

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 28, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/05/28

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. As we begin our deliberations in this sitting of the Legislature, we ask for the insight we need to do our work to the benefit of our province and its people and to the benefit of our country. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, if you now would join in the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Please sing in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Hon. members and particularly the young people in the audience, the gentleman who led us in the singing of our national anthem, Mr. Paul Lorieau, one year ago was of course riveting everyone in North America in singing the national anthem at the hockey games for the Edmonton Oilers. Sadly, neither the Oilers nor the Flames are involved this year, but we are all supportive of the Ottawa Senators.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly His Excellency Tsuneo Nishida, ambassador of Japan, and his wonderful wife, Keiko. With the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations it was my pleasure to host the ambassador and his wife at a luncheon earlier today to welcome him to Alberta.

Japan is one of Alberta's most important international partners, with annual two-way trade totalling more than \$2.5 billion. Since 1970 Alberta has had a trade office in Tokyo promoting Alberta's exports and encouraging Japanese investment. But, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's Japan relations go far beyond trade. For example, 18 Alberta municipalities are twinned with Japanese cities and towns, and Alberta has had a sister province relationship with Hokkaido for more than 25 years.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that our honoured guests will now please rise and receive our traditional warm welcome.

head:

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a very talented and successful Alberta youth, Mr. Ryan Hodgson of

Okotoks. Last year Ryan was chosen from among 132 candidates to receive the 4-H Premier's award, the highest award in the 4-H program.

Ryan has been a member of Alberta's 4-H program for the past 10 years, specifically the Millarville Stockland 4-H Beef Club and the Millarville 4-H Multi Club where he's held several executive positions. He is well known in his community for his exceptional leadership, communication, and personal development skills, and it was these qualities that earned him this great honour.

Along with 27 other exceptional youth Ryan spent last year as a 4-H ambassador promoting the opportunities of the program. I know that his efforts played an important role in contributing to 4-H, culminating this year as the 2006 Premier's award winner. Ryan is here to be presented to the Assembly and to meet with Premier Stelmach. Mr. Speaker, Ryan with his parents, Steve and Debbie, and his brother Matthew are seated in your gallery, and I ask them to now rise and receive the usual warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly three guests visiting from the Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency. Watching these proceedings today are Francois, Elizabeth, and Sarah Hebert. Mr. and Mrs. Hebert not only farm; they operate a large feedlot in the St. Paul area. But, most importantly, they are the very proud parents of Matthew Hebert, who is a researcher with the government caucus. They are also accompanied by their daughter Sarah, who is in her third year of education at the University of Alberta. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly a group visiting from Mother Teresa school in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. This is a group of 27 students who are here for the week, and they are participating in School at the Legislature. They are led by their teacher, Ms Kelly Laxdal, and she's also ably assisted by teacher-partners Ms Virginia English and Ms Jolene Ryall. This group is in the members' gallery, and I would now ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a class of 57 grade 6 students from Albert Lacombe, teachers Mr. Joe Esposito, Mrs. Paddi Brown, and parents and helpers Mrs. Donna Maxton, Mrs. Leslie Begert, and Mrs. Bourgeois. I wish them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The second group, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce the chairman of the Greater St. Albert Catholic regional school division and the vice-chair. The chair is Rosaleen McEvoy – and I don't know where she is, but hopefully she's here – and Jacquie Hansen, the vice-chair. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two series of introductions today. The first is a very special group of visitors from Norway that are here as part of a Rotary group study exchange. They're led by a Rotarian of 14 years, Kristin Mourud, who is a physiotherapist and also a coach. The team members are Siri Svere, who is a sheep farmer and also a municipal politician in Oslo; Roger Espeli, who is involved in hotel management; Mr. Finn Holm, who is in health management; and the last member of the team is Camilla Brekke, who is a lawyer. They're accompanied by three members of the Rotary Club of Edmonton South: Gordon Edmiston, Delores Knudsen, and Hank Hendricks. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:10

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is a very special person to the members of the Alberta Liberal caucus. She is a long-time health care professional, a former vice-president of the Alberta Liberal Party, and currently the nominated candidate in Sherwood Park. I would ask Louise Rogers to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Carol Wenger and Brenda Komick. Carol and Brenda are Palace Casino workers entering their 262nd day on strike due in part to the government's failure to protect Alberta workers from unfair employers. [interjections] The compassion can be heard around the House.

