

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 10, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/10

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for our abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask for guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce a former colleague and a special guest who's seated in your gallery this afternoon. Mr. Drew Hutton served as the MLA for the Edmonton-Glenora constituency in the 25th Legislature. I'd ask that he please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through to all members of the Assembly the hon. Mr. Ken Cheveldayoff, MLA for Saskatoon Silver Springs, who's seated in your gallery today. Mr. Cheveldayoff was elected to the Saskatchewan Legislature in November of 2003 and has been one of the hardest working men in the business ever since. He's the opposition critic for Finance, deputy critic for postsecondary education, a member of the Public Accounts Committee, and has served as deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Human Services. He was educated at Carleton in Ottawa, the U of S, Newport University in southern California, earning several degrees, including his master's.

Mr. Speaker, you may be pleased to know that Mr. Cheveldayoff was a parliamentary page in the House of Commons and has won the prestigious Queen Elizabeth II scholarship for excellence in parliamentary studies. Ken has served as senior business adviser with Western Economic Diversification and has built a solid reputation both as an entrepreneur and as a humanitarian.

The last thing I'll mention about Ken today is perhaps the most important. He has a wonderful wife named Trish and two super children, Carter and Paige.

Now, with a resume like that, Mr. Speaker, I believe Mr. Cheveldayoff would make a great addition to our caucus, but if his Saskatchewan Party has the right kind of luck in the next election, I believe Ken Cheveldayoff will be Saskatchewan's next Finance minister.

If Ken will please rise, please accept the best wishes of all in our Assembly.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly 23-plus members of the Alberta College and Technical Institute Students' Executive Council, or ACTISEC.

ACTISEC represents student associations from 14 colleges and technical institutes in Alberta, more than 200,000 students province-wide. The students with us today come from all regions of the province and represent Lakeland College, Mount Royal College, Grande Prairie Regional College, Lethbridge College, Medicine Hat College, Keyano College, SAIT, and NAIT. They're in Edmonton this week to attend an ACTISEC conference for newly elected student leaders, and I look forward to meeting with them later today. I would point out that included are the chair, Jon Hoffman; vice-chair, Jonathan Hill; executive council Jeremy Duenk, John Blomme, Carrie Creaser. I believe they are in the members' and public galleries, and I would invite the students to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again this year it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a group of students from Crestwood elementary school in my constituency. This school I think probably holds the record for the most miles travelled to and from the Legislature because to the best of my knowledge they have been making an annual trek from Medicine Hat to Edmonton for in excess of 20 years. This year is no exception. If I could, I would like to introduce three groups of students who have joined us in the members' gallery along with teachers and parents: Mr. David George, who's the principal, Mrs. Van Maarion, Mrs. Karen Irwin, Mrs. Maria Thompson, Mr. Gary Ziel, Mrs. Wendy Smid, Mrs. Kathy Western, and Mr. Wade Lawson, also parents Mrs. Jennifer Martin, Mrs. Tracy Lawson, Mrs. Nicole Petersen, Mrs. Sharon Pudwell, Mrs. Tracy Klein, and Mrs. Denise Yates. I'd ask that they stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of all members of the Assembly.

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

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise today and acknowledge the presence of 30 students from Madonna school. It's an exemplary community school, a Catholic school in Sherwood Park. Teacher Ray Rudanec and assistant teacher Nicole Gallo accompany them. I wonder if the students would now please rise, and we will give them a warm acknowledgement and welcome.

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

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly three guests: Maureen Geres, my executive assistant, who does a tremendous job in my ministry, and her sister and brother-in-law, Julie Geres-Brydie and Jim Brydie, who have come from the Lake District in England to visit family in Alberta, and they're also taking the opportunity to visit our Legislature. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly Dr. Glen Roberts, director of health programs for the Conference Board of Canada, visiting us here today from Ottawa.

Under Dr. Roberts' direction the Conference Board has completed several landmark reports since 2004 that have significantly informed health policy direction in Alberta, indeed across Canada. These include Understanding Health Care Cost Drivers and Escalators; Challenging Health Care System Sustainability: Understanding Health System Performance of Leading Countries; and Healthy Provinces, Healthy Canadians: A Provincial Benchmarking Report.

Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to note that the last time Dr. Roberts was a guest in this House, in 2004, he was here, in fact, because one of my predecessors, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, wished to acknowledge Dr. Roberts' outstanding research on health system sustainability and the importance of public and community health and wellness.

Dr. Roberts is accompanied today by my executive assistant, Mr. Fred Horne, who himself is no slouch in health policy, having in excess, I think, of 20 years in the health policy field and also, it might be interesting to note, a candidate in the last provincial election on behalf of the Progressive Conservative Party.

An Hon. Member: Did he win?

An Hon. Member: Next time.

Mr. Hancock: He will, indeed. But, in the meantime, the public of Alberta is having the benefit of his wealth of experience.

I'd ask, Mr. Speaker, that all members of the House acknowledge Dr. Roberts and Fred Horne and say thank you for their contributions to public health. If they would rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to introduce to you and through to members of the Assembly representatives from Parents Empowering Parents, an outstanding group that works to support communities through work with families dealing with addicted youth. We have today Audrey Bjornstad-Holliday, Tina Dow, Lori Jones, Dawn Fannin, and Maralyn Benay. I'd ask that they please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is certainly my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you my executive assistant, who is here from Lethbridge, a young lady who also served a former member of this House, Dick Johnston, and also served her MP in Ottawa. I'm delighted to ask her to stand. Yes, her name is Bridget, and yes, she is my daughter.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Jessica Fox and Shawn McKinlay along with their beautiful three-month-old daughter, Angelique. Jessica and Shawn recently moved to Alberta to seek a better life but were stunned to receive a \$1,200 a month rent increase for a one-bedroom basement apartment here in Edmonton. Jessica and Shawn are in danger of losing their home because of this massive rent increase. Because of Shawn's inability to work due to an injury, Jessica has had to take on two jobs to support their young family. They're currently looking for a new

place to live. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:10

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Gerry Hryschuk and Paul Buckler. Gerry and Paul are Palace Casino workers on their 244th day of strike due to this government's failure to protect Alberta workers with better and more fair labour legislation.

Gerry has been at the Palace Casino for seven years as a dealer. He came to the casino for a career change from industrial sales. In his spare time Gerry is active with various charities and nonprofit organizations. At the moment he's working hard to ensure that his son, who is in culinary college in New York City, and his daughter, who is studying arts at the U of A, get everything that they need to complete their education.

Paul has worked at the casino since only four months prior to the strike commencing. Paul is very active in the Ukrainian Catholic church as a lector. He helps his priest with the services each Sunday and serves the faithful. Paul is a very active and effective voice for his and his co-worker's cause within the gaming industry.

They are joined by UFCW local 401 representative Don Crisall. They are in the members' gallery. I'd ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the 2007 recipients of the human services worker award. Each year this award recognizes two Children's Services employees who have made significant and positive impacts on the lives of Alberta's children, youth, and families. These front-line workers are some of the most dedicated, talented, and caring people in our province, and children, youth, and families depend on their outstanding service and support every day.

I'd like to ask the following recipients and their guests to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: Marlene Proctor of Fort McMurray, Carrie McGillivray of High Prairie, and their guests, Harry Andrews, Carrie's husband; Judy Delorme, nominator and casework supervisor; Janet Fizzell, acting CEO of region 10; Heather Edelman, nominator and supervisor/manager; Ron Benson, CEO of region 9; and Irene Milton, Children's Services human resources manager. Please join me in welcoming them today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members would want me to introduce and congratulate the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane and the hon. Minister of Children's Services. Twenty-nine-and-a-half years ago, she entered the world. Happy birthday.

head:

Members' Statements

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

Project neuroArm Surgical Robot

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 17, 2007, the Calgary health region together with the U of C unveiled the world's first MRI-compatible surgical robot for brain surgery. The need for improved precision and dexterity and stamina in surgery inspired a

talented team led by Dr. Garnette Sutherland to embark on this life-changing project. This six-year, \$30 million project called Project neuroArm is the most advanced MRI-compatible robot available to date.

As Project neuroArm is now out of its lengthy design and testing stage and into manufacture, delivery can be expected within the next 20 months, after which neuroArm will rapidly incorporate into surgery. Once incorporated, neuroArm will revolutionize neurosurgery and other branches of operative medicine by liberating them from the constraints of the human hand while significantly improving the way brain surgery and other microsurgery is performed all over the world.

Once in full operation the surgical robot will deliver less invasive and more accurate brain surgery and will afford the ability to shift surgery from the organic to the cellular level. Using neuroArm's image guidance system, surgeons will be able to practice virtual operations before the actual procedure, resulting in fewer mistakes in real operations. The use of this new technology will strongly impact our society by decreasing postsurgical morbidity, illness, or complications. Patients will experience higher survival rates and reduced recovery times and shorter hospital stays as a result of the new surgery method.

It's important to acknowledge Dr. Garnette Sutherland's team for the lead on this neuroArm. Their undeniable dedication created a milestone in medical technology. As an Albertan I wish to congratulate the successful completion of neuroArm and recognize all those individuals whose efforts and dedication contributed to making this project a reality.

So, Mr. Speaker, if you ever need brain surgery, you might want to ask for the Sutherland neuroArm. Thank you very much.

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

Parents Empowering Parents

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the closing of the First Session of our 26th Legislature the then Minister of Education made this comment on the all-party co-operation to pass Bill 202.

I've been in this House for 12 or 13 years, Mr. Speaker, and I've yet to see such tremendous co-operation. [If] it were so on so many other important pieces of legislation we do in this House, we could change the image of democracy as we know it in this entire country.

Today I pay tribute to the citizens' group that launched that initiative and is still working to address issues of addiction. Parents Empowering Parents is, first, a self-help group. It's not a band of experts with solutions, not a crusade to change society. It is there for those who are bewildered and anguished, who have no one to turn to but others who have shared the same experience.

Second, PEP is an educational group. I use this word in its original sense of drawing out what is there. PEP draws out experiences and strengths from its members, resources they didn't know they had. PEP is persevering. Its members don't just work office hours, don't keep public and PEP lives separate, don't quit when things get tough. They believe in a cause and they live it, which makes them powerful.

Margaret Mead said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Mr. Speaker, Parents Empowering Parents contributed to the initiative of Bill 202 and through it to renewing our democracy. I commend this organization to my fellow members, and I'm proud to say that PEP now has a chapter in Edmonton-Mill Woods.

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

Jeff Toews

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to express this Assembly's support to the Toews family, the majority of whom live in my constituency of Grande Prairie-Wapiti. I'm sure members of the Assembly are aware of the tragedy that occurred to Jeff Toews as he vacationed with family and friends in Mexico earlier this week. While the details are still under investigation, the fact remains that a very upstanding, hard-working, and very highly respected constituent met a terrible fate while on this vacation.

I know that our Ministry of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations has been in touch with the federal government and the RCMP, encouraging them to seek answers to some of the outstanding questions surrounding this tragedy.

On behalf of the constituents of Grande Prairie-Wapiti and Grande Prairie-Smoky I offer our condolences and support to the Toews family.

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

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every spring thousands of Albertans come together to fight multiple sclerosis, a serious, life-threatening disease with painful symptoms. There is no cure, but Albertans are working to change that. I am proud to say that many of those Albertans live in my constituency, including Donna Romanuk. She is the Edmontonian who has organized hundreds of people to form the Munnky Krunchers, Canada's top fundraising team.

Together the Munnky Krunchers have raised tens of thousands of dollars to fight MS, bringing us closer to a cure as well as helping pay for services and equipment that improve the quality of life of those people suffering from MS, Mr. Speaker.

Donna herself is currently fighting her own case of MS, and despite how devastated she was by the diagnosis, she refuses to give up. She is a truly inspirational human being. She reminds us of how privileged we all are to enjoy our time on Earth. When I met her in person, I felt compelled to sign up for the Munnky Krunchers myself. I will do my best to help the team fund a cure for MS, Mr. Speaker.

Donna's story reminds us all that our constituents, the citizens of Alberta, are the most powerful force for good in this province. Their hard work, compassion, and goodwill are leading us forward to a better tomorrow.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

1:20 Southesk Collection of Aboriginal Artifacts

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week marked the coming home of rare aboriginal artifacts that are on display at the Royal Alberta Museum. After nearly 150 years Albertans now have the opportunity to view the Southesk collection, one of the world's most significant collections of northern plains ethnological artifacts, in a new feature exhibition entitled *Stories from the Southesk Collection: A 150-year Journey*. The Southesk collection represents a vital part of the story of our First Nations and Métis people and of Alberta and western Canada.

The First Nations and Métis artifacts had been collected in 1859 and 1860 by James Carnegie, the 9th Earl of Southesk, during a trip

to western Canada. The collection had been kept in the family's castle in Scotland for 147 years before being offered for sale in May 2006 at Sotheby's auction house in New York. With support from First Nations and Métis representatives the Royal Alberta Museum was the successful bidder for 33 of the 43 objects at the auction, for a total price of \$1.1 million Canadian. This would not have been possible without the financial support of the federal government and the Alberta government. Without this support we would have lost an important part of Alberta and western Canadian history.

Among the artifacts purchased by the museum were a Blackfoot dress made of mountain sheep skin, a rare finger-woven Métis sash, a beaded Plains Cree pad saddle, and the earl's journal. The acquisition of these artifacts will enhance the history galleries of the Royal Alberta Museum and provide research opportunities for scholars and students throughout North America. For Albertans young and old the Southesk exhibit represents a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the story of Alberta and our aboriginal culture.

Mr. Speaker, the Royal Alberta Museum should be commended for its initiative and determination to acquire these artifacts and bring them back to Alberta. Like many of the museum's past feature exhibits, *Stories from the Southesk Collection* continues the proud tradition of presenting us with a story that talks about our past and helps shape our future.

Mr. Speaker, it is fitting to conclude my statement by saying: welcome home, Southesk.

Thank you.

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

Community Policing

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know that rapid growth in population without the proper infrastructure and services can pose serious challenges to building and maintaining safe communities. Alberta's police services struggle to keep up with the pressures of our rapidly growing province.

To cope with new challenges, Albertans need creative solutions to guarantee that our communities are safe. However, under this government the property and violent crime rates in the province remain above national levels. Tellingly, Alberta continues to have the lowest number of police officers per capita west of P.E.I.

Community policing is an effective and creative strategy for preventing and solving crime, but this has been systematically neglected by our government. Community policing involves developing closer interaction between the police and the local communities to properly deal with such problems as prostitution, drug trafficking, and gang violence. We must provide municipalities with the legal and financial means for both expanding and promoting good police practices as well as for hiring significantly more neighbourhood/community officers over the next few years. This requires increased provincial budgetary support for municipalities and improved enforcement measures.

