax in 1994. The rationale for this shift included providing for greater equalization of educational resources, irrespective of local and economic conditions. However, that move has eroded local autonomy. Local school boards are elected officials who have very little autonomy. I think this is another area where we need to consider what we're doing with property taxes because I feel that that was a backwards move, and it's still in effect.

The elimination of seniors' property tax is an idea that sounds good at first glance. Seniors have paid their dues to society. They've got rising costs to meet, often on fixed and limited incomes. They're not going to be benefiting from the educational system themselves. Or are they? There's a maybe here that doesn't quite ring true. I'm not simply referring to seniors who go back to school, some in their 80s, to complete university degrees. Even for that select few perhaps their education tax should be written off out of deference to their lifetime contributions. But there's more than dollars and cents and cost recovery at issue here. Education is one of the ways we all participate in society and all benefit, whether we attend an educational institution or draw on the services of someone who does. Education is part of a social consensus, a consensus that is becoming more fragile.

There are other areas of our shared life that we could also divvy up according to who uses and who benefits from them. I'm thinking of health care, for instance. By the user-pay dictum the healthy need not contribute to health care costs or pay medicare premiums. By that token, seniors could be charged more since they are more likely to use the system.

How about the highways and other transportation? Why should those who don't drive pay for roads for those who do drive? Why should those who use public transport have their ride subsidized by those who don't? If we start down this slope, we're making our choices on the same kind of self-interest that Martin Niemöller described in his statement, "first they came for the Communists, but I did nothing, for I was not a Communist; then they came for the trade unionists, and I did nothing because I wasn't one of them" and so on.

Reducing our contribution to society on the basis of self-interest isn't a way to a more streamlined society. It's the beginning of the end of the sense of community and of looking out for each other, and that is a decline of civilization. These proposals for streamlining can be very seductive when they're couched in terms of a group that is deserving, such as seniors. But the consequences of this approach can be very deadly for all, including seniors, as we unravel the social fabric that we do share.

If we want to aid seniors, let's increase the benefits to them that

more than offset the tax in question. Let's not dismantle what they've helped to build up and continue to support symbolically as long as they're with us. It may look like a good idea, and I appreciate the intent, but I believe that we've got to look at universality and at the seniors who aren't property owners. Shouldn't we be helping them all? I think there are better ways to do that. I support the intent of this motion, but I really believe it doesn't do enough.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to speak to Motion 505. As many others have already remarked, no doubt this is a bill with very good, well-meaning intentions, but as most of the members on this side of the House know, when it comes to public policy, the road to hell is paved with good intentions, so we have to look at the results.

Having said that, I did want to say that this is one of those rare occasions when I do happen to agree with a number of the members on the other side here, including the members for Edmonton-Decore, Edmonton-Mill Woods, and also the Member for St. Albert. The Member for Edmonton-Decore has pointed out how a wily scoundrel could use this as a way to beat the system and shirk his public responsibility. The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has pointed out that public education or education in general is a shared responsibility. Today's seniors had their education paid for when they were youth. I see no reason why they shouldn't continue to contribute to education.

I'm particularly concerned about some of the issues of equity and fairness, both between seniors and also between seniors and young families. The Member for St. Albert pointed out that: why should a senior with a six-figure income that lives in a million dollar home have no tax treatment and a senior in a smaller owned property with a small income get the same treatment?

I'm actually even more concerned with the question of equity or fairness, the intergenerational issue. Many of us have children that are just entering the housing market, and particularly in cities like Edmonton and Calgary, where they're paying not \$200,000 but \$300,000 or \$400,000 for their first home with big mortgages, why should a young family with a big mortgage and two or three children be paying property tax when in the house next door a senior couple is not paying any tax? I think that's an equity issue as well.

I have looked at this issue before, and I agree with the hon. Member for St. Albert that British Columbia has come up with the proper solution to this, which is a property tax deferral approach. That allows a senior or senior couple, if they choose, to stay in their home, not to avoid paying their taxes but to have the taxes paid when and if they eventually sell the property. So that preserves the integrity of the tax base. It addresses the issue of intergenerational equity and also the equity between seniors at different income levels.