Carol has worked at the Palace Casino since June of last year in maintenance. Carol originally hails from Saskatchewan and came to Edmonton in 1972. In her off time she enjoys relaxing and going for walks. Brenda Komick is a slot attendant at the Palace Casino for the past three years. She has a son who is 17 years old and moved to Edmonton from Vancouver four years ago to be closer to her mother, who lives in a seniors' home. In her spare time she likes to be with her family.

I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that they please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

Ukrainian Foundation for College Education

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to acknowledge the efforts of the Ukrainian Foundation for College Education and its Kyiv Konnection fundraising banquet held earlier this month. More than 300 people attended the banquet, including representatives from the government of Alberta, businesspeople, academics, and members of Alberta's Ukrainian community. The event raised about \$12,000 for MacEwan College's Ukrainian resource and development centre.

The Ukrainian resource and development centre fosters innovation, leadership, and education within the national and international communities in community development, the arts, digital communication, business, education, and assisting Ukrainian Canadians to develop and retain their cultural identity and participate more effectively in the multicultural life of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the Ukrainian Foundation for College Education is a nonprofit society, and since 1994 its overall purpose has been to

raise funds to carry out Ukrainian education projects, particularly in co-operation with the college system. Projects include providing students with financial awards and promoting donation giving for Ukrainian college education. Over the years the Ukrainian Foundation for College Education has helped to raise more than \$4.5 million for these worthwhile projects.

Mr. Speaker, we should all be very proud of the volunteer work and the accomplishments of these dedicated Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Community Initiatives Program

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently in question period the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie raised objection to nonmatching grants issued by government to volunteer groups, which include St. Luke Catholic school, Alberta Native Friendship Centres, Kids Help Phone, River Valley Alliance, and St. Albert Senior Citizens' Club. These groups deliver valuable services to our communities. Their members offer thousands of volunteer hours. However, at times they are not in a position to match their grants. In these cases, from time to time this government supports them with nonmatching CIP grant assistance, which is subject to transparent grants reconciliation. In his question the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie further referred to the CIP grants issued to these volunteer groups by saying, "Well, you were paying [them] five times more than they deserved anyway."

Mr. Speaker, let me set the record straight. I suggest to you that this government could not do enough to support such volunteers, who take the initiative and donate their personal time for free to enrich our children's lives, to address social issues in our native population, to protect our children from violence and abuse and offer refuge, or build parks in the province or care for our seniors. Anyone who suggests that this government supports these groups five times too much is either ignorant of the value of the work that these groups provide or has little appreciation for volunteerism.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to use this opportunity to thank previously mentioned groups and assure them that this government will continue to appreciate and support their efforts despite the opposition's criticism.

Thank you.

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

Alberta's Social Infrastructure

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to talk about potholes and politics. Potholes happen. When we live in a climate where the ground freezes and thaws, spaces will open and road surfaces collapse. Depending on the budget for roads and the kind of winter, they may be repaired by summer, or we spend a long time trying to avoid them. We may blame the authorities, but we know that even with the best of care some potholes are inevitable.

Some political crises are like that. Whoever is in power, there will be incidents, many not of their own making, that they have to deal with. Though it's the job of the opposition to highlight these, to find neglect and call for inquiries so this never happens again, we know that some things do happen. If the sides were reversed, we could not prevent them any more than we can prevent potholes.