Furthermore, Alberta's police services must reflect the diversity of our communities to improve their interaction with the citizens on the local level and to build lasting, trusting relationships. Police officers should work proactively with neighbourhood associations, aboriginal organizations, and other groups.

We also need to enhance crime prevention programs to better tackle the root causes of crime. Such programs must include cracking down on slum housing, pawnshops, and triple-X video stores and enforcing tougher measures to prevent alcohol and drug

abuse. Providing affordable housing and a living minimum wage are very much needed as part of the crime prevention strategy. Youth at risk must be supported and encouraged to actively participate in the life of the community.

Surely, Mr. Speaker, we can all agree that Alberta communities should have all the proper conditions to develop their potential.

Thank you.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My voice is going. [interjections] I'll get it back; don't worry.

I'm tabling the text of a speech given by Mary Ladouceur at an affordable housing protest held just outside the Legislature last week. She notes that Alberta's economy does not help poor people and that her hard-earned savings shouldn't be given to greedy landlords.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter from Bruce Magyar of Edmonton about the process that children with autism are funded by or how the government determines how much money each child receives to pay for professional consultants to come and help the children learn enough skills that they can be a part of their community.

The second is from Natalie Weller of Beaumont, an e-mail with an article from the Halifax *Daily News* regarding the child care crisis and the need to retain high-quality, trained early childhood educators.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling this afternoon, and that's a letter dated May 7, 2007, that I received from the hon. Minister of Energy. This is in regard to Sessional Paper 250/2007 regarding the royalty rates and the comparative take between Texas and Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today intended to improve the transparency and accountability of Bill 26, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2007. The title of the tabling, originating from Alberta Municipal Affairs, is Detailed Assessment Audit Manual.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first one is the city of Edmonton brochure titled *Mother Nature is Looking After Me!* The message which follows this label reads, "But you can help if you find wildlife orphaned, injured or in distress." I was given this wonderful brochure when I attended the trade show at the John Janzen Nature Centre last Sunday. A good read and very useful.

The second one is another brochure from that trade show. This one is produced by the Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of Edmonton. Their phone number is 914-4118, and they offer unique referral,

nanny, transport, and education services. Again, very worthy of attention.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings, and these are ones I mentioned in debates last night. One is the Rental Market Report from CMHC, which shows a 4.5 per cent apartment vacancy for Edmonton in 2005. One is an article, How Rent Control Killed Affordable Housing in Winnipeg, and the other is The High Cost of Rent Control, which shows how rent control limits housing for the poor.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head:

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the hon. Mr. Melchin, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, response to Written Question 10, asked for by Dr. Pannu on May 7, 2007.

head:

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Could I ask the Government House Leader to please share with us the projected government business for the following week?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday evening from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. under Committee of Supply Energy and Environment would be called, and the ND caucus would be the presenting caucus.

On Tuesday, May 15, after Orders of the Day in the afternoon Committee of Supply with Municipal Affairs and Housing and Seniors and Community Supports, and the Liberal caucus will be presenting. In the evening Infrastructure and Transportation; Employment, Immigration and Industry, with the Liberal caucus presenting. In the afternoon, time permitting, possible government business could be Government Motion 20, Government Motion 21, and bills 31, 32, and 33.

On Wednesday, May 16, under Orders of the Day in the afternoon a cross-ministry initiative presenting the ministries of Children's Services, Seniors and Community Supports, and Education, and of course all caucuses participate. In the evening it's actually a Health cross-ministry, and it's Energy, Environment, and Health. Again, in the afternoon, time permitting after Committee of Supply, second readings of bills 31, 32, 33, and, time permitting, potentially government referral motions.

Thursday, May 17, in the afternoon in Committee of Supply Education and Agriculture and Food, and it would be the Liberal caucus participating; and again government business as per the Order Paper, should time permit, Government Motion 22 and bills 31, 32, and 33.

1:30

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, Motion 19, which was assented to by the Assembly on May 8, included the following words: "and that a revised Committee of Supply schedule be tabled forthwith." Has that been accommodated now in your report?

Mr. Hancock: The report does indicate the changes that were made with the exception of the portion of supply that was moved from the 16th, which will, as I understand it, be presented on I think it's Monday the 4th, but that hasn't been nailed down yet, and I'll let the House know as soon as that is.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Temporary Rent Regulation

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and his government want to claim that the affordable housing crisis is, quote, the price of prosperity. Well, it's not. It's the price of the failure to plan, and the price is too high for too many Albertans. Angela Grainer, for example, is a single parent making a moderate living, an average salary of over \$43,000 a year. On July 1 her rent will increase from about \$800 a month to \$1,200 a month. To the Premier. After Angela pays for just the basics, she'll be \$40 in the hole every month and in danger of losing her home. Can the Premier explain why this government refuses to put in place temporary rent regulations to help people like Angela?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we debated the bill all night and to early this morning. The bill was lifted from committee and now is in third reading, and this bill will go a long way in protecting Albertans also with almost – well, more than a quarter of a billion dollars invested in affordable housing in this province. That's a substantial amount. We want to move forward to build more units so that we can accommodate more Albertans in decent accommodations.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. But those efforts aren't going to help people like Angela and the thousands like her. The Premier should know that Angela and those others won't qualify for the assistance under this government's very flawed housing policy, and indeed the much more efficient thing to do is to bring in regulations. To the Premier. The Premier pledged that his government will help "anyone that requires some assistance in housing." Will the Premier now commit to revisiting his plan and finding a way to help people like Angela, people who are working hard but who are getting left behind?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have a number of programs in place to assist Albertans. One, of course, is the emergency shelter benefit program, the other is the rental supplement program, and the third the homelessness and eviction prevention fund. For specific details any minister can answer those in question period later.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and his government have attempted to dismiss this crisis as isolated incidents, something that can be fixed by the minister of housing having a chat with the landlords, and no doubt he's going to be having a lot of those chats.

Mr. Stelmach: Might be having a chat with you, then.

Dr. Taft: Is that a threat, Mr. Premier?

The Speaker: Whoa. Through the chair, please, everybody.

Dr. Taft: To the Premier. Will the Premier finally admit that this housing crisis is a widespread problem, a genuine crisis affecting thousands of average Albertans that his government's policies will not help?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I've mentioned this in the House numerous times. During the leadership campaign I recognized that this was a priority for government. It is a priority for government. We put money into affordable housing. We also have millions of dollars in protection for Albertans. We'll continue to work. We do have compassion and care for Albertans. And you know, Mr. Speaker, continually – continually – every month, new people come to Alberta from other provinces, other countries because there is some hope that they have a job here and they can continue with their life here in the greatest province there is to live in, Alberta.

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

Rent Supplement Programs

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Premier and his cabinet have stumbled in trying to respond to the affordable housing crisis, and everybody in the province can see that. Programs have been announced without clear rules, and before they're ready to be implemented, phone numbers have been offered that provide no help. They admit that rent gouging is happening but offer no policy to stop it. I think Albertans would like to know who's in charge, that somebody – anybody – over there is in charge. To the minister of municipal affairs, and I want an answer from this minister, who is responsible, not someone assigned to come to his defence: can he tell us what the eligibility criteria area? What are the eligibility criteria for the rent supplement program administered by his ministry?

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

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would assure you that I don't need anybody to come to my defence, but I want to explain to you – and I think that has been tried many times – that if we do have individuals that are in emergency need, that is under the jurisdiction of Employment, Immigration and Industry. If individuals have concerns or challenges with the rent supplement, it is under the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. If you want to talk about the support that we are giving to municipalities, working with municipalities . . .

The Speaker: And we'll probably be able to get to that more later. The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll repeat my question. I believe that the rent supplement program is under this minister. My question was this: can this minister tell the Assembly the eligibility criteria for the rent supplement program administered by his ministry? What are the criteria? Who qualifies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The criteria for rent supplement and the policy of this government is that individuals should not pay over 30 per cent of their salary – 30 per cent of their salary – for housing.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then, just in the spirit of making some progress here, does that mean that all Albertans who pay 30 per cent or more of their salary for housing should be contacting you for assistance?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about affordable housing, and this affordable housing and rent supplement deals with individuals in need. If the hon. member of the opposition wants to rent a facility and he wants to rent and pay let us use an artificial figure of \$50,000 a year, we are not going to support him. This is affordable housing for people in need.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Temporary Rent Regulation

(continued)

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before and during the debate on affordable housing this government maintained that they could not interfere in the market, that the market looks after itself. Well, not true, at least not all the time. When Alberta faced the BSE crisis, the government immediately stepped in with many programs and subsidies to protect farmers from losing their farms and homes. In July 2005 the six-point BSE recovery plan was brought in to rescue the struggling beef industry. They even set up a 1-800 stress line to counsel farmers in distress. Farmers were not left to fend for themselves. Can the Premier explain why his government acted so decisively to aid farmers in a crisis but refused to help Alberta renters living in big cities by bringing in temporary rent regulations? Why the double standard?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, obviously, the member isn't listening to the answers. I just listed a number of programs, including more than a quarter of a billion dollars for affordable housing, millions more in terms of protection for Albertans. And I'm going to make it very clear that what the hon. member is talking about was something as a result of a health issue in animals between trading partners. It was a major issue at that particular time. This issue in terms of housing, more people moving to Alberta: that's why we're putting, as I said, more than a quarter of a billion dollars into housing and protecting Albertans with a variety of programs.

1:40

Mr. Elsalhy: Mr. Speaker, I think some of the divide here is that many rural members of this Premier's cabinet aren't hearing these stories and cries for help in their constituencies, so I'm going to give them an example that they understand. In 2002 the government took over the function of regulating confined feeding operations. Now the NRCB controls and regulates livestock operations and feedlot sites. Isn't this an example where this government interferes in the market and private business? If you want to establish a new site or expand an existing one, you go to the NRCB. To the Premier: why not have the same approach for those few landlords wanting to jack rents over and above an allowed, accepted provincial average? They can appeal to exceed the cap if they can justify why. Tell me and the renters why this is any different.

Mr. Stelmach: This is another example of a member who sat here for some period of time, knows nothing about, obviously, the role of the NRCB. But you know, Mr. Speaker, the more I listened over the last few weeks, this must be the new Liberal way: pitting Albertans against Albertans. That's all they know. That's all they know.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In October of 2003 former Premier Klein told Albertans he was frustrated with the auto insurance situation and the skyrocketing premiums, and for that he implemented a one-year freeze on premiums. He said to reporters, quote, it doesn't lower or higher insurance rates. It just says everything is on hold until we sort this thing out. End quote. To the Premier: your former boss reacted to a public outcry over auto insurance gouging and sided with the people. He was also admired for backing down when found wrong. Will you be as decisive as he was in those instances and ensure fairness in the marketplace? This time we're asking for a cap on rent hikes, a temporary cap, not a freeze, and it is not too late for an about-face. Will you or will you not?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, first of all, not everyone across the way there is asking for rent controls because, obviously, there were noticeable absences when it came to the final vote. The issue is completely different. However, we are being decisive. We are being decisive, because . . . [interjections] Oh, boy. What a reaction. That really gets them going. I guess you must have had a little bit of a lack of sleep last night. A little bit of lack of sleep, and you sure get irritated.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that we are decisive as a government. That's why we put over a quarter of a billion dollars into affordable housing and millions more into supportive programs to support Albertans in need. We are caring, and we're compassionate. We'll continue to be so.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know what? I'm proud to say that every single member of the NDP caucus was present for every single vote, and no other party can say that. No other party can say that.

Mr. Speaker, this Conservative government has turned its back on Alberta's renters. The Conservatives would rather side with the landlords than with the hard-working renters of this province. Here's another example where the Conservative government's lack of compassion is hurting Albertans. We have Jessica Fox, Shawn McKinlay, and their three-month-old daughter, Angelique, in the gallery. They've been hit with a \$1,200-a-month increase, from \$495 to \$1,695 for a one-bedroom basement apartment. This is their first rent increase since last year. Why has the Premier turned his back on these people?

The Speaker: And the Premier is going to have a chance to respond.

Mr. Stelmach: Yes. Mr. Speaker, once again, the government is not turning our back on any Albertan. That's why we have a number of programs. If this is an issue with this very specific person, the minister has heard the individual's name. We have staff in place to look after that. It's one-stop shopping, one phone call, and three departments – EII, also municipal affairs and Treasury Board, Service Alberta – will look after Albertans in need.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, while this may be an extreme case, there are hundreds of thousands of renters in this province, most of whom are seeing significant increases in their rent. The government's programs will not help all those Albertans, and the Premier knows it. This is not a case of just a series of one-offs where you help people individually. You've got to fix the problem, Mr. Premier. Why won't you bring in rent guidelines?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, because evidence time and time again no matter what jurisdiction you study, whether it's in those provinces that have been governed by a socialist government, a Liberal government, has proven now that rent controls have not worked. They've actually decreased the number of spaces available for rent and also put such tight controls that no new housing was built. We don't want to get in that situation. That's why we're putting money up front, working with the municipalities, working with the federal government, and looking after Albertans.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, Jessica and Shawn may be forced to return home to Nova Scotia or Ontario, where they come from, because they can't find affordable housing here in this province. This government prides itself on attracting people from all over Canada, but in fact people are leaving this province in greater numbers than ever before. That is because this government does not care. There are more people leaving the province than ever before because they can't find a place to live because this government doesn't care. My question is to the Premier. Why doesn't he care?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this Premier cares. This government cares. We care about all Albertans. In fact, we care about all Canadians. In fact, because of the tremendous economic growth in the province of Alberta other provinces share in about \$40 billion worth of goods and services. All this economy spreads across all of Canada, and if you pull the economic growth out of Alberta today, most of the other provinces will see their economies almost flat. So Alberta does care. It does share with other provinces. It does contribute to equalization. To make a ridiculous statement like that is absolutely not true. In fact, we just contributed handsomely again this year to the equalization fund. Where are you getting all your information from?