So for all of those reasons I would encourage all members not to support this motion. The intentions are good, no doubt, but there's a better way to achieve the same end, and I encourage all members to oppose it.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is indeed a remarkable day when the minister of sustainable resources agrees fully with the shadow minister of sustainable resources. This is probably progress.



I agree as well with the intent of the motion, but a bit of a history lesson: the education portion of property tax ceased to fulfill its intent in 1994 after the right to collect the tax was taken away from duly elected school trustees by this patriarchal provincial government. Prior to 1994 those locally elected and responsible for the education in their communities, trustees, used the property tax to have the autonomy, as my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods said, to control 50 per cent of their school budget. They could make the decisions that had the greatest impact at the local level, and unfortunately that right was taken away by the centralized dictates of this province.

5:30

Having said that, I also agree with the Member for Edmonton-Calder. I would rather forgive a wealthy individual if it meant that a less fortunate individual's needs were met, so I do accept the universality of the need for protecting seniors. The education of individuals is what determines our future and our well-being. I'm sure there are a number of seniors who are in that wealthy, fortunate circumstance, and they would continue to fund schools whether or not it was required. They have the wisdom to know that their future is in the hands of the up-and-coming generations, and assuring that they had the highest and best education possible would be in their own best interests.

The motion attempts to give seniors a break. I agree with the idea that after paying taxes for 40 to 45 years for a variety of things, whether it's education or income, et cetera, seniors deserve to be recognized, and those most vulnerable seniors on fixed incomes need the protection. It is in our best interest as a government to protect seniors and keep them in their homes as long as we possibly can as opposed to condemning them to long-term care, which has not been properly supervised or funded by this government and of which a number of seniors are extremely fearful.

This motion directs us to consider removing the education portion of property taxes for seniors. As our sustainable resources minister indicated, while it does have certain flaws, we can fix those flaws by adopting the B.C. model or toughening up the registering of property so that loopholes that would allow a person to change their ownership to that of their parent would not be permitted. I believe scrutiny can occur. I believe we can improve upon this, but the motion directs us in a particular direction, which suggests that seniors get a break.

As I began, I would rather see seniors on fixed incomes receive some support from this government as it finally agreed to with the removal of the health care premiums for those on fixed incomes. This, to me, would be a natural progression. If we properly invest our money today to prepare us for the future, if we show the type of fiscal responsibility as a provincial steward that a number of seniors have demonstrated, then that money will be available. Of course, our Liberal suggestion, our funding for the future, would see us setting aside the types of savings that would guarantee our provincial future and no longer require us to be dependent on nonrenewable energies or on the property tax portion that education represents but doesn't truly receive. The money, unfortunately, just goes into general revenue and gets lost. So if we're going to charge the education portion of taxes, let's give it back to the local officials, the trustees who were elected to carry out their duties, exempt seniors, and let's get on with having a savings plan that reflects the future for the entire province, that takes away this kind of dependency.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Rodney:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak on Motion 505, education property tax elimination for seniors, brought forward on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Motion 505 encourages our government to work with municipalities in phasing out the collection of property taxes from seniors. It's aimed to alleviate this burden on seniors 65 years of age or older by working with municipalities. We all know how exciting that can be, especially the minister responsible. Although the collection of property taxes is under the jurisdiction of municipalities, the province allocates contributions to the Alberta school foundation fund.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to look at some of the pros and cons to Motion 505 and look at a number of stats, which may really excite a number of the members in the House as I see a number of members looking very intently at what I'm about to say, including one senior, who makes up 10 per cent of Alberta's total population. It's anticipated that by 2031 20 per cent of Albertans will be seniors, including a few of us here in the House. That's a demographic that's growing at a faster rate than the rest of Alberta's entire population.