There are potholes that happen and potholes that proliferate. There are the potholes that run together to become trenches until the roads weaken from the water that flows through them. When roads become obstacle courses, we stop talking of potholes and talk of neglect. Mr. Speaker, this is precisely what has been happening in

the past decade in Alberta, not only on our streets but in social infrastructure. For years we've closed our ears to problems and dismissed messengers as whiners. We have shipped our poor out of province, drowning out complaints with chants of the Alberta advantage. Just as four-wheel drives weave through the washboard and call it freedom of the road, our Premier calls for managing the pressures of growth.

Given the neglect that has brought this on, we need a plan and new direction. Potholes happen; washboards do not. Accidents happen; neglect does not. Human neglect is no accident. I urge citizens to keep this in mind as they drive this spring.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Medicine Hat Tigers Hockey Team

Mr. Mittel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with a great deal of pleasure that I stand in this Assembly once again to pass on the news regarding Medicine Hat's beloved Tigers Western Hockey League hockey team. The Tigers played well and fought hard during the Memorial Cup tournament in Vancouver. Unfortunately, this year it wasn't meant to be. However, this team has a great deal to be proud of. The tournament brought to an end a very successful season for the Tigers.

Last Wednesday night the Medicine Hat Tigers defeated the Vancouver Giants in a 1-0 round robin victory that secured them a spot in the finals. They once again met up with the Giants on Sunday night. In their ninth meeting in three weeks the Tigers had their last encounter with the heavy-checking and highly talented Giants that unfortunately saw our boys get shut out from the title by a score of 3-1. Throughout a tense and electrified game the Tigers put on a brave fight and left the Giants just barely out of the first period with a scoreless match. By the second period the two teams rallied back and forth in a tied pursuit. However, by the third and final period the efforts of the Giants came to the detriment of the Tigers. The underdogs – or should I say the undercats? – fought hard and proved that teamwork is a force like no other.

I'm pleased to be able to tell the House that this season was a conference-best regular season for the Tigers, who relentlessly clawed their way to the Memorial Cup.

To all the players that will be leaving the team due to age and other professional commitments, we wish you all the best, and your province congratulates you on all your successes with the Medicine Hat Tigers, including your hard-fought series with the Giants.

Also, I'd like to offer my best wishes to the Giants on their first win, a first in the team's six-year franchise history.

I know that I speak for the members of this Assembly and Albertans when I wish the Medicine Hat Tigers a restful off-season and all the best in the hockey season to follow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Government Task Forces

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unmasking the task force farce. In a pathetic attempt to appear more transparent and accountable than his predecessor, our interim Premier has not only assigned his new/old cabinet colleagues specific homework projects, which to date have gone unmarked, but has sent information-gathering task force farces hither and yon throughout the province, frantically compiling several clear-cut forests worth of pulped paper for what purposes other than a public relations/frustrations exercise.

Who can forget the 2005 task force that toured the province investigating long-term care shortcomings and abuses highlighted by Auditor General Fred Dunn's scathing report? That MLA committee set the task force standard as it toured the province, hearing a series of heart-twisting, gut-wrenching stories of neglect and abuse from concerned seniors' family members and advocates. How many of the task force recommendations has this government acted upon?

For 45 days this winter and spring the Affordable Housing Task Force toured the province, gathering several more forests worth of reported recommendations, including 38 of 52 which this government outrightly rejected.

1:20

The rigged royalty review's outcome has already been compromised by the Finance minister's premature conclusions.

The crime and community support task force completed its relatively short, by Affordable Housing Task Force standards, 14-municipalities tour this past Friday at the University of Calgary, in the Calgary-Varsity constituency, which I represent.

With the exception of the government's sleight of hand-picked royalty review, which won't report until after the Legislature's sessional spotlight has been turned off, the other task forces contained MLA men and women on a mission who sincerely wanted to hear from Albertans in order to address their concerns. They and their equally dedicated committee volunteers and Albertans who participated must feel duped and betrayed by this government, that sent them on a mission only to ignore and reject their recommendations.