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

Steel Fabrication Plant in Tofield

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Temporary foreign contractors and owners hire their own temporary foreign workers. They do not look to Albertans first to employ or to train. We have Alberta laws, but these companies don't always follow them. Now we have KNM looking to bring in temporary foreign workers. They say they can't find 2,500 skilled workers in the Tofield area. Go figure what that labour market opinion will be. My question is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. What has your department done to ensure that Albertans are hired first, Canadians second, and foreign temps after at the Tofield site?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me state that before temporary foreign workers are allowed to come to Canada, a business must prove – must prove – that there's no Albertan or Canadian available for that job. Because this is a federal program, the employer must prove to the federal government through a forum on a labour market opinion that no Albertan or Canadian is available, and that's a serious process. Through our labour force strategy, Building and Educating Tomorrow's Workforce, we have a multi-pronged approach to help ensure that Albertans have an adequate supply of labour: first of all, getting Albertans educated; second, giving the employers information; third, keeping workers in the job longer; and finally. . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: how will the government ensure that Alberta contractors who hire Alberta trades, technicians, and engineers have a real chance at bidding and winning the construction work at KNM?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, it is not the role of the provincial government to ensure that one company successfully outbids another company. It is our role to provide an environment where businesses can thrive and to attract investment to our province. It is a priority for this government to give Albertans the job first and Canadians second. All Albertans considered first; Canadians second. Ultimately, the market will decide who wins the opportunity to successfully be engaged in the projects.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Thousands of Albertans work for the 17 large vessel manufacturers in our province. These employers include some of our best trainers of trades apprentices, both union and nonunion. The Tofield temps will distort our industries' competitiveness in Alberta and will result in the training of fewer Albertans. What will the government do to ensure that the Tofield development does not undermine Alberta's industry?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, you know, it's been very useful to have the hon. member's question because clearly we can keep a watchful eye on the kinds of things that will happen in Tofield, particularly relative to this industry. Our government's role is to make sure that the province remains globally competitive. This involves training opportunities for workers and attracting business investment in the province.

Mr. Speaker, our labour market strategy, in fact, includes actions to increase apprenticeship here in Alberta, and many of these RAP programs are highly acclaimed by the leaders in postsecondary. Our Budget 2007 gives a \$15 million boost to apprenticeship.

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

1:50 School Construction and Renovation

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I was able to attend one of four grand openings of brand new schools in the city of Calgary, the Chapparral elementary school. It was a delight to be able to see children performing with violins, song, and dance and to talk to parents that were thrilled to have a school in the heart of their community. But not all communities have that, and they are looking for their school. So my questions are to the Minister of Education. Can the minister please share with this Assembly what plans he has to allow schools to be built in these new communities?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, there is some tremendous good news in the area of new schools being opened in this province. In the current school year, which I guess is winding down very quickly, we will have either opened or will be opening some 16 new schools throughout the province, and about an equal number will be on stream in this next school year. However, saying that, we also recognize that there's still, despite putting about \$1.3 billion into school construction over the next three years, a very large amount of infrastructure and modernization required. So I'll await the supplemental question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. We're hearing a lot about alternative financing. Some call it P3s. Can the minister describe to this Assembly what the advantages are if we go down this road?

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have some \$3 billion worth of need throughout the province for new schools and for modernization, and although \$100 million was put into our budget in this current year for additional school infrastructure, it will come nowhere near to meeting that need. So we have to look at a whole variety of ways of getting schools in areas where students live and learn. We're just in the process of looking at that now, and I'm open to all suggestions by all members of this House.

Mrs. Ady: My final supplemental to the same minister: that's good news, Mr. Speaker, but parents want to know when. They want to know when this can come to be. They want to know if it'll be there when their kids go to kindergarten or university. Can the minister share when this could be?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think that is a very valid concern. In talking to parents that are waiting for a new school, basically what they're saying is: we recognize that it can't all happen at once, but at least lay out a plan for us so that even if it's in the year 2010, we know that we'll be getting our school at that time. I think you're aware that there is a small committee of cabinet, chaired by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, and we're looking at all capital projects in the province. Hopefully, in the near future we'll have some good news to announce.

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

Youth Addictions Treatment Programs

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recognizing the stress and isolation many parents face in dealing with children who have substance abuse problems, a group of parents in Sherwood Park got together and formed a support group known as Parents Empowering Parents, or PEP. They are here with us today to raise some of the concerns they have with treatment for children addicted to drugs in this province. My first question is to the Minister of Children's Services. PEP has identified several problems for families in remote communities who would like access to services. There are few rural treatment beds and no service dedicated to transporting children apprehended under PCHAD. What is the minister doing to address these service gaps?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that you've raised this issue. There's also the bill that the hon. Member for Red Deer-North put forward and was implemented last year. As well, I'd like to thank the Parents Empowering Parents for supporting that bill because I know that they were a huge part of garnering support to get it passed in the Legislature. I will say that my understanding is that that program has been very successful. It was only implemented last summer. I understand that 350 children and youth have gone through that program with their families. Fifty per cent of them have voluntarily moved on to treatment, which is unbelievable.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. Parents involved with PEP have expressed concern over the shortage of drug treatment beds in Alberta. They point to both a lack of facilities for youth and adult patient waiting lists of over two months long. Drug addictions require immediate action. Forcing families and people in need of treatment to wait for prolonged periods is simply unacceptable. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: what is your department doing to implement the recommendation of the Task Force on Crystal Meth that 300 additional beds be made available for detox and substance abuse treatment?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. After the Task Force on Crystal Meth was presented, a cross-ministry committee was set up of deputies from a number of departments who were affected, I think the Solicitor General, Health and Wellness, Children's Services, I think Municipal Affairs and Housing. The cross-ministry deputies committee looked at the task force report, looked at what we were doing, and looked at what needed to be done not just with crystal meth but for youth addictions. They've brought back a report to me as the lead ministry. I'm currently reviewing that report and shortly will be forwarding it to government for further discussion as to what needs to be included in business plans and where we go from here.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. PEP has identified several problems associated with access to effective treatment for different groups. In particular they're concerned about the need for increased resources for young adults in the 18 to 25 age group. The burden drug addiction places on addicts and their families is just as severe whether the individual is 16, 17, 18, or 19. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: will your ministry agree to provide targeted treatment programs for young adults aged 18 to 25 in order to create a transition period between services aimed at youth and those designed for adults?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree with the concept that we need to have in place addiction treatment and the transition programming, but I will ask the hon. member to be just a little bit more patient. I am working thoroughly through the youth addictions report that the deputies have prepared. They've done some very good work, and it's on my desk now – in fact, I think it might even be in my briefcase with me here today – to read thoroughly and to see how we can fit it into our current business plan with the current budgeting and what things might need to be brought forward within another business plan.

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

Skilled Workforce Training Programs

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Due to the continued economic activity within Alberta, there is a growing need for skilled workers, and this is expected to continue for the next 10 years. Of course, this occurs in a myriad of areas and sectors. Would the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology please outline his

strategy to address this high demand to ensure that Albertans get a chance at any job availability?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Addressing Alberta's labour force challenges is going to require a partnership and collaboration amongst not only the postsecondaries but with industry, with the associations, with all of those groups working together as part of the overall plan to manage the growth pressures that we have. We want solutions that ensure things like apprenticeship training and the industry and the system, that we're meeting those needs, so we're working on a long-term labour force strategy with industry, with the postsecondaries. We're adding more apprenticeship training spaces and recognizing prior learning experience where it's possible. We're offering a wider variety of delivery models in terms of either in-class training or distance learning or bringing the job site to the student or those sorts of things. We're doing as much as we can.

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that's fine and dandy, but some of the apprentices are unable to even attend apprenticeship technical training because there are no spots available at institutions to accommodate them. So what is it that you're going to be doing to address this very problem?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're already starting to address it, and in a very big way I might add, larger than any other jurisdiction probably in North America. We recently, in this budget, added 3,000 new apprenticeship spots, and this House may recall that a couple of months prior to that, we added an additional 3,600 apprenticeship training spots to the system. No doubt there are probably some apprentices out there who are looking at where they can go to get their spot. As part of Campus Alberta and the roles and responsibilities mandate we want to make it easier for students to find the spot. We want to make it easier for employers to work with the students to get them into the apprenticeship training program, and we will continue to add capacity, add space, and add instruction to make it affordable and accessible for all students.

Ms Calahasen: We have a rapidly growing aboriginal population, and these Albertans are currently underutilized. I would like to ask the minister: what kind of training programs have you got available to make sure that these available Albertans are going to be able to take advantage of the Alberta advantage?

Mr. Horner: Well, Advanced Education and Technology, Mr. Speaker, provides a number of programs and services that are specific to aboriginal Albertans. We are encouraging more aboriginal Albertans to pursue their postsecondary learning. The ministry supports a number of programs targeted at aboriginal learners and leaders in career opportunities, like the practical nursing program at NorQuest. We also have transitional training programs that are focused on those. There are now more than 1,200 aboriginal apprentices in Alberta. That's an increase of more than 400 per cent since 2002, when the province only had 238. We also administer several bursaries for aboriginal learners. We have the Alberta aboriginal apprenticeship program, which links aboriginal apprentices with employers. All part of building a stronger Alberta.

2:00

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

Steel Fabrication Plant in Tofield

(continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As was mentioned earlier, KNM, a global manufacturer of steel process equipment, is setting up shop in Tofield. Tofield, as we all know, is in the Premier's riding, but unfortunately the constituents from the Premier's riding will not have first crack at the jobs that are going to be created. The process equipment is eventually going to find its way from China and Malaysia all the way up to Fort McMurray, but it's going to stop in Tofield for final assembly. My first question is to the minister of exploitation, immigration and industry. Why is the Alberta government allowing this proposal to mobilize . . .

The Speaker: Whoa. Please. There is no such minister known as the minister of exploitation. Perhaps the hon. member would like to rephrase that.

Mr. MacDonald: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I forgot. Employment. The minister of employment and immigration.

Why is the Alberta government allowing this proposal to mobilize over 2,000 temporary foreign workers without first forcing KNM and their affiliates to hire workers in Alberta?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, previously the hon. colleague from Edmonton-Manning asked the question, and I gave the response. Perhaps I can abbreviate question period by referring the hon. member to the response previously given.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. I'll start with a quote. This is from the Malaysian *Star*.

It said while the cost of labour in Canada was expensive, the group was likely to leverage on its plants in China and Malaysia for prefabrication works before shipping them to Canada for final assembly.

My question: how can Alberta-based steel fabricating shops compete with this operation, which relies on low wages and substandard working conditions in China and Malaysia? How is our local fabricating industry to compete?

Ms Evans: We have a global economy. There are many things that are built offshore. There are many other countries that participate in the Alberta advantage every day by either engineering or creating products that are used. The development of Syncrude and Suncor is attracting people from Ontario. Businesses from out of Canada, as well, are competing on many jobs. Mr. Speaker, it's the global economy we live in. That's totally to be expected.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. The executive of this outfit, KNM, admits that wages are cheaper in China and Malaysia and that they're higher in Canada. He's taking advantage of it at the expense of our local steel industries, and you're allowing it to happen. My question again to the same minister: why is this government selling out the steel fabrication industry here in Alberta?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in my previous answer I replied that this is a federal program, the temporary foreign worker program. The program on the labour market opinions and the issues around labour market opinions are things where there has to be an illustration, before workers are actually brought over, that there are no Alberta

workers available to do the job. I look forward to discovering more about the company's plans. Maybe there'll be a further response to be given later, but I'm not clear why this hon. member continues to pursue this line of questioning.

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

Regional Municipal Planning and Development

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In his state of the city address Mayor Mandel stated: "The inability of Edmonton and its regional partners to pull together is our biggest challenge. Working in silos is not just silly. It's destructive. One region of 1 million people should not have 23 answers to every question." To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: in response to rumours that the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability's report has now been shelved, to those who claim that a report which advocates for regional co-operation and planning and sharing of revenues and expenses has no support from this government, what say you?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. No, there is no truth to that rumour at all, about this government shelving the minister's council on sustainability. Last Tuesday, I believe, when CPC was scheduled to deal with the minister's council report, I was summoned to Committee of Supply at the same time, and I asked if we could just pull that part of the agenda, that report. I have asked the chairman of the CPC for rescheduling.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mayor Mandel further stated that the Premier has been definitive on this issue. He promised that government would deal with these issues once and for all. This issue demands that a decision be made and made to stick. To the same minister: following years of studies and several reports later, will Albertans and particularly Edmontonians have a definitive response from your ministry to the report and on the matters of regional co-operation?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, there have been numerous reports that have been presented. There have been numerous reports and analyzations that have been done by the city of Edmonton and also by the surrounding area. There was also a report that was presented to us by the minister's council on sustainability. We have taken that report. We are moving it through the process. It is critical that if a report of such comprehension has come to this government, we need to do it right. To rush it through would not be the right focus.

Mr. Lukaszuk: I agree: we need to do it right, and we need to do it right now.

To the same minister: can I then assure Edmontonians that anticipated growth in the capital region will result in equitable sharing of the benefits and burdens that come along with such sudden growth?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are working together with the municipalities. At present we are arranging a meeting with the surrounding municipalities, 23 municipalities. I very much believe that we need to work with the municipalities as a provincial government, and our position, as shown by the budget, stands true.

We need to have regional planning. We need to work together. We need to have communication, collaboration, and co-operation.

Thank you.

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

Assistance for Student Housing

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By failing to introduce rent stability guidelines, this government has turned its back on tens of thousands of tenants and, in so doing, created a new indirect tax on postsecondary students. This new Tory tax will hit rural students particularly hard. Many students come from rural areas to go to universities, colleges, and technical institutes in our cities and regional centres, and they'll be hit hard by the huge rental costs that await them. Will the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing explain to this House why there is nothing, absolutely nothing, in the government's response to the Affordable Housing Task Force report to protect tens of thousands of students from being gouged by landlords?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the recommendations that we received from the housing task force and those responses very much included individuals that have challenges in housing. I have had discussions with . . . Is it CASS?

Mr. Horner: CAUS.

Mr. Danyluk: CAUS. Sorry. Abbreviations.

. . . CAUS talking about the possibility on how we can improve student housing.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, the minister clearly is out of touch with the realities that students face in this province. It will now cost students even more to pursue postsecondary education in Alberta. The 14 per cent increase in living allowance for students, which is, in fact, an increase to student loan limits, will not help except to increase their debt. Will the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology explain to this House what he has to offer to students to help to offset their skyrocketing housing costs besides a higher debt burden?

2:10

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the affordability of living accommodation is one piece of the affordability piece in the overall student financial picture, if you will. I am also a parent of two individuals who are attending our fine postsecondary institutions this fall, one of which . . .

Mr. Martin: You've got lots of money.

Mr. Horner: No, I don't have lots of money, hon. member. I wish I had lots of money.

To get to the answer that you're looking for, the point is that the cost of living increase that we put into the student finance program is not just loans because as the hon. member well knows, a good part of our student financial system is bursaries, is grants. The federal component is all loans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is in the grip of a serious affordable housing crisis. There's no doubt about it. Postsecondary students will be among its many victims as they return to school this fall. Students will have to take on extra debt

thanks to this new Tory tax which effectively allows landlords to gouge students. To the President of the Treasury Board: is the government going to pick up all the additional rental costs for all affected postsecondary students, and if not, why does it not care?

Mr. Snelgrove: You know, Mr. Speaker, as someone who has a son attending an institution right now to try and make a better life here in Alberta, I understand very well about the investment in the future. I find it somewhat frustrating that if a student is spending his own money on his education, somehow that's a bad debt, but when government does it, it's an investment in the future. Well, I'm very proud of the fact that my son has chosen to work in time and invest in his future. He understands that there's a cost to education. There's a cost to all we do, but he looks at his as a true investment in his future. Alberta is providing probably the most opportunistic area in the world to receive great instruction with a great future, and then they can really invest in their future.