From July 2003 to June 2004 Alberta attracted the second-highest number of senior interprovincial net migrants after British Columbia. That says a lot about how attractive our province is, but it also brings other responsibilities and other problems. Since 1984, Mr. Speaker, more seniors have moved into Alberta from other parts of Canada than have moved out, and according to the 2001 census, 60 per cent of Alberta's seniors lived either in Edmonton or Calgary, a stat that surprised me. I thought we'd have more in rural Alberta. They accounted for 11 per cent of our population in Edmonton and 9 per cent in Calgary. I don't know if that says anything about the Oilers and Flames, Stampeders and the Eskimos or not.

This particular age demographic typically has an average income below the mean and is often reliant on community and financial supports. Those are simply the facts. No editorial comment here. Now, eliminating education property taxes would be measured in eliminating potential hardship for certain seniors who pay property taxes. According to the stats, seniors' average income for the year 2000 was \$26,336, which is approximately \$5,000 lower than the average income for Alberta's general population.

Just a few more stats before I move on to the next facts: approximately 7 per cent of seniors accessed provincial housing programs in 2004, including almost 15,000 seniors in self-contained, subsidized rental accommodations and 9,400 seniors in lodge and cottage programs. Certainly, Motion 505 would help those seniors dependent on government and community supports and fixed incomes. If they are physically able to do so, the ease of financial strain could allow them to stay in their homes longer, which, of course, is a very good thing and solves a lot of other problems.

Although seniors have raised their children and many are watching their grandchildren grow, many seniors have likely spent a lifetime paying education property taxes and have paid their dues, so to speak. It would help a large number of these people, who have contributed to our province for many, many years.

However, Mr. Speaker, while there are all these benefits to Motion 505, there are implications in the motion that raise certain concerns, some of which have been aired already, and here are a few more. The tax revenue collected from municipalities' property assessments are used to meet the local portion of the province's required funding. The revenues collected for distribution to local school boards may be at a loss as a result of this portion not being represented.

5:40

Motion 505 assumes that all seniors are in a lower income bracket, and accordingly there are other demographics that might benefit from the cut in property taxes as well. The decrease in funding for

the Alberta school foundation fund would continue to decrease as more and more baby boomers continue to age. Seniors continue to benefit from a well-funded education system that produces doctors, nurses, carpenters, plumbers: a myriad of people in wonderful professions that do provide services not only to them but all Alberta residents. Alternatively, the loss of funding for basic education is estimated to be \$140 million. It could also escalate into further problems in order to compensate for the loss of those funds.

So, Mr. Speaker, the purpose of Motion 505 should be weighed by its pros and cons, like any other motion, in order to fully understand the complexity of this issue. It's been mentioned that property taxation is a municipal affair, but there is room for the government of Alberta to work with municipalities to address the needs of seniors and school funding. It's an issue that, I believe, requires further discussion than what today's proceedings allow. We need to review in order to arrive at a solution that's beneficial for all parties. I'd like to thank the hon. member for opening discussion on this topic, but since I believe it can't be closed today, I believe that this motion needs to be rejected in favour of something better in, hopefully, a future time that is not too far away.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it does appear to be a historic day because there's an awful lot of agreement on both sides of the House today and on more than one issue. So that's nice to see.

Mr. Speaker, as the Member for Calgary-Lougheed indicated, this is indeed a complex discussion and one, I would argue, whose time has come. [interjections] Glad to see that everybody is now paying attention and hanging on every word.

Certainly, one of the most profound things that I noticed during the last election as I was door-knocking through the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford was the number of residents living in the homes that they built 40 years ago. So clearly, now, these are seniors who, in most cases, have had their families grow up in the community. The families have now left and started families of their own. The seniors, in some instances, may have lost a partner or a spouse, but they're struggling to hang on to their homes. Particularly for those on fixed incomes this is a real challenge.

As the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek mentioned in his introduction of this motion, while some things have been controlled and some relief has been given to seniors from the government, there are so many things that are out of their control, whether it be utilities or the cost of food, transportation, on and on. So some sort of relief in the way of education property tax, I'm sure, would be very much appreciated. We know that they get a little bit right now. I've had several seniors come and show me that the relief they get to this point is often no more than \$10 or \$15 a year. Obviously, that's not making enough of a difference for seniors in terms of trying to keep them in their homes.