Instead of the boy who cried wolf, Albertans have the Premier who cried task force but failed to follow through.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am rising today with a petition with 182 signatures on it. All 182 signatures were gathered during our housing rally on May 17. The petition notes the Conservatives' continued refusal to protect Alberta families from rent gouging and urges the government to immediately introduce temporary rent guidelines.

Thank you.

head:

Introduction of Bills

Bill 39

Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 39, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Amendment Act, 2007.

This amendment act proposes changes which reflect a new governance model that the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists, and Geophysicists of Alberta, fondly known as APEGGA, and the Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals, fondly known as ASET, have agreed on. It's one act and two associations. This proposed model is in response to the request the Alberta government made of these two groups last year to work together to come to a mutually agreeable solution over the governance of Alberta's engineering and geoscientist technologists.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 39 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 39 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

**Bill 40
Personal Directives Amendment Act, 2007**

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce Bill 40, the Personal Directives Amendment Act, 2007.

These amendments reflect the input of over 4,300 Albertans and will make it easier to benefit from the Personal Directives Act. Bill 40 will include a voluntary standard form that Albertans can use to write their own personal directive, which will ensure that their wishes are respected if they are unable to speak for themselves. It will also include a voluntary registry for their personal directives. The act will also provide safeguards, including a new process to reassess decision-making capacity and a new process for investigating complaints about agents when there are concerns about harm to the maker of a personal directive.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 40 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 40 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I have three tablings, all from the same source. They were shared with me when I attended the Alberta Funeral Service Association annual conference earlier this spring. The first one is their booklet called *Funerals: An Information Guide*. The second one is called *Yours, Mine and Our Children's Grief: A Parent's Guide*, to help parents with little children who are grieving. The third booklet is called *Grieving: "Our Time,"* which helps grown-ups.

I must say that they were really pleased to have an MLA, who brought greetings from the Legislature, and they wish all members in the House all the best.

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings, all with respect to questions raised in Committee of Supply on the evening sitting of May 16, answering questions from Edmonton-Calder, Edmonton-Manning, and Calgary-Fort.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today: the first from constituent Colin MacIntyre, noting that he thinks "the housing market is now officially out of control, and it is

hurting a lot of people" and believes "it is the Government's responsibility to do something."

The second from constituent Seth Franklin, who has a good-paying job but is feeling that he has to look away from this city for housing, but that would take him away from his young daughter, who lives in Edmonton with her mother. He's particularly disappointed with the Capital Housing decision to tear down a complex rather than to sell it, as had been previously promised, to low-income earners.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter from a constituent, Gloria Williams. She has multiple sclerosis, and she can only work part-time. She's asking for help with the stress in her life caused by expensive medications and now an unacceptable rental increase.

Mr. Backs: Mr. Speaker, I rise to present two tablings. One is the program for the excellent theatrical production at John D. Bracco school on Friday of *Storybook Love*. It was written and directed by Darolyn McCrostie and Jason Ashmore. The program describes the role of each of the 36 students. A great night was had by all.

The second tabling is from northeast resident Liz Lister, calling on the federal government to act on youth crime. Her son was swarmed in a northeast Edmonton neighbourhood on the weekend.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first is the 15th anniversary joint fundraising breakfast program of Apache resources, Calgary Stampeders, and the Calgary Urban Project Society.

My second tabling, along the same theme, is a homeless awareness week program pamphlet entitled: 3,436 people are looking for a place to sleep tonight. That pamphlet comes from Homeless Awareness Calgary.

My third tabling is a program entitled Living Legends, that highlighted a number of First Peoples' dance and music, which was put on by energetic youth from Brigham Young University, cohosted by the National Energy Board and the Church of Latter-day Saints.