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

Elbow River Watershed

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend a group of very concerned residents of Calgary area and Bragg Creek will be fighting to protect the Elbow River and pristine eastern region of Kananaskis park from logging. They will be tagging trees with the words Save Kananaskis: It's Worth It written on tags made from a slice of fallen trees. This is an area that is vital as a watershed, as a water source for Calgary and other communities east, a habitat to threatened species, a recreation area for thousands of Calgarians. It's an area that should be left natural. To the environment minister: given that 28 per cent of the area will be clear-cut over the years, will the minister provide assurances that the water quality will not be adversely affected?

Mr. Renner: Well, first of all, let me say, Mr. Speaker, that it's nice to actually get a chance to answer a question. I thought we'd forgotten about the environment for a little while. Let me just say that this particular issue is primarily the responsibility of the minister responsible for Sustainable Resource Development. However, like so many other issues, there is overlap between his ministry and mine, and I can assure the hon. member that any impact on long-term sustainability of our water supply is very much at stake and a concern to this minister. I will assure this member that we'll be working hand in hand in ensuring that what needs to be done from the sustainable side does not adversely impact the environment side.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, at a time when moratoriums are affecting all of the southern rivers for water licensing, five years after the implementation of Water for Life why is there still no comprehensive plan for the watershed of the Elbow River?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, such a plan that the member refers to actually does exist. That plan has to do with the implementation of WPACs, the watershed public advisory councils. That plan has to do with the ability for us to study the capacity for storage along that river basin to invest in the necessary infrastructure to increase the storage capacity of that basin. At the end of the day the plan is very much contingent upon us dealing with the allocation of licences in a basin that is fully allocated at this point in time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of climate change and the threat to growing water quality and quantity problems in the area, jurisdictions such as Vancouver and New York have bought back the watersheds to protect in perpetuity the water for those regions. Will the minister consider buying back this vital watershed?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a significant difference between the two jurisdictions that the member refers to and this one. The biggest one is that in most cases we already own significant portions of the watershed. Our watershed is primarily the Rocky Mountain basin, and most of that already is Crown land. So I would suggest to the hon. member that it's probably not necessary.

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

Rent Supplement Programs

(continued)

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last few weeks, day in and day out the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has been telling us about the \$285 million allocated for affordable housing projects in the province. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. How much money out of that \$285 million is going to help seniors facing rent increases and when?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the hon. member that the \$285 million is new money that has been added to our budget. We have \$143 million that has been allocated to municipalities for them to make a choice in what the needs are in their communities. It is up to them to decide how much of the \$143 million should be used in the direction or the focus of seniors. Also, there's an allocation of \$68 million on a per project basis for other municipalities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. How much money out of that \$285 million is going to help AISH recipients facing rent increases and when?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess I could give the same answer for the second question because the municipalities do have that option to decide what they feel the most important needs are in their communities.

But I would ask the minister of seniors if he'd care to supplement.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we work very closely with respect to these funds being available to all Albertans: seniors, AISH recipients. This certainly would be accessible to every one of them. They are equally applicable as with anybody else. But we do work closely with those on AISH and seniors to provide subsidized housing for both of them, actually.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister:

how much money out of that \$285 million is going to help homeless people in Calgary, Edmonton, and around the province and when?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have increased our assistance to the homeless to \$35 million this year. The provincial homeless initiative increased to \$6 million. The Alberta transitional housing initiative received 2 and a half million dollars, the homeless and eviction fund, that has been discussed, \$7 million. The rental program that caps rents at 30 per cent increased to \$33 million. All of these programs and funding have increased to continue to have a positive impact.

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

Tourism Industry

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tourism is a sustainable industry that does not receive enough attention from this government. This government needs to start thinking about the long-term prosperity of this province and take advantage of the opportunities to diversify the economy and support communities. My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. Members of the tourism industry are concerned that there is no way for them to provide criticism or input to improve tourism in Alberta. Is this what the minister considers governing with integrity and transparency?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We value tourism, and certainly we want to have that particular industry grow. I need to say that the tourism industry in the province of Alberta ranks about number 4 at this stage in terms of economic activity for the province. The industry has had all sorts of opportunities to participate. Certainly, my office is always open. In my past activities I have met with a number of service providers. We also have our strategic marketing council, that administers and makes recommendations to me on the tourism side.

Mr. Agnihotri: I don't know why the stakeholders are not happy.

My question to the same minister: what changes has the minister made in the last six months to ensure that all voices are being heard?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, I've spent the last four, five months actually meeting with a lot of industry representatives. My door has always been open. Certainly, I've talked to industry representatives. We have our Strategic Marketing Tourism Council that we work with. We've got some staff that are appointed. I work very, very closely with Travel Alberta to ensure that our tourism industry is growing and expanding.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: the Leitch report identifies gaps in the accountability in the current tourism framework and recommends options to close those gaps. This report has not been released yet. Will this minister make this report public immediately?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, certainly we're always reviewing the governance structure of Travel Alberta. You know, we are review-

ing various options as to how we can best improve the tourism industry in the province of Alberta, and we will keep on reviewing those and making adaptations and changes as we see fit.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 84 questions and answers today.

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Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 34

Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it's a tremendous pleasure to move third reading of Bill 34.

We had quite an exciting and stimulating conversation that, obviously, lasted far past its usefulness. However, that's part of our democratic process. We look forward to probably a more concise and focused debate at third reading, and we would like to proceed.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon. I think it's afternoon although I must admit that the way I feel right now, I'm not exactly sure what time of day or night it is.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, third reading is meant to discuss the effects that the bill will have when passed. I have some members across telling me that this is the perfect bill and that it's going to solve a lot of problems, and I have other members on my left telling me that it's not going to have any effect. I don't think that either one is the case.

Clearly, there are some measures in Bill 34 that are going to go some way towards addressing some of the situations that we've heard described in this Assembly over the last several days, go some way towards addressing some of the challenges and troubles faced by some of the visitors to our galleries over the last several days, and that's good. I hope that, in fact, the bill does accomplish some of the goals as outlined by the minister.

There is, as I suggested, a crisis in affordable housing in this province right now, and there is, as I suggested, a crisis in the public relations management of this issue for the government right now. So not only is it important for the government that this bill accomplish some of what it set out to do, but clearly and far more important is that it accomplish some of what it is intended to do for the renters of this province and particularly for those that are most vulnerable.

As I had suggested there would be, we had examples in the galleries again today of gouging. I don't know how you could describe it as anything but that. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and to the President of the Treasury Board: if the example that was introduced in the public gallery today is not gouging – we talked a lot last night about what is gouging. I would submit to you that the example that we had up here today is gouging. There's no question about that. There's no black and white. There's no disputing whatsoever that an example such as what we heard today is gouging. I think that it is important to note that even though this legislation is going to pass this afternoon because the government has a big majority and it will go through, this legislation is not – and I repeat and I underline “not” – going to address the example that we had in the public gallery this afternoon.

If we're going to talk about the impact that the bill is going to

have in third reading, let's also talk about the impact that it will not have. It will not address the situation that we had here today, and that is a major problem.

I heard the President of the Treasury Board speaking in a scrum when the marathon sitting, which started yesterday afternoon at 1 o'clock, ended this morning. I heard the minister in a scrum saying that he's going to sit down with the landlord and tenant dispute board and discuss with representatives from the landlords and discuss with representatives from tenants some sort of a mechanism whereby the landlords would police themselves and whereby they would agree to self-regulation so that these examples that we saw again in this Legislature today will not happen.

I'm going to submit to you right now, Mr. Speaker, that I don't believe that that will be good enough. I appreciate where the minister is coming from. Frankly, I hope he's right, but I don't believe that what he suggested to the media this morning is actually going to happen. I talked the other day about the greedy few landlords that are out there that are going to take full advantage of this marketplace, of the fact that there is no legislation that prevents them from doing so, and I don't think that a little bit of peer pressure is going to change that. I hope he's right, but I'm fearful that he is not right. I suppose only time will tell, and you can bet that we'll be lifting a page from the government's playbook where they always talk about how they're monitoring.

Well, I guarantee you that this member on behalf of all Albertans will be monitoring very carefully the few greedy landlords who have been imposing these dramatic and, as the Premier said last Friday prior to the Conservative convention, un-Albertan increases on their tenants. That, I can assure you, is something that I will be doing and that I know my colleagues in the Official Opposition will be doing on behalf of all Albertans. To those members that are in the gallery this afternoon and to all of those who've been down here all this week helping us bring the attention of this most serious crisis to the ministers of the government and to their staff, that is my commitment to you, and you can hold me to it.

Mr. Speaker, the government has talked a lot in the last few days about the need to create additional units, and there's absolutely no question that that is desperately required. Again, I would submit to you that this legislation is not going to create additional units. It does certainly provide some additional protection to renters in terms of notification periods for eviction notices in the case of condonation or major renovations. It provides additional time periods for notification in the instance of rent increases, and those are good things. We all know that those are part of what the housing task force recommended.

Clearly, as the minister himself described in the wee hours of the morning, those are pieces of the puzzle, and I'm hopeful that they will go some ways towards addressing the situation. They're not going to accomplish everything that's needed. On behalf of the Official Opposition and even, Mr. Speaker, I would submit to you, on behalf of some members of the government who have spoken previously yet did not allow that to carry through to debate in this Legislature over the last 24 hours and did not allow it to carry through to the standing votes, the many standing votes that we had on the various amendments, that clearly there are members in the government caucus that are hearing the same concerns from their constituents, and some have even expressed either publicly or privately over the last week or two their acknowledgement that temporary rental guidelines are necessary in this out-of-control marketplace.

2:30

I appreciate that they've shared that with us either privately or in some cases publicly, but I am disappointed that that didn't carry

through to putting themselves on the record during the last 24 hours while we debated this bill, and I'm disappointed that that didn't carry through to standing up and having themselves counted when it came to a recorded vote in this Legislature, because I think it's important for those members to show their constituents that, in fact, they're standing up for them and for what they've heard in their constituency offices.

I know that this government is ideologically committed to anything but any sort of rent controls or rental guidelines, and I can appreciate that. There's been a lot of talk over the last 24 hours about that philosophical difference between that side of the House and this side of the House. But, Mr. Speaker, you're one to always remind us that we are all, first and foremost, here to represent our constituents. You always remind us that we choose to align ourselves with a political affiliation but that it is really the constituents that put us here and that our first and primary responsibility is to represent those people.

I have to tell you that I cannot imagine doing anything but supporting temporary rent guidelines based on what I have heard in my constituency office, and I'm going to guess that at least those members that represent large urban constituencies have all heard the same things that I've heard. This is not a problem that's specific to Edmonton-Rutherford by any means, and it's certainly not a problem that's specific to Edmonton-Centre or Edmonton-Mill Woods. This is a problem that is rampant throughout Calgary. We know the horror stories that we've heard from Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, areas in Red Deer. I see now the Energy minister, Mr. Speaker, is giving me a little waggle of his finger, suggesting that perhaps it's not true in Grande Prairie, but I've been in Grande Prairie.

Ms Blakeman: He's had one call.

Mr. R. Miller: He's had one call. Well, I can tell the minister that the gentleman that I spoke to that's living out of the back of his pickup truck doesn't have access to a telephone or the Internet, and he probably doesn't even know where the minister's office is.

Mr. Knight: He's probably making \$150,000 a year.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, you know what? If he is making \$150,000 a year, and he can't find a place to live – he can't find affordable housing – that just exactly illustrates the problem that we've been discussing in this House over the last couple of days.

You know, whether you're talking about Lethbridge – and I know that there are certainly some instances of this happening in Lethbridge, not to the same extent, perhaps, that we see in Calgary and Edmonton and Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray, but certainly it's there too. There are instances in communities across this province.

This afternoon in question period we had the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar discussing a steel manufacturing plant that's going to go out in the community of Tofield, and there are going to be about 2,000 workers suddenly living out there. Mr. Speaker, I know Tofield quite well. There's not accommodation anywhere near capable of housing 2,000 workers in the area of Tofield. So I'm not sure where that's going to put that community in terms of their housing situation, but I'm going to guess that there will be a housing affordability crisis in the Tofield area as well, if there isn't already.

For us to sort of stick our heads in the sand and somehow think that all is good because 55,000 new residents are coming to this province every year, we're missing the point. In fact, I think the reality is – and actually the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs spoke to it quite well yesterday when he dis-

cussed the fact that a lot of the larger oil sands companies used to provide company housing, and now instead of that they provide living-out allowances. He discussed how that has had a major impact on the housing shortage in Fort McMurray and these sorts of things we're seeing across the province.

The Energy minister would well know that in Grande Prairie, as an example, there are oil companies that are buying up apartment blocks. Now, to their credit they're not just en masse evicting the residents, but what they are doing, Mr. Speaker, is as residents move out, they're moving their workers in. This is certainly reducing the availability of housing to the average worker that's looking for affordable housing in Grande Prairie.

We heard that the health authority, for instance, in Grande Prairie is buying up houses and offering those houses as incentives to doctors and nurses to come to the Grande Prairie region. Again, you know, this is symptomatic of a situation where . . .

Mr. Knight: Solutions. We have solutions.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, the Energy minister seems to think that that's a solution, Mr. Speaker, but I'm going to suggest to you that it's not. It does certainly address the concern of helping to bring in qualified professionals, whether it be doctors or nurses or x-ray techs or whatever, which Grande Prairie needs desperately at this point. They don't have a psychiatrist, so clearly there's some demand for this. But what it is also doing, when you have the health region buying up housing, is that it's taking those markets – I mean, let's be honest, Mr. Speaker, the average single wage earner probably can't compete with the health authority in terms of affordability, so it's driving up the price. There's no way that an individual would have the same resources that the health authority would to purchase housing. So it's all part of this out-of-control market where we see prices being artificially inflated, and this Bill 34 is not going to address that situation.

I talked about Edmonton-Rutherford, where we've got a development going in at the old Heritage Mall site. In excess of 8,000 residents are going to be moving into there. You know, this is a wonderful initiative, although there was some controversy about the height of some of the buildings, but overall it's an urban village. Instead of going out in urban sprawl, we're going up, and there's going to be an LRT station right on-site. I think this is probably a very good model for the future. But, Mr. Speaker, this is not affordable housing. These units start at \$375,000 and run up to \$900,000, and this is in a lower to middle-income community, \$375,000 starting prices. Clearly, people that are having trouble finding affordable housing are not going to be looking at that as an option.