So it's a debate that is very relevant, and anything we can do to help our seniors age in place as opposed to forcing them into some sort of alternative housing arrangements I would support completely. But if we're going to have that discussion and that debate, as the Member for Calgary-Lougheed suggested, it's a much bigger debate and probably requires a full review of the entire taxation system as opposed to just looking at this one particular area of it.

One of the things that springs to mind any time we talk about reducing or eliminating education property tax is the whole notion of autonomy or lack thereof that the school boards are dealing with. As we know, they've already seen a severe limit placed on their ability to raise revenues to operate. In fact, in this Assembly last

year we had a motion to completely eliminate the education property tax not just for seniors but for everybody. Again, the question arises: what does that do to the autonomy of those elected officials that have been tasked with running the education system on behalf of the local residents? Certainly, that's a part of this.

The other thing, I suppose, as a shadow minister for Finance, is that any time I look at something like this, even though in principle I support the idea of helping seniors, especially those that are on a fixed income, the question automatically becomes: how much would this cost if we were to extend this particular provision to all seniors who own homes? As the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek indicated, if there is a cost – and obviously there is – then that money has to be made up somewhere. Are we simply going to transfer that extra burden onto the rest of the homeowners? Is the provincial government going to step forward with some sort of a plan to take money from natural resource revenue and direct it to this?

The surplus policy that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek referenced in the budget that was introduced on the 19th is, I would submit, woefully inadequate in terms of saving money. If we're going to count on that surplus policy to fund the provisions that would be encompassed by this motion, Mr. Speaker, then I would submit that that's just not good enough. Although, certainly, the Liberal opposition has been calling for some time for a surplus policy, we've recognized that in this province particularly surpluses are incredibly vulnerable to political manipulation. If that's the way we're going to look at funding, the proposal that's in front of us in this motion, then I wouldn't have any degree of confidence whatsoever that the money would actually be there to fund this. I think we have to look at an entire restructuring of the tax system if we're going to in fact proceed with the ideas that are contemplated in this motion.

Now, I think the Member for St. Albert discussed the model that's used in B.C., and I heard the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development reference it as well. I think that this perhaps is a very reasonable approach to the problem, whereby we would allow seniors to defer their property taxes until such time as they're no longer in that residence. I think, Mr. Speaker, that this is maybe a model that we should look at much more carefully because it would seem to me that it accomplishes a number of things. It certainly would provide immediate relief to those seniors that find it difficult to pay their portion of the education property tax, yet at the same time it would see that the province and, in effect, all residents of the province eventually receive that tax money. It may be deferred for a number of years, but it would eventually flow through. So that's a model that certainly attracts my attention and, I would submit, something that we should perhaps look at a little more carefully.

I know as well that my colleague from St. Albert talked at length about not just seniors but others that are on a fixed income and whether or not we should in fact be extending the provisions that this motion contemplates to others that are also unable to cope with rising education property taxes and give them that same relief so that we can keep them in their residences as well.

5:50

The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods I thought raised a very valid point when she was talking about if you're going to look at sort of a user-pay model and if we're going to discuss in broad terms the fact that seniors are for the most part no longer using the education system, then why should they pay for it? Then she raised examples. What about those of us who don't use the public transit system? Why should we be paying into that? You get into that whole discussion as to what is good for the society as a whole and how much commitment and responsibility do we as individual taxpayers

have to take for that, Mr. Speaker. I think, again, that what it does is illustrate that this discussion that we're having today – although there's very good reason to extend the proposals that we're talking about to seniors, I don't think you can do it without having the larger discussion in the broader context, and that is a complete review of the entire taxation system and a broader discussion as to how and why we collect taxes and where we wish to collect taxes from and so forth. There certainly isn't time during today's debate for that. In fact, I think that probably there are only a few minutes left, and we've only had a handful of speakers with the opportunity to even discuss it today.