My fourth tabling is the program from the 2006-2007 showcase awards of the Consulting Engineers of Alberta.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling today copies of documents concerning correspondence on the transfer of water from the Red Deer River to the mall and racetrack at Balzac.

Thank you.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, pursuant to the Regulated Forestry Profession Act, the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists fourth annual report 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Knight, Minister of Energy, response to a question raised by Mr. Mason, hon. leader of the New Democrat opposition, on May 14, 2007, Department of Energy 2007-2008 main estimates debate.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Red Deer River Water Transfer

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The controversy involving the water transfer from the Red Deer River to the shopping mall and racetrack at Balzac won't go away. In fact, it's going to escalate. The Alberta Liberal caucus has obtained internal government documents clearly showing that this government is committed to this water transfer no matter what the Premier says. To the Premier: does the Premier still deny there is a commitment by your government to have this water transfer take place?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the matter of the water licence is before the Minister of Environment and before the committee to review the application. The leader tabled documents just a few seconds before you called question period. I'll review those documents that he tabled, and I will respond to his allegation tomorrow.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The documents come from the government. Support by this government for this water transfer has been in place a long time despite this Premier's denials. An e-mail dated July 31, 2006, from a high-ranking official in agriculture, food and rural development states that "at a meeting that took place a while back with several Ministers in attendance, it appeared that support for the project was going to be forthcoming." Construction on the project was in full swing a month later. To the Premier: will the Premier finally admit that this government has been behind this project from day one?

1:30

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, my earlier comments hold true. On occasion the Leader of the Opposition has tabled documents and carved out a few words to read publicly in this Assembly, but when you look at the total document, the meaning is completely different. As I said before, we'll have a look at what has been tabled to review it and respond appropriately. It's only fair given the way that this House conducts itself.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would have thought the Premier was well briefed on an issue of this size.

The case keeps building. An e-mail dated July 10, 2006, from the executive director of rural development states that "the developers were meeting with Ty Lund last week." To refresh memories, that would mean the developers were meeting with the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. To the Premier: will the Premier instruct the former Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to provide a written account of that meeting and any documents associated with it so that we can all see what deals were made?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that I didn't and I don't read all of the e-mails that come to every minister or every MLA in this House. He's quoting an e-mail from back in 2006. If it is part – if it is part – of the very thick documents that he tabled in the House earlier, we'll have a look at it and respond.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, when the Premier reads his own material, I see that it gets better and better.

An e-mail dated July 10, 2006, from the former agriculture minister's EA states that Doug "has flipped me an e-mail asking on the status of our work with the county on applying for the water/waste water program . . . Doug indicated that developers are looking for a letter from us today." The person referenced would be the current Minister of Advanced Education, by the way, who appears to have been interrupted in a caucus meeting for this business. Will the Premier instruct his government to make public whatever letter or other communications were sent to the developers?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, allegations are raised in the House and words like "apparently." I said that we'll review the documents. We'll also pursue this particular matter, because again the member is using the privileges of this House to make certain allegations in the House. We'll look at all the information that was tabled today and review it and make the necessary statements.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the reply to that particular e-mail says, "Ron and I have a meeting scheduled regarding other matters at 1:30 – we'll get a draft done after that." The subject line on this e-mail is "Balzac-water for county." It doesn't get much clearer than that. To the Premier: exactly how many people in the government were working to make this water transfer occur?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Before I call on the hon. Premier, there's a point of order. Hon. minister?

Mr. Horner: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay. At the conclusion of question period.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm quite sure that the Liberals have three questions. Three times three: that's nine. He'll find a few more e-mails to read out publicly in this Assembly. Keep doing that. The answer will be the same. We'll review the information, and tomorrow we'll make the necessary reply to these allegations.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Even more evidence: an e-mail dated June 27, 2006, states that a representative of the United Horsemen inquired what the outcome was at Treasury Board regarding water supply for the project at Balzac. The e-mail states: "Apparently [the] issue was discussed at length last week at TB under Ministers Horner & Renner." To the Premier – we'll try to come at this a different way – has this government brought all work on the water transfer to this project to a halt?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the licence is before an authority for consideration, and once that authority makes its decision, that decision will be made public to all, not only the developer, the MD, but also to the opposition.