There are times, I've said before – and I think it's worth repeating in third reading of Bill 34 – when the market does not work. Despite ideology and despite the fact that this government insists on, you know, the Premier's own words – full steam ahead; we don't want to interfere with any investment; let the market go where it will; it will correct itself – I said in debate that it will correct itself. Markets always do. We understand that. In a free-market economy the market will always correct itself. That's what markets do, Mr. Speaker.

The challenge for this government is: while you're waiting for the market to correct itself, how many people are you going to allow to be hurt, and how badly are you going to allow them to be hurt? That's the challenge for this government and any government that is faced with a situation like this, where the free market is out of control. How many people are you going to allow to be hurt, and how badly are you going to allow them to be hurt? How long are you going to wait for the market to correct itself? We understand –

and many of us in this Assembly have lived through it – that if you let a market that's out of control correct itself, it will peak. I'm not sure how far we are from that peak right now, but I sense that we're not that terribly far. It will peak, and it will peak higher than it should, and then it will come crashing down.

I don't want to be a fearmonger, but I am concerned. When I look at what's happening in this province right now and the lack of management of the growth and the runaway market that we have, there's potential for a major downturn. These peaks and valleys that we talk about often in the Official Opposition and the sustainability gap that we talk about in terms of the government spending last year – \$2,200 more per man, woman, and child than we realize in sustainable revenues, and that number is growing every year, Mr. Speaker – we're setting ourselves up for an ever bigger fall.

You know, the one situation that that might address when it happens is the housing affordability question. But does anybody want to go back to 1983, when you had people walking away from their homes for a dollar? I certainly don't. I lived through that, as did many members of this Assembly. That's not where I want to go again, and I don't think anybody in here does. Yet that's what happens when you allow the market to run amuck the way it is right now and then you allow it to correct itself, which it inevitably will do.

2:40

Mr. Speaker, Bill 34, as has been described many times, cherry-picked a few recommendations from the housing task force, and it will go some modicum towards addressing a few of the problems that were faced, but it certainly is not going to solve the problem. The government has admitted that it's not going to solve the problem. In fact, the biggest problem with this bill and the reason why the Official Opposition does not support it is that it does not address the biggest single problem that's facing this government right now, and that is the issue of the few greedy landlords who are taking full advantage of the situation that the market is in right now. They're taking full advantage of the fact that they know that this government is on the wrong side of this issue with the public and that they have no choice but to step in and provide assistance to the tenants that are being unduly harmed by the few greedy landlords, so they're gouging.

As I've said many times over the last 24 hours, that is the primary problem right now that the government has yet to address, and as I said at the beginning of my comments this afternoon, there is nothing in this bill that addresses that. I for one do not have confidence, as the minister apparently does, that landlords will self-regulate themselves and that suddenly these problems of gouging that we've seen and heard over the last couple of days are going to disappear.

In fact, I do believe that as people reach the end of the 12-month period during which they cannot have a rent increase, knowing that that increase can be as high as any landlord can get away with, there will be those few greedy landlords who are going to take full advantage of that, and we're going to continue to see on a daily or perhaps weekly basis thousand dollar increases like we saw again today.

The government's problems in terms of the public relations exercise are going to continue. Those are not going to go away, because there's no legislation to stop them. The government has said this and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing said this, that there will always be those that will take advantage of it. It's human nature. If you allow people to do that, there will be those that will take advantage of it regardless of peer pressure, regardless of self-regulation from their fellow landlords. So, ultimately, the government has to decide. You know, the minister rhetorically

asked the question back: "What is gouging? Is it a thousand dollars?"

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Is the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition going to participate? If so, I'll recognize him after the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Dr. Taft: Sure. That would be great.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's been a long time since I've had the opportunity to speak to Bill 34. I need my Bill 34 fix here. I mean, after the debates that we've had, what more can we say? But we will say it.

I guess the frustration for me, Mr. Speaker, is having been on the task force and having heard what people were saying. I see that the minister of municipal affairs is here today. We travelled across the province listening to people. Some of the recommendations we have accepted; others we didn't. But, clearly, what we heard time and time again everywhere, through the Internet, through all the public hearings, was that people were feeling afraid about the rent increases and feeling that something had to be done because the horror stories were starting. They were starting last summer. They were starting last summer in Calgary, as I recollect. That's when we decided that we needed to call for rent guidelines, 4 plus 2, because of those stories. Then pretty soon we heard it right across the province, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing is that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is correct. I can't understand why people say that they're not getting calls about this. What is it about our constituency offices in the opposition that we are getting all these calls? We're getting call after call after call after call: 10, 15, 20, every day. So, yeah, tie the two things together. I tie the two things together.

First of all, from what we heard on the task force and what we're hearing in our constituency offices, we say that we have a crisis. Mr. Speaker, the government's response is: well, we've increased the rental subsidy, and we have the eviction fund, and that's going to solve all the problems. Well, hopefully that will help some people that are the most vulnerable, but it's not just those people. I explained that there are renters all over – young people, professionals – worried about it because at the other end the housing prices are going beyond them. They can't buy a house and get out of the rental market because the housing prices are making that impossible, and at the same time their rents are skyrocketing.

You know, I understand the reason that people don't want any rent stabilization, Mr. Speaker, but if there's a market there, you don't need it. I've said this before, and I've got to keep stressing it: there is no market there. I think that even the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has heard the same calls that we have and knows that there's no market there. You can say that the subsidy program will help some people, and we can call them about the eviction fund, but the eviction fund is not ready to go. But that's just a small group of the people that are struggling right now. It's some people that are making even more money. They wouldn't be really at the bottom end, but they can't keep up with the rents.

You know, Bill 34 is saying: well, we can only do it once a year. They did pick that up from the task force. But that may just possibly make it worse. I think that's what we saw today, the \$1,200 one, because they're going to try to get it all at once rather than twice a year. So it may indirectly – I don't think the government means this – make it worse. It may make it worse because they bring in the big lump sum right away rather than twice, if that's what they figured

they were going to get, the \$1,200 today. Regardless of that, it still doesn't solve the problem.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know the government, and we're not going to change their minds here. Hopefully, enough people will keep complaining. The politics will become more difficult. They'll start to get the calls, and they'll continue to get them, and maybe eventually it will force them into doing the right thing, or they can pay a political price for it. Either way, I guess that's okay from the government's perspective, but unfortunately a lot of people are going to be hurt in the meantime. So we in the opposition are going to keep fighting this particular issue. I don't see any way around it.

I asked the government, Mr. Speaker, many times last night: what is the alternative? They always went back to the rent subsidies and the eviction fund, that aren't set up yet. But the reality in this overheated economy – and I quoted that even the government's own documents indicate that this is going to continue and that housing is going to be a major problem into the next year.

So when all is said and done, hopefully the \$285 million will help and is going into some of the things that we on the task force asked about. But ultimately, if the rents keep going up in big chunks, like what we heard today, what are the options for people? What do we do? Now, individually they can maybe go to the minister and hope that they can get some help, or they can move out of the province. But is that what we want? You know, how many people do we want out there that are one rent away from being homeless? How many other people do we want to hurt?

One of the things that we really suggested – Mr. Speaker, you will recall the boom before. I mentioned that I thought this is one that the government would look at, you know, to try to stimulate the market: the mortgage subsidy. That did work well. As you're well aware, in Edmonton-Norwood it almost lost me the election the first time I got elected, when it was brought in, because it was such a popular program. But it did get some people into the market, and that would create rental units. So we have to look at the supply side, no doubt about it, and we need to give tax incentives for rental housing, no doubt about that. But even if we do all these things, it will take – and the government acknowledges this, at least the officials that we dealt with in the task force – a minimum two years, probably longer, to bring that sort of housing on board because it's just not being built.

2:50

Again, I stress that I just don't know what we do with all sorts of people that are facing this problem, Mr. Speaker. We're not going to win this debate. That's pretty clear. The majority is over there. [interjection] Well, I don't think that the leopard will change his spots from afternoon to evening. Maybe I'm wrong; one can only hope. But it seems that the ideology is that we can't interfere with the market. Well, that's assuming that there is a market to begin with, and that's the point: there isn't. There is not a market.

So what do we do? I asked the government many times last night and this morning: what do we do, then, with all these people that are going to be facing these problems? They can't all go to the eviction fund and get money, and many of them won't qualify for the rental subsidy because that comes down to another problem. The minister today said: what's the standard for people that need affordable housing; you know, trying to define that?

One of the things we said in the report is that there had better be a definition, and the government said: yeah, we accept that there has to be a definition. But they reject what we had said in the affordable housing report, which is interesting because we said 30 per cent. That's what the minister said today. That's sort of a standard measuring block throughout North America, that people should be spending no more than 30 per cent of their income on their accommodation.

You know, I understand the government's dilemma because I know now that if they opened that up to over 30 per cent, there would be a lot more than \$33 million in terms of people qualifying. Therein lies the dilemma. But if they can't do the 30 per cent, then what is it? They've agreed that there has to be a definition. Is it 40 per cent, 50 per cent, 60 per cent of your income? What is it, then, Mr. Speaker? We have to grapple with that. Otherwise, the subsidy program doesn't mean anything.

Mr. Speaker, I fear that in the short run in the next two years there's going to be a lot of misery out there: a lot of stress, a lot of anger, a lot of frustration. It's already there. It will get worse, if we believe the government's projections on the economy coming up, because they say that housing is going to be a bigger problem.

Some of the housing will come on, hopefully, but when we talk to municipal affairs to really deal with the housing problem, we'd need 12,000 new rental units. Twelve thousand. Right now it would probably be more. There would be different ways of doing it. Certainly, the government, I recognize, can't do all of the public housing, but we have to have the carrot and the stick with tax incentives, with zoning, higher density, and all sorts of things. My point, Mr. Speaker, is that all those things will take time, and many people don't have the time. That's the hard reality.

So I say, Mr. Speaker, that that's why we don't think this bill really solves it. They took a couple of half measures without doing what they really needed to do, and that's unfortunate. That's unfortunate for a lot of people in this province. But hope springs eternal. Maybe the leopard can't change its spots in a day, but if enough people complain and listen and enough calls are made, maybe, just maybe, the leopard can change its spots in a month or two months or three months. Time will tell. We in the opposition will certainly do our job to bring the issues here to the Legislature, where they belong.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, you wish to participate?

Mr. Eggen: With the standing order.

The Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Eggen: I would just like to ask the hon. member. There's one area that we have not pursued, and I believe that it's very much parallel with solving the larger housing problem, and that is providing mortgage assistance. You mentioned that the Affordable Housing Task Force explored this to some degree. How do you see that unfolding? Similar to the program that was around 15 years ago or so?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe some hon. members were there. [interjections] Yes, we know some hon. members were there. I remember the Premier of the day, Premier Lougheed, announcing it in the '82 election. As I said, I thought I had a fairly good ride in Edmonton-Norwood. I could see after that program was announced that I was lucky to squeak through by 84 votes. But it did work. It did work after the mortgage program came in. It was a mortgage subsidy. It was an attempt to get young people into their first time to buy homes. Of course, that springs it open: if we get them into home ownership, that's good. The more home ownership we have, the better it is, frankly, whether it be condos or townhouses

or houses or whatever. It had a major impact, I think, and it did get some people into homes that wouldn't have been there.

Now, we in the task force said that we were looking at the spectrum – you know, from the homeless right up to that sort of level – of how to get people into home ownership. I honestly thought that this was one the government would buy. We said: okay, let's take a hundred million and put it into mortgage subsidies to precisely get sort of our young professionals. That's a bit of a problem right now: professionals, nurses and other people, technicians – you name it – people that are making a relatively good salary. But with the housing prices going up, they can't afford to buy. I've talked to a number of people there, that this would have got some people into the market. A hundred million, we think, would have been a good investment by the government, and it's not a giveaway. Obviously, it's a second mortgage, and they would get it back. So I was, frankly, a little bit surprised that the government didn't take that one up. That's one I thought they would.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others? There were a couple of others, in fairness. Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, you had a question?

Mr. Cernaiko: Not a question.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, do you have a question, sir?

Mr. Herard: I just want to ask the hon. member from the other side: with respect to mortgage assistance what is the interest rate difference between those days and today?

Mr. Martin: No doubt that was a time of very high interest rates. The impact was the same, though, because the people couldn't afford to buy the houses because of the high interest rate. They now can't afford to buy the houses because of the high cost of an overheated economy. I can tell you precisely that in Edmonton right now the provincial government is involved with the school boards. They're looking at school sites. I was at a meeting, and the city of Edmonton is going to go, precisely, into mortgage subsidy to keep some of the young people here. So they certainly see the need. The bottom line is: people can't afford houses and home ownership. We want to get them into it. So that's the bottom line.

The Speaker: Additional questions?

Then we're going to proceed with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak in third reading of Bill 34, the Tenancies Statutes Amendment Act, 2007, and to have the opportunity to be on record with some thoughts here.

This bill is an omnibus bill that amends the Residential Tenancies Act and the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act. The purpose is to respond to the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task Force. The main amendments are to regulate the frequency of rent increases for fixed-term tenancies to once a year, to provide clarification around the start date for the time referred to for rent increases, and to make it an offence to not comply with the condo conversions notice period, which is a one-year notice.

3:00

This means that amendments are to modify the notice period set out in the acts to allow for one rent increase per year. This will apply to both periodic, month-to-month, and fixed-term tenancies.

Three months' notice will still be required before increasing rent on periodic tenancies. One year's notice must be provided before ending a periodic tenancy for the purpose of converting a rental unit to a condominium or to undertake major renovations to a rental unit. No rent increases will be allowed during that one-year period. The notice for converting a mobile home site to a condominium unit or for other uses continues to be one year. These changes are retroactive to April 24, 2007. There's also a punitive clause included to apply a fine per tenant for any landlord that violates the legislation.

The major flaw with Bill 34 as I talk to my constituents is the failure to introduce any kind of rent regulation, either permanent or temporary. There is nothing in this bill to protect renters from massive rent increases while they wait for the market to stabilize, which could take two years to see the first evidence of new units. What is needed and where this bill fails is to introduce renter protection measures in the short term. I cannot support a bill with this fundamental flaw. The evidence is overwhelming to me as I speak to my constituents and other people in Alberta that Alberta renters mostly in the cities are being subjected to unreasonable rental increases due to a destabilized market.

We know that this is not a new problem. There have been many instances of rental increases that are simply rent gouging for over a year. I do believe that it's just a handful, a very small group of individuals that are taking advantage of the instability and actually gouging. Unfortunately, it gives all landlords a stigma of being unfair and unreasonable and unkind. However, it is the failure of the government to not recognize that sometimes, in rare instances, the market just does not work. In these instances, we need temporary measures taken to protect citizens in the short term.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The only way I could really support this bill because of the effect of it is to include a temporary rent regulation. This bill fails to provide protection for renters. This is critical to any plan to address the affordable housing crisis. I just think that this bill fails Albertans.