So I'm going to take my seat and allow one more speaker to get a few words in before we run out of time today. As I say, although I certainly respect the intent of this motion and applaud the member for bringing it forward, I don't think this is really the time or the place to approve it given the lack of discussion that has taken place today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to give a few opening comments on Motion 505. I agree with it in principle. If I can just sort of talk basically on the aspect of national parks, and I'll sort of focus in on Jasper national park, the aspect there with homes. The first thing is that you have a set area where you can build, and you're only allowed to build a certain amount of homes, so of course the assessment value is way high, and then you're taxed on the school portion.

The other area that hits a lot of the seniors is the right to reside. You know, when we're looking at seniors in that area, we need them there because they're the knowledge and do a lot of our volunteer work, so it would be kind of nice to be able to give them a bit of a break.

Another reason is that you have co-operative housing in the municipality of Jasper. You've got some low-income people that are there. They buy into a co-operative unit, and of course they're not allowed to sell it for any more than they paid for it other than an inflation value, but what really gets them is the education tax because it's on assessment value.

I mean, we did some portions of this for the aspect of seniors in the year 2004, that the taxes couldn't be any higher and that they could claim for them, but I still believe that we have to look at something because I get a lot of complaints. When we go back to 1994 – and I always don't look backwards. Seniors feel that they've done their part. They don't mind paying for their grandchildren's education, but when they're paying for their great-grandchildren's education, they feel that that's a little too much.

So I just feel that we should develop a balance. I know that we're going to have to review this. I know that we've reviewed it a lot, but the big thing is with the national parks. I think there's something that has to be done there to make sure that the seniors can reside there. I mean, we've worked hard with other municipalities in West Yellowhead now, as I stated earlier today, to move forward and get some other types of housing for them.

**The Acting Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, but under Standing Order 8(4), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-East to close debate on Motion 505.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am well aware that there are many seniors who can afford to pay taxes such as this particular one we are debating, and I know that from personal experience again, door-knocking in my own area. However, I am equally acutely aware that there are many who simply cannot. However, to be fair to them all, I don't see any way of really further categorizing the two groups, those who can afford versus those who cannot. Hence, I'm supporting this particular motion from that standpoint.

Just a couple of closing comments, Mr. Speaker. First of all, thank you to all the members who participated on both sides of the discussion. We should be reminded that according to the 2001 federal census, 60 per cent of Alberta's seniors lived in that year in either Edmonton or Calgary. In fact, 81 per cent of seniors overall are located in our urban areas throughout Alberta, not just in Edmonton and Calgary. According to the trends available as seniors continue to age, the numbers that live in urban areas will also increase. Now, as the seniors population in Alberta continues to climb, so too are our property values climbing. In fact, they are skyrocketing in various places. Property taxes are following suit.

Although seniors are by no means the only group facing financial challenges due to high costs of living and in maintaining their properties and so on, many of them are certainly at risk of financial hardship. We here as legislators and lawmakers are always looking for unique and relevant measures to manage growth pressures and to improve the quality of life for all Albertans, including our seniors. Here today we have an opportunity to do exactly that for a very special group of individuals, individuals who helped build this province and in so doing contributed enormously to the prosperity we enjoy today.

By eliminating this portion of property taxes for seniors through the phasing out approach referenced in the motion, our Legislative Assembly of Alberta will immediately ensure the retention of money in the pockets of seniors so they can be assisted as they address the challenges they face. Having contributed to the building of a strong Alberta and to the assurance of a bright future for our children, it would be very appropriate to say thank you to our seniors by removing the education property tax from their shoulders.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, at the same time it's equally important to first identify a predictable, sure, and stable source of replacement funding for education purposes because we wouldn't want to do anything to the detriment of the outstanding K to 12 education system that we have in this province. This is critical for the sustenance of that system. So please let's not misconstrue each other's comments in that regard, nor should we let them get in the way of supporting this motion.

My final comment, Mr. Speaker, is simply to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-East for having brought this motion forward to our attention. He would point out to you that individually a senior's average income was \$26,336 in the year 2000, and that is approximately \$5,000 lower than the average income for Alberta's population in general. This is a group that needs some help. Let's see if we can do that today by supporting this motion.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 505 lost]

**The Acting Speaker:** The House stands adjourned until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