The other concern I have is that the entire substance of the bill is in the regulations. It seems to me that once again the government is hiding behind . . . [interjection] Yes. I'm going to get there. Thanks.

Once again there are regulations here that we can hide behind, making authority that allows the minister discretion that I think is undemocratic. It doesn't provide stability for anyone if the rules can be changed at a whim. If we're confident that these amendments are good, then they should be debated in the Legislature. I believe that a bill should have to be introduced in the House and open for debate and scrutiny if it's really to protect Albertans.

So to me it's clear that the government's response to the affordable housing crisis has failed to address the critical issue. What are my renters supposed to do in the short term until more affordable housing units come on stream? I had a guest here yesterday who has been looking for appropriate housing for seven months. They came from Ontario, got a really good job but no place to live. They're moving from place to place. People will put them up for a period of time, and then they have to move again. This instability is causing a lot of distress as the lady has medical issues.

I think it's the government's responsibility to listen to Albertans and respond to help them. We've heard numerous examples this week. It's especially true when the market fails to provide stability, as is the case today. I think Albertans are speaking clearly on this matter. They desperately need short-term protection, and it is this government's duty to address those concerns even if the solution falls outside of what the ideology would be.

I look at the Affordable Housing Task Force's own report.

The decision to recommend these protective measures was a very difficult one for this task force. There was clear concern among many members about the impact of rent guidelines on overall new rental supply, and on rental rates once guidelines are removed in two years. At the same time, the task force was confronted everywhere with the plight of renters who were losing their homes right now. These people have few other affordable housing options in today's overheated market. The task force understood that keeping people in their current homes wherever possible is essential while dealing with the urgent situation Alberta is facing.

The report clearly articulates why temporary rent regulations are needed. Albertans, thousands of Albertans everywhere and from all walks of life need it, most importantly of all because everybody needs a home.

I'm proud that the Alberta Liberals proposed four amendments to Bill 34. Two amendments regarding temporary rent regulations did not go through. Two others were passed this morning. One amendment, A5, writes into the legislation a once-per-year limit on rent increases. The other, A4, doubles the fines to \$10,000 for landlords who violate the rules on condo conversions. So now we have the limit on rent increases set out in the legislation, and it provides some clarification. This has been a good, democratic process. It's about standing up for Albertans who are living in fear of losing their homes because of unaffordable rent increases.

That is why the Alberta Liberal caucus has introduced amendments. We've tried to have the voices of our constituents heard, and we believe that governments must respond when the citizens they represent demand action. The price is too high if we do not. Albertans will continue to suffer, and the government responsible cannot let that happen.

I hear over and over, this week especially, about people coming to Alberta and facing housing problems, and I have those people in my own constituency. At the same time there are many long-time Albertans, long-time taxpayers who have worked hard, who have built this province, who have sacrificed, and who have wanted to have a home here that they could feel stable with, that they could feel comfortable with and have some assurance that they were safe. Bill 34 does not do that for them.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any questions or comments. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I just wanted to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods about the frequency and the amplification of these calls that are coming into your constituency office because, you know, some people are saying that they have not received one single call about the housing issue. Not that I think that I'm incredulous to that possibility, but I'm just wondering, maybe, if I just have such a different constituency. Do you get a lot of calls on this housing thing?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you very much. My office is overwhelmed with the calls. I have, actually, extra staff in right now because the calls are nonstop. We have hundreds – hundreds – of names on petitions, and we are holding a town hall on the 17th to give these people another opportunity to voice their desperation.

The Deputy Speaker: Others?

The chair now recognizes the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the debate.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to speak to this bill in third reading. I listened with a great deal of intensity last night and over the evening and into the early hours this morning. There was a lot of discussion, a lot of compassion and empathy shown in this House by all members of this Assembly. I represent an inner-city riding in the largest city in Alberta and one of the largest cities in Canada and have to deal with the issues that we're debating and bringing forward to the Assembly with new legislation that is there that will be protecting Albertans.

3:10

I want to bring to your attention, Mr. Speaker, issues that we've discussed. Even looking in the 2007 budget and business plan issues related to seniors: that seniors in need have access to financial assistance, Albertans with severe and permanent disability have access to financial assistance, seniors and persons with disabilities have appropriate access and finances to living, and health and related disability supports and services enhance independence and well-being. This is just out of the seniors. I mean, I could go through this budget ministry by ministry.

It does show that this government has in the past and will continue in the future to assist those individuals throughout the province, and there are areas in Alberta right now that are more affected than other areas. This government has addressed these issues in the past five, 10, 15 years, but in the last three weeks this government, this Premier's government, has provided a quarter of a billion dollars – a quarter of a billion dollars – of new money that is going to assist in all of these programs, whether they're for seniors, for individuals that are on low income, for individuals that need that financial support. No other province with a population of 3.1 million people has got that kind of assistance. No other province in this country provides that kind of funding support of approximately \$10,000 per Albertan for services in this province. No other province.

Now, I wanted to stress another point, Mr. Speaker, that there are solutions being worked on as well. I'm sure the opposition is well aware of the work that's being done here in Edmonton with homelessness. As well, in Calgary I'm honoured to sit on the Calgary Committee To End Homelessness, which is chaired by Steve Snyder, the president and CEO of TransAlta. Its membership includes individuals such as Rick George, the president and CEO from Suncor; Tim Hearn, the president and CEO of Imperial Oil; Mayor Bronconnier; Bishop Henry; Steve Allan of the Stampede board; Ken King of the Calgary Flames; Hal Walker, president and CEO of the Calgary Chamber of Commerce; Dr. Kabir Jivraj; Jack Davis, CEO of the Calgary health region; and a number of other very important people from the city of Calgary that have made a commitment to Calgarians and to Albertans to develop the template to end homelessness, not to manage homelessness but to end homelessness in the province of Alberta but especially specifically in the city of Calgary.

This committee has met. It has developed five subcommittees that meet on a regular basis: the prevention subcommittee, a housing subcommittee, a services subcommittee, an implementation subcommittee, and a communication and outreach subcommittee.

The work has been done, and it was actually announced in January, with the final report being drafted in December of this year and going to be available to the public and reported to the public in January of 2008. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that this is one of the most energetic and exciting committees I have ever had the opportunity to sit on, with these types of individuals that have placed their names and their organization names on the line to say that we will end homelessness in this city and in this province within 10 years.

Mr. Speaker, the issue related to individuals that are in dire need of affordable housing, those individuals that have addictions issues

and require treatment and detoxification, those individuals that are moving into Alberta that don't have a place to live, those individuals that may have been down on their luck and that don't have a damage deposit and can't meet the next month's rent: these solutions are being worked on right now. I'm not sure if the hon. members – no one from Calgary has mentioned this. Now, whether they don't read the paper, whether they're not sure of what's going on in Calgary, I can tell you that there's a huge community commitment from all the major stakeholders in the Calgary area to provide solutions regarding all of these areas.

So when we're going to be looking at individuals that have these special needs, we're going to be looking at, one, their medical assessment and their medical health, their dental assessment and dental health. We're going to be assessing them to determine what their mental health issues are, how their addictions issues may be related, and then look at being able to provide an advocacy component to it so that we can address the issues of that individual by not just plopping him into a residence, saying: here you go; live a good life. It will be to ensure that this individual will have the proper care, that he can learn life skills, that he can get employment training, that he can get a bank account. A lot of these people – and I have 2,500 homeless in my riding – don't even have a bank account.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of solutions that are being worked on, but none of the opposition members want to talk about solutions other than fixed rent controls. That's it. They just want rent controls but forget about assisting them with detoxification, about assisting them with treatment, about assisting them regarding mental health issues. I never heard that last night. In fact, I heard the Member for Calgary-Varsity say that one of his constituents committed suicide because their rent went up. I was astounded to hear that. Why wasn't he there to assist any of those individuals in his riding? That's his job. He's the MLA. The question is: what do you do as an MLA, and what are you responsible for as an MLA? You get out and you talk to your city housing component. You talk to the apartment association. You find the contacts. That's your job as an MLA. You don't put them off to government, saying, "The government's got to find you a home."

I can guarantee you this, Mr. Speaker. Any of these ministers that are responsible for any of these projects: their doors are open. Any MLA, not just the government MLAs but any MLA, whether it's from the NDs or the Liberals, can go and see a minister with a client if they want to. They can set up an appointment like any of us can, and I can guarantee you that that minister will be there to listen and will be there to help them with any issue that they have. So I'm saying that as an MLA I was elected to represent my constituency, which is a lot different than other suburban MLAs. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has the floor.

Mr. Cenaiko: I'm suggesting that there are a lot of MLAs, and from what I heard over the evening . . .

Mr. R. Miller: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: What's your citation?

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. R. Miller: Standing Orders 23 (h), (i), and (j), Mr. Speaker. Quite clearly, this member in his comments about my colleague –

you can sit down now – from Calgary-Varsity is trying to incite disruption in this Assembly. He has clearly suggested that my colleague from Calgary-Varsity is not doing his job as an MLA in representing his constituents. He clearly illustrated with his comments that he does not understand issues surrounding suicide. I would expect that as a former police officer he should know better, and I would ask him to withdraw his remarks.

The Deputy Speaker: On the point of order.

Mr. Cenaiko: I would like to remind the member that . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Is this on the point of order?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, obviously, there are no solutions to what the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity was talking about last night. He didn't provide solutions. He provided issues related to why people are going homeless but no solutions to what, in fact, he did for any of those constituents. Not one solution was provided last night, from what I heard, and so far today.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else on the point of order? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Mr. Speaker, I'm pretty surprised because the member that stood up on the point of order has misinterpreted and misquoted our Standing Orders. He said that 23(h), (i) and (j) concern riling up the House, and certainly they do not. In fact, (h) talks about making allegations against another member, which this member did not point out. It also talks about imputing false or unavowed motives, which he did not cite. It also talks about using abusive or insulting language, which he did not cite. So there is no point of order here.

As a matter of fact, what the Member for Calgary-Buffalo was doing is the exact same thing that every single member from that side of the House has been doing for the last 20 hours, and that is trying to point out some of the issues that need to be fixed and that this bill is attempting to fix. There's obviously no point of order here.

3:20

The Deputy Speaker: Well, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar almost took the words out of my mouth. There has been back and forth over the course of the last number of hours on this particular bill, this arguing back and forth of who works harder than the other. I'm sure that all MLAs work their very hardest on behalf of all their constituents. Those types of arguments aren't productive on either side of the House. I would say that if everyone spoke through the floor and waited their turn to get up and speak, we would have a lot less disruption in the House. So in my mind there's no point of order.

Hon. member, please continue.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, I'll try not to incite the opposition.

Debate Continued

Mr. Cenaiko: Mr. Speaker, what I would want to say, though, is that we do have a responsibility as elected officials. We have a responsibility to our constituents. Whether they have homes, whether they don't have homes, whether they have addictions, whether they have mental health issues, or whether they're seniors, our responsibility is to assist them in any way. When they walk through the door of our office, when they give us a phone call, that's our job to assist them. Whether we assist them through Calgary

Housing, for example, and assist them in trying to find a home, whether we assist them by looking at the Calgary Apartment Association because we've made contacts there: that's part of our job, to assist individuals doing this. Whether they need to increase their employment skills by knowing where they have to go and who to contact in the community, who they should be meeting and talking with to get that employment training: these are issues and real solutions that we as MLAs, as all elected MLAs are responsible for.

I want to move on, though, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, ministers' doors as well are always open. They're always open, whether it's one of my constituents or whether it's a constituent from Edmonton or from Ponoka or from Vermilion or from Edmonton-Mill Woods. The doors of the ministers' offices are always open, and they're there to assist. If these ministers can provide them with a contact number for an individual to be assisted in any way, that's their responsibility when they take that oath to be a minister of the Crown.

Now, I wanted to move on, Mr. Speaker, and just let you know of some of the things that we're doing in Calgary regarding the Calgary community and homelessness. For example, a subcommittee on implementation is looking to develop a business plan, a specific action plan to avoid simple platitudes, to ensure that plans are integrated based on solid information and economic analysis.

Encouraging favourable collaborative approaches regarding all of the agencies. There are thousands – thousands – of not-for-profit organizations that receive provincial funding every year. What we're doing in Calgary is getting those groups together. In fact, tomorrow I'm going to be announcing in Calgary that a number of agencies that work with individuals that are addicted to drugs and alcohol and gambling are going to get together, and they're going to now, when they're assessing individuals, have that ability to say: which would be the best facility to assess this individual and provide treatment? So these things are happening in Calgary. I'm not sure about Edmonton, but I can tell you that this is what we're looking at in Calgary.

The Calgary Committee to End Homelessness is looking at a housing trust that individuals can actually flow money into, that they can have wills and estates go into a foundation that will be there for the long term, that funding could be provided through the homeless foundation. They're looking at issues related to secondary suites and working with the city of Calgary regarding issues related to secondary suites. They're looking at a management information system so that we can track individuals so that we know what individuals need wherever they are in the community, whether they were homeless to begin with, whether they had addictions issues, a way that we can track them so that we know what we've done to assist them and/or what the next step is for them as they move to becoming healthier in our society.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many. This is a huge community that we're working on. We're looking at, as I mentioned, the case management approach, case managers that are accountable not just for issues related to housing but, as well, issues related to health through the Calgary health region, developing an integrated database that will be able to compile this information and share that information with all of these individuals, and assessing the inventory and service needs on a level of the demand of these services.

There are hundreds of not-for-profit organizations out there providing services. It's the issue of bringing them together and integrating them so that we can provide the best service to individuals. It's about looking at those agencies becoming the advocates for individuals by taking them and finding them an apartment to live in, providing the damage deposit for that individual, providing the first

month's rent for that individual. And if they damage the apartment, then that agency will be responsible, possibly, for fixing up and/or paying for the damage that may have occurred in that building. But the issue is that there needs to be someone as an advocate for the individual as they go through the process of cleansing themselves to become healthier and/or ensuring that the mental health issues that they have are being dealt with.

Mr. Speaker, we've worked on drafting the communications plan that's going to be required because, again, this is going to be a huge plan that is going to focus on all three levels of government: federal, provincial, and municipal. As well, the private sector is going to be involved because they want to be involved in the Calgary community and in the surrounding areas because they want to give back to society. So these are some of the things.

I won't go on for much longer other than I did want to say that even though we were debating one small piece of legislation over the last number of hours, there are other things happening throughout Alberta. There are other organizations that are working on solutions. They're not all debated in this Assembly because there are individuals that are volunteering their time to work with not-for-profit organizations because they have a social responsibility. We all have a social responsibility because we all are compassionate, and we're all empathetic regarding those issues related to those less fortunate.

So I just want to end, Mr. Speaker, by saying that this legislation is the first step. I don't think anyone heard the President of the Treasury Board say that we're not going to do anything else. I think you heard the President of the Treasury Board say that this is the first step, that this is what we're going to do regarding this. But there are a number of other areas that each of the ministries is working on, and those programs are in place.

As well, again, a quarter of a billion dollars of new funding: no other province in this country or, I think, any state in the United States of America has ever seen this kind of funding go into affordable housing.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Does anyone wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Yes. I really appreciate the comments from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo regarding the roles and responsibilities of MLAs and the comprehensive list of services that he's run through that are available for constituents. I am a new MLA. I'm learning. I have lots to learn yet, I suppose, but I believe I'm working very hard for my constituents. I'd like you to tell me what it is that you think other MLAs may not be doing from that list of services that you've suggested.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, that's a good question. I think the issue is that it might be a little different for those that live in Edmonton versus those that live in other parts of the province. My assistant, of course, takes part in all of the training that's provided by the LAO, which I think is tremendous and a tremendous opportunity for them to learn regarding what's available from government.

But it's not just government programs that are available to our constituents. There are a number of programs out there that are provided by a number of organizations, whether it's the Red Cross or whether it's Samaritans, whether it's, you know, a number of the seniors' facilities that may be in your community. So it's the issue of not just yourself but, as well, your staff that you have in your office are there to assist you because you can't be there all the time. They're there more than you are, and they probably know your constituents better than you do. It's your responsibility as the MLA

to ensure that they have looked at all the services out there, whether they're government, whether they're federal government, and/or whether they're municipal, and/or whether they're not for profit.

It's, again, building that contact list that you have out there to ensure: can we assist them with this issue or this issue or this one? Who's the contact person that could be reached here or here? Who are the contact persons in the ministries' offices that are going to be essential to finding out and/or providing you with the assistance that you may need? Each of the ministries have, you know, those contact people that we may need. Whether it's issues related to mental health or issues related to the Calgary regional health authority, they have a government relations person there that's willing to help you. I'm sure that Capital health has the same. They're there to help you regarding issues related to mental health, so we can be there to assist them and ensure that services are provided, whether it's issues related to seniors' supportive housing, seniors' programs regarding benefits, dental benefits, or housing, some housing benefits. There are contact numbers out there. Those are the things that I learned, and I've only been here six years. But those are critical if you want to ensure that you're providing service.

3:30

This isn't about getting re-elected, although I think some MLAs think that's what it's about. It's about an opportunity to serve the community. By serving the community, you're going to be using those social agencies all around you to be able to provide the best services for your constituents.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw first and then the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to ask the hon. member: I know that he has been involved with the committee in Calgary with some of the best minds in Calgary looking at some of these issues and talked a lot about the social agencies and trying to network and make those more available, but has your group or committee discussed at all the idea of rent controls, and what thinking have they come out with if you've discussed this issue?

Mr. Cenaiko: The topic of rent controls has come up, but there's been no discussion regarding it. The issue is that we're looking for some quick wins, obviously, and to be able to pick that low-hanging fruit in the next few months or so. But this committee's goal is to end homelessness, so it's long-term, sustainable solutions. With funding that is coming now from the province, obviously this is going to be assisting us. Obviously, we have to work with the federal government because they have a responsibility as well, and the municipal government as well is in place. So it's issues related to long-term solutions. But as well there are opportunities to increase capacity within the city. There are opportunities to increase treatment and detoxification for those individuals.

Seventy per cent of the 2,500 homeless that I have are addicted to drugs or alcohol, 70 per cent. Of those same 2,500 approximately 40 per cent of them are involved in criminal activity because of the fact that they have an addiction to drugs or alcohol. So they are active in the community. As Chief Boyd from the Edmonton Police Service – if we could in fact stop the cycle of criminal activity, if we could stop the cycle of the addictions of alcohol and drug abuse, you could actually reduce your crime rate in your community by 40 per cent. That's huge. Now, you have to remember, too, that only 6 per cent of the criminal population is creating 94 per cent of the crime in your community. So it's again targeting those 6 per cent.

There are a number of strategies that have to be worked on in the

future. Again, it ties in with long-term goals and long-term vision, but as well this is about ending homelessness, not about managing it.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to try and zero in on some comments on Bill 34. First of all, I think the government across the way is to be commended on setting up the process to hear Albertans about housing across the province in the nine locations. And the results that were achieved is the report on housing. But I think one of the things that the government has to recognize: in setting up the task force to do this, they created, I believe, an expectation on the part of Albertans. The expectation, of course, is to meet with people across the province and listen carefully to their suggestions.

Then, of course, there is an expectation on behalf of the people that are participating that many of their suggestions are going to be implemented. I think that's probably one of the things that's caused this whole matter of housing to be such a contentious issue because, you see, when you listen to people and they make suggestions and then you have recommendations and only 12 of them are implemented, people are wondering if they've been jeopardized and their time has been wasted.

I think it looks at the whole question – I'm kind of a Frasier. My wife and I watch Frasier a lot. And when I was listening to the debate across the way from Calgary, I was thinking of Dr. Frasier Crane's favourite comment: are you listening? And, you know, I remember the old days of the Social Credit, which I was part of and was honoured to serve Mr. Ray Speaker. We use to send out task forces to listen to the people of Alberta. I was very blessed with Ray. He really believed you had to listen carefully. If you set an expectation on the part of people, listen carefully, and make sure that you have got the content that they're talking about, and then take some risks and implement the suggestions.

I think what I'm saying: when you create a democratic environment in which you get people to talk about their interests and needs, I think then it sets up an expectation. If people are not being listened to and not listened carefully to, I think they get very, very upset, and they tend to be turned off. So, anyway, I'm just suggesting that's something that you may want to look at in terms of processing some of the information that you're getting in across the province.

The Deputy Speaker: On a point of order? Please take your seat. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Herard: It's more a point of clarification. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member's conversation because I probably could have done the same thing to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, but it seems to me that third reading is about what's contained between the front page of this document and the back page of this document. It's not about consultation processes. It's not about all sorts of programs that we might have in the city of Calgary. It's about the bill that we have in front of us, not the bill we could have had or should have had.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you calling a point of order?

Mr. Herard: Yes. I want clarification as to whether or not, Mr. Speaker, you go by those rules.

The Deputy Speaker: What's your citation on your point of order?

An Hon. Member: Beauchesne 489, Denis.

Mr. Herard: Yeah. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else on the point of order?

An Hon. Member: He didn't give a citation.

The Deputy Speaker: I didn't quite hear exactly what the hon. member was saying except for, was it relevance?

An Hon. Member: There wasn't one. No point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, hon. members, as I listened to this debate for the hours that I was in here through second reading and committee and now third reading, I guess relevance could have been called pretty much on every speaker, as could Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j), as was previously raised. If the Assembly wants zero tolerance and has these Standing Orders and the rules administered to that level, this Speaker could very happily do that. However, the tradition of the House was to allow for some flexibility, and unless things get difficult, that has been tolerated. So I don't believe there's a point of order in this case under the traditional sense of the way we've been operating in this Assembly.

I would ask the member to continue on with his speech.

Debate Continued

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try and continue and try and be a little more specific in terms of housing now. I'm trying to sum this up with about five points based on the discussion I've heard somewhat this afternoon and last night. There is currently across the province an imbalance of supply and demand when it comes to the question of housing.

The second point I'd like to make: the best solution is to increase supply. However, we recognize that that will take time. In the interim, there's an issue with how people are going to be accommodated with housing needs across the province. I think that's the big question: how are people going to be accommodated? So that's a major. The MLA for Calgary-Buffalo talked about some of these ways people are going to be looked after. I think that's what the tension issue is. People are unsure, it seems to me, of where they're going to go, how they're going to fit. I'm encouraged by the fact that we are going to have something for them.

The third point I'd like to make in terms of trying to sum up what I've been hearing over the last year: in the interim many people, as I've just said, are getting squeezed, particularly the low-income, the disabled, people on fixed incomes, and the working poor.

3:40

I had a situation in St. Albert. This is a lady with two children out of wedlock. She's an aboriginal lady, lovely lady, and she really wanted to get back in the work stream by going to MacEwan and taking a year's program in hotel management, I believe it was. The Salvation Army presently, I believe, is helping her live in her accommodation. I'm hoping, with what I've heard, just talking about this question of housing again and getting the right accommodation for her that with one of these new programs – and I've asked my constituency manager to get the information because she's worked with her and get back to her to see if she can fit into one of these areas and get back on that program. It's a little more compli-

cated than I've let on today, but I'm encouraged that some people are going to be helped. That's what I'm trying to say.

I think one of the things that has really come clean to me across this issue is that there seems to have not been in the past a plan. No plan. There now is an indication that there is planning. Unfortunately, because there hasn't been a plan, people are getting hurt, and I think that's difficult.

The fourth thing that I want to make in terms of my position was that I supported temporary rent caps, and I was hoping we could get a time limit on that.

The other issue I must talk about is the question of landlords. I have received a lot of feedback from my constituency on the landlord issue, and I want to say this very clearly: I think there are a lot of wonderful, good landlords. I found that out when I was the regional director in social services. We have a lot of good landlords, and I think they have been blacklisted by some of the discussions that we've had in the House. I don't think it's their fault. I will even go out and say that the majority of our landlords are good people, private enterprisers, good people trying to make a dollar. I even know of some that have talked to me on the phone that have said that they have reduced the increase they could have had in order to accommodate people that are in low-income situations. So I think the landlords maybe have taken a little bit of a kick on this one.

I'm really saying, too, that it isn't the fault of the renters. I think the problem lies solely presently with the government. I'm not being overnegative, and I'm encouraged that they're going to do something about it. I think that's fine. I think that we've failed to create affordable housing, and the problems that we see are a result of a strong economy. I'm, hopefully, going to see some changes in the near future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there anyone who wishes to add a comment or a question on Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for this opportunity to speak on Bill 34 in third reading. The House has had a rather detailed debate over this very important piece of legislation over the last 24 hours, and that's for the good. I think it's important. That's what this House is about. That's what the House should be about: to engage each other, to challenge each other with respect to the pros and cons of a piece of legislation that's before it.

I have a question before I proceed further. I don't want to forget this. Maybe the President of the Treasury Board will have the answer for me on that. The question is a kind of afterthought or reflecting on, now, the consequences that will follow from this bill and how it will be implemented, what kind of regulations will be developed to ensure that its very limited objectives can indeed be achieved through its careful implementation through the development of regulations.

The question that I have specifically, Mr. Speaker, for the President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Service Alberta is whether the requirement that there can only be one annual increase in rent applies to a building, a site, a suite, or whether it applies to the owner or the landlord. Lots of rental property is being flipped back and forth, unfortunately, and that's causing the prices to go up and not reflecting necessarily the substantive value of the property. It's the rental increases that encourage people to engage in this. They simply hike their rents up, show a higher cash flow, and then put the property back on the market for someone else to take care of it.

Therefore, I think that when it comes to Bill 34 and what kind of

constraints it generates for rent increases only once a year, there's no clear answer to my question in the text of the bill itself. Will there be specific attention paid in the writing up and drawing up of the regulations to clarify that the one increase a year applies to specific sites or suites and not to the owner? The reason I raise this question is that the penalties seem to apply to the owner who at the time of the rent may be not in compliance. That owner, however, could change through sale or purchase. I have no answer that I can find anywhere in the bill which tells me who will be held responsible, who will be responsible to pay those fines. So that's the question.

That's just a specific question that I find is a loophole, you know, in the writing of the legislation. Even if you take the legislation seriously and say that it will be of assistance and help to lots of Albertans, which I don't think it will be, but that's a different issue, within the parameters of the bill I think there are some questions that need to be addressed. I'm sure that the minister will pay attention to those. I would like to hear from him either here or later, sooner rather than later.

So to go on from there, Mr. Speaker, much has been said on this bill from this side of the House, from the NDP caucus side, which draws attention to how disappointing the bill has been with respect to what the task force recommendations hoped such a bill would achieve in moderating the rate of increase in rents, which a very large number of Albertans face under current market conditions. The President of the Treasury Board the other day in conversation with me during the debate acknowledged that there are at least a million people, 1 million Albertans out of 3.1 or 3.2 million, who live in rental residences and accommodations.

Certainly, these are rough estimates. I hope that the government and this minister and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing will pay more attention to that so that we have a more firm grip on the number of Albertans who in fact are in the rental market as tenants or potential tenants. My suspicion is that the numbers would be anywhere from a million to about 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 million Albertans that will be affected by it.

3:50

This bill and the provisions in it and the associated programs which help renters through subsidies or through protection against eviction will help only a very small proportion of this total number of renters. Most of the renters fall above the income level that would be qualifying for subsidies. These are middle-class, middle-income Albertans, most of them young, most of them former students who have just entered the labour market as accountants, as teachers, as nurses, as town planners, what have you. These are the people who are coasting, as it were, for the next few years. They are renting whilst trying to save in order to buy their first house. They will not be assisted through this rent subsidy program that you have because it's income contingent.

There was an interesting letter today by a single mother who is looking after a child and has a job that pays \$44,000. She gives exact figures, and her take-home pay, including everything, you know, including all kinds of child benefits and so on and so forth, is about \$2,300 a month. Then she gives a list of the different items in her budget and how she is finding it extremely difficult and, in fact, now is unable to go to sleep, saying: "What can I do? How is this Bill 34 and its provisions going to help me." She says, "It's not going to help me."

So it is these people who would fall just a little above the cut-off line for qualifying to get this subsidy that this minister and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing have drawn attention repeatedly to as a way of seeking some help and protection against this intolerable situation. These people are the ones who are really going to be hurt, who don't qualify for the subsidy. Their ability to

save is going to be undermined seriously by the rate increases that they face. Their hope to buy a house down the line is going to evaporate in conjunction with the necessity for them to pay rents, which can become intolerably high for them. They have no recourse, no appeal, no review as provided in this bill to seek a redress to their concern that their rent increase is unreasonable, that it's exorbitant, that it's gouging.

Given that there's no redress, no opportunity to appeal, this very large number of middle-class Albertans, mostly young but not just young, are being thrown into, I think, a very difficult situation, and they are likely, in my view, to find themselves being deprived because of the weaknesses of this bill from being able to build a financial capacity to have enough money to put as a down payment to be able to buy their first home. So, Mr. Speaker, that's the problem with this piece of legislation.

The second point that I want to make in this third reading about the bill is the provisions that it has for condominiumization. I've been around in this city for a very long time. I know of investors who buy a property – and this has been going on since the mid-70s. I have known people from that time who tried to benefit from it. They're investors, but they don't create real value. They don't create any real commodity or add value to something that they have when they buy a rental property, apply for condominiumization, very quickly turn that property into condominium property, and then sell to people who want to own their first house.

During this process the value of the property shoots up. As purchasers they benefit from that rise in value through the conversion to condominiumization, without having created added, recognizable, substantive value that adds to the GDP or the wealth of the community in general – we call it in terms of GDP provincial wealth – but is essentially speculative activity, not benefiting either tenants or potential owners.

So this flipping activity, as sometimes it's called in the housing market, a quick purchase and then trying to flip it over to another person who wants to buy quickly and then sell again or convert it into condominiums, is not going to be discouraged by this bill. It is that kind of activity that doesn't really create any real value, a new commodity or new article from which as investors, as entrepreneurs they would have the right to benefit and is what is also contributing to the escalation of rents and the problems of affordability, whether you are a tenant and therefore renting or whether you are someone who hopes to become an owner sooner rather than later by hopefully being able to save while you're renting a property. It's a chain of events here, a succession of decisions that people make on either side of the line, which will not by virtue of this bill becoming law necessarily help alleviate the pressures related to very rapid escalation in the cost of purchasing a house or in the cost of renting a house.

Mr. Speaker, the third point I want to make is that it exposes lots of people who are income earners to feel that simply buying a house, having a decent rental property even, a residence, is getting out of reach, and that leads to frustration. That leads to hopelessness. One particular group that I fear I will be dealing with fairly soon, in the next two months, is the very large number of postsecondary students who flock to our universities, colleges, institutes, and so on, in big cities as well as in regional centres, such as Grande Prairie or Red Deer or Medicine Hat or Lethbridge – you name it – Fort McMurray. These students are going to find themselves in a very difficult situation because there is no cap, there are no limits within which rents can be raised by landlords. Already most students, these students particularly who had to move away from their towns and villages and farms to come to these big cities, bear this disproportionate . . .

Mr. Speaker, I think I'm out of time. Thank you.

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

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Leader of the Opposition I think I'm entitled to 90 minutes on this? Thank you very much. [interjection] A good sense of humour, Harvey. Thank you.

I've always felt that the point of debate in third reading is to talk to the effects of a bill that's making its way through the Legislature, and I think that's well worth considering here because the effects of this bill are going to be felt for months and, I would say, years to come very acutely by some people. I worry about what happens over the next several months as all the people that are getting these large notices of rent increases have to make their decisions, because this bill will not have the protection that they would have if there was a rent cap in place or that they would have in a normally balanced market. I think most of us in this room will agree that a normal, healthy market needs a minimum of regulation. I guess that where we disagree is that when a market is totally out of balance, as it is right now, it is the place of government to step in.

4:00

So what are the effects going to be over the next several months? Well, I think it will depend on different sectors. For seniors you may see some moving away from the province to take up with family in other provinces where they can afford to live or, you know, moving back to live with their children within Alberta. For students – in particular, I'm sensitive to the plight of postsecondary students because the University of Alberta is in my constituency – I think you're going to find, come August and September, a real sense of panic among students as they realize that the cost of postsecondary education, which is already daunting, is just going to become some hundreds of dollars a month more costly. That may well discourage some students from actually seeking postsecondary education, or else it'll drive others to take a second or a third job while they are attending university or college or technical school and as a result get less out of that learning experience and perhaps even fail or get discouraged. So students, I think, will see things played out.

Young professionals or young middle-income earners – and I'm thinking of teachers, nurses, physiotherapists, firefighters, police officers, all those kinds of people – I know already are really struggling to find places to live, are in fact leaving the province or are not coming to this province because of the cost of housing and, again, because of this bill's failure to provide the protection that's needed.

I think we're going to see a lot of human casualties here.

Mr. Danyluk: Eleven thousand in three months.

Dr. Taft: I'm getting comments from the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

So over the next several months I think we'll see this issue escalate, and barring a really sharp downturn in the market, I think that escalation could continue for a couple of years. One of the frightening things, for us in the Liberal caucus at least, is that the number of rental units being constructed is not showing signs of any surge. In fact, it's tailing off. The number of rental units in the market is tailing off. So instead of a solution looming on the horizon, it's going to be six or eight months until all these units are opened up. There is no solution at all. In fact, the solution may be receding into the sunset. So I need to emphasize that there are going to be human casualties over the next several months.

There's also, in my view, going to be a real hit to the economy.

I mean, we think we have a labour shortage now. It's only going to get worse because people moving to Alberta from other provinces aren't going to have a place to live. Even if they could find a place, they wouldn't be able to afford it. I know this is happening because I hear these accounts every week as I travel around the province and speak to businesses who want to bring in, say, chefs for restaurants, staff for restaurants, for example. A big challenge. Reporters for media outlets coming in from other provinces: a big challenge. Health workers, of course, construction workers, all of those kinds of positions are going to be more difficult to fill than ever because the people who would come here to fill them and take the job can't find a place they can afford to live, unfortunately, again, another negative side effect of this bill.

I also think that an unanticipated economic problem that this bill will create is to increase economic instability in Alberta. What we're seeing now is a dramatic spike in the cost of housing. Dramatic spikes are typically followed by dramatic collapses. We've lived through that in Alberta. Just about any resource-based or commodity-based economy in the world faces that, and because this policy does not dampen the spike, it's going to mean that the risk of a dramatic fall is that much more great, and therefore the risk of instability for the economy is increased.

I also think that an unintended effect of this policy will actually be greater cost to the taxpayer. We're already seeing, as the minister so frequently reminds us – what is it? – \$285 million or something in additional taxpayer funding over the next two years, I believe, if I've got the figures correct. But I don't think that'll be the end of it. I think that once this crisis really, really starts to peak, starting in the fall, the public demand for more subsidies and more spending will grow and will be irresistible, particularly as we head into the red zone before a general election. So I could well see this government pouring tens and tens and tens of millions of additional dollars into this issue when simple good regulation would in fact allow the same problem to be corrected without a lot of expenditure. So I think this is going to be costly to the taxpayer.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, there's the social cost to the cities, the big cities, Edmonton and Calgary, and the mid-size cities, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, that carry the lion's share of the problem for homelessness and affordable housing. As those problems increase, as homelessness itself increases, and as the number of people who can't afford housing increases, well, the cities are going to have to bear the burden.

I think we will see an even greater number of people out on the sidewalks, living in the parks. In fact, I heard a term yesterday, and I might as well put it on the record here. This is not something we created ourselves, but it was in reference to a homeless person walking through the streets carrying a sleeping bag just before 8 o'clock yesterday morning. In fact, it's a regular occurrence for this particular person. He's living somewhere in a park or river valley, and just before 8 every morning, when he would get chased out, he rolls up his sleeping bag and walks through a particular neighbourhood. One of the people who has watched this turned to one of our caucus members yesterday and said: have you seen that homeless fellow go by every morning just before 8 carrying his Stelmach suite on his back? I think that term might begin to get some currency here. I'm not using it in an inappropriate way.

We're going to see a lot more people living that way, and the burden of that's going to be on the cities. As I walk down Stephen Avenue in Calgary or as I walk down Whyte Avenue or Jasper Avenue in Edmonton or as I go to Grande Prairie or other places, the number of homeless people is shocking. Who has to pick that up? The cities. So this is going to be yet one more strain between this government and the municipal governments.

Ultimately, I think the highest cost and the most tragic cost will be

visited on families and children. When I'm in Grande Prairie and I have people in tears speaking to me about families living in trailers, not proper trailers in trailer parks but little holiday trailers, trying to make it through the winter or families living in the crew cabs of pickup trucks and, you know, lucky if they get a shower every few days, I know that this problem is out of control, and that is occurring. I ask myself: what's happening to those families? Is it any surprise that those families split up? Is it any surprise that those kids don't do well in school, kids who move several times through one school year because their families can't find a home? Where are those kids going to be in six or eight or 10 or 20 years, Mr. Speaker? Everybody needs a home. We owe it to families, we owe it to children, we owe it to every citizen of this province to take whatever steps we need to take to make sure that they have an affordable home. This bill, in my view, fails utterly in that respect.

So what will be the effects of this bill, Mr. Speaker? I think the effects of this bill will be a series of problems: short-term problems, economic problems, higher costs for taxpayers, problems for municipalities, and ultimately and, I think, most severely and tragically a series of problems for families and children.

4:10

I'm disappointed in this bill. I'm disappointed in this government. There was middle ground that could have been taken. We don't have to get into rent caps for all time. The Alberta Liberals put forward a position: one year, 365 days, 10 per cent. Not even a rent freeze. A 10 per cent rent cap. And it goes nowhere. I find that's a telling sign of a government that has lost heart, is failing to look voters in the eye, is failing to sit down with the people who've turned up here in the dozens in the last few days and listen to those stories and take those stories to heart. I think this is a government, as I said, that's lost its heart and is well on the way to losing its soul. It's a sad comment on what has been a proud political dynasty for so long, Mr. Speaker.

With those comments, I think my message is clear, and you can tell where we're going to be voting on Bill 34. We'll be voting against it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Questions or comments?

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Speaker's Ruling

Referring to a Member by Name

The Deputy Speaker: Just before the hon. member starts, a member's name was raised by two different members in this House in unique ways, and we don't allow members to be referred to by their proper names. It was used on both sides of the House this afternoon. I just caution members that it's best to edit those out of your speeches and be on the safe side.

Debate Continued

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the debate.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be very brief because I know that I was here all night, and many of the people here have certainly shared our thoughts with each other during the night. But I'm really delighted that my colleagues from Rocky Mountain House and Stony Plain are going to actually be able to hear me now.

There are a couple of questions that I would have liked to have

had answered. The minister has said that he is considering 30 per cent of income to evaluate who would be eligible for help with the housing part of it. That's fine, but clearly he's not going to worry about 30 per cent of, as he mentioned, say, \$100,000. What I wasn't clear on is: exactly what is the cut-off? Where are they going to create the criteria and then look at the 30 per cent?

Another question that I would have liked to have had answered was: does the year criterion go with the unit, or does it go with the tenant? For instance, if a landlord raises the rent on a tenant in January and the unit is sold in February, it now has a new owner. Is that new owner then allowed to raise the rent one more time? Who is protected? Is it the unit that's protected for the year, or is it the tenant that is protected for the year? I never really had a clear answer on that.

The market system works very, very well. It's very creative because it's competitive, but I think it has to be balanced to work, and I think that we've all agreed in this House that the major problem we have is supply. Is it the government's job to create incentives to ensure that we have those units being built? It's probably half and half because I don't believe for a second that if a developer would be able to build something and make money, it wouldn't be built now.

Perhaps the government has to be able to put in rules that would be an incentive for private developers to certainly go into what would be considered either transitional housing or affordable housing. I've heard that we don't want to interfere in the market, and I basically agree with that, but I do believe that it's the government's job to make the rules that level the playing field so that everyone is on the same competitive basis.

This bill has helped with the timeline and certainly the enforcement mechanisms, but I don't believe that it truly protects against immoral rent raises. For that reason, I will not be able to support it.

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

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on the bill?

Mr. Hancock: A point of procedure. Would the chair believe it was appropriate to ask for a shortening of the time for the bells? I don't believe many of our colleagues would be concerned about it, but I'm a little reluctant to even ask because we have no way of letting them know that the bells will be shortened to one minute.

The Deputy Speaker: I can put the question to the House before we take the vote. It has to be unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:18 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

The Deputy Speaker: Just for clarification, members, the one minute is the time between the first bell and the second bell.

For the motion:

Abbott	Ducharme	Lindsay
Ady	Evans	Lund
Amery	Goudreau	Melchin
Calahasen	Hancock	Ouellette

Cao	Herard	Pham
Cardinal	Horner	Prins
Cenaiko	Jablonski	Snelgrove
Danyluk	Johnson	Tarchuk
DeLong	Johnston	Webber
Doerksen	Knight	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

Eggen	Miller, R.	Pastoor
Flaherty	Pannu	Taft

Totals: For – 30 Against – 6

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a third time]

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

Bill 31
Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007

[Adjourned debate May 1: Mr. MacDonald]

The Deputy Speaker: Does anyone wish to speak on Bill 31? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking on the Mental Health Amendment Act, the members from my constituency point of view would support this act. We believe it will create an improvement in the current systems that is needed.

There are cases both for and against the proposed community treatment orders. This is a complex issue that has supports and opponents. While CTOs are intended to provide a more structured approach to treatment, there is a legal and ethical dilemma of potentially violating a patient's rights as well as inconsistency with today's medical philosophy around the right to refuse treatment and evidence-based decision-making on the use of the least invasive alternative. But as a whole, from the perspective of my constituency, there are more that support than are against this particular act. Therefore, with some of the reservations that have already been expressed about the bill, I will be supporting it, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Does anyone wish to close debate? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar

Rev. Abbott: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been some great comments, and during Committee of the Whole we look forward to answering some of the questions that have come up. I would just like to thank all of those who participated in the debate on Bill 31, and I move second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a second time]

Bill 32
Animal Health Act

[Debate adjourned May 1: Mr. MacDonald speaking]

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a couple of

questions that I would like to ask on this bill. I'm a very strong believer in definitions so that we're all talking off the same page and singing out of the same songbook, so to speak. The definitions of a reportable disease and notifiable disease seem to be open ended to me, and I'm not exactly sure that I understand the total difference in those. How frequently do new reportable or new notifiable diseases arise? Over the past decade how many of either one of these has emerged as a concern? I would leave anything like BSE aside, which was certainly an anomaly.

Another question that I have that would raise a flag for me as a professional health care worker. Section 6(3) states that "the chief provincial veterinarian may appoint individuals who are not registered veterinarians as inspectors." I would suspect that that is a very solid piece of knowledge that everyone should have, certainly to be an inspector, when they have such great responsibilities and significant authority under this bill. So I just wondered if the minister could perhaps quickly elaborate on that issue. I think it's a very important one. Perhaps they'll be using vet techs; however, I'm not sure that I think that that's a high enough level with the authority that they carry.

They speak of control zones. It would prevent the importation or movement of animals into Alberta from neighbouring jurisdictions, and they would have the authority in neighbouring jurisdictions be present. So they're talking about animals moving from control zone to control zone. How would this process really unfold? I think my main question on that one would be: what effect will TILMA have on animals that are coming from B.C.? Do we have higher standards or lower standards, and which standard would be looked at in terms of TILMA being assessed against that question?

The last one. I believe that when we're speaking of the appeal board, it really should be somebody who is not directly affected by the decision that is being made. I think that anyone who has listened to me talk about continuing care, long-term care, et cetera – I really believe that independent, outside eyes are the ones that actually see in a clearer, unbiased way exactly what is going on. Perhaps someone could record those questions, and I could get the written answers. I see the House leader nodding.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka on Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

4:30

Mr. Prins: I was just going to say that I had a big long speech that I could read on this. I'm going to refrain from doing that now, but we can answer in writing to those questions.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have had a robust week of democracy in this Chamber, and I think that we all deserve the opportunity to call it 6 o'clock. I would so move that we adjourn until Monday the 14th at 1 p.m.

[Motion carried; at 4:31 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1 p.m.]