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

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite this Premier's denial of his own government's involvement in this, the same thing is happening under his watch. On January 22, 2007, a briefing note to the minister of agriculture, food, and rural development states this, and I want everyone to listen carefully: "The government is providing funding for a project involving the movement of water from the Red Deer River to a development in the Balzac area near Calgary." There it is in black and white. This government is committed to this water transfer. My question is to the Premier. Will this Premier finally say in public what this government is saying behind closed doors, which is that this government supports the water transfer from the Red Deer River to Balzac?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if the e-mails or alleged e-mails or whatever this Leader of the Opposition brings forward in the House were all so true, then I'm sure that waterline would have been built right from the start. It's before an authority. That authority has very specific criteria that they follow in making very important decisions. It's up to that authority to make those decisions. They only respond to the Minister of Environment. Those decisions, of course, and all of the information that comes before the authority will be made public once the authority makes that decision.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this and in other material we've obtained, there is overwhelming evidence showing that this government was bending over backwards to get this water transfer approved. There are extensive meetings with cabinet ministers; there are thousands of pages of documents; there are millions of public dollars involved. To the Premier: on March 19 you said you would debate me on this issue of water transfer "any time, anywhere." Will you live up to your own word and debate me on this issue in Drumheller before the next by-election?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again the opposition leader is showing his disrespect to this House. We also have a leader of the third party. If the leader of the third party wanted to get involved and debate issues with respect to rural Alberta and all the concerns raised across this province, I'm quite sure that all three would get involved. It's a by-election, both in Calgary-Elbow and in Drumheller-Stettler, and that's what the purpose is.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, I'll give the Premier one last chance to live up to his own words. Will you debate me as you invited "any time, anywhere" on this water transfer in Drumheller before the next by-election? Yes or no?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the opposition leader is talking about keeping his word, especially coming from him.

With respect to the two by-elections, there are two candidates, of course, in the by-election of both Drumheller-Stettler and Calgary-Elbow. They are not members of government. They're seeking to run for the Progressive Conservative Party. There are also candidates representing the Liberal Party. They're up there to win those elections for themselves. In this particular case we have very good candidates both in Calgary-Elbow and in Drumheller-Stettler, and they debate all of these issues very well.

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

Affordable Housing

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I would love to

debate the Premier and the leader of the Liberal Party, but I'd like to talk about a bunch of other issues.

One of the most important issues that we've got to deal with right now has to do with housing and control of rents because when it comes to helping renters, this Premier is all talk and no action. After learning of massive rent increases in Edmonton, the Premier called them un-Albertan. After residents of the Mission apartment building in Calgary got \$1,200 per month rent increases, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing called the increases immoral. Now, aside from calling gouging landlords bad names, what concrete steps will this Premier take to help the residents of Calgary's Mission apartments?

1:40

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this House debated at great length a very good piece of legislation in terms of condo conversions. In that legislation there is a fine, and that's \$10,000 per unit. So if there is evidence of a condo conversion in violation of this act, there's a very significant penalty. If the hon. leader of the third party, who doesn't want to get involved in the other issue, has evidence to bring forward that there is hard evidence that this is a condo conversion, then deliver that evidence to the minister responsible, and we will take the appropriate action.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Premier seems to think the opposition should do all his work for him, you know, but I think it's up to the government to protect tenants in this province.

Now, the people in the Mission apartments have received an increase of \$1,200 a month. Condo conversion or not, Mr. Premier, that's too much. What will you do to help them?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, we have numerous programs in place. There's a very good rental supplement program. There are also safety net programs for those families that may be evicted or move into Alberta and can't find a place. My information is that we have helped a significant number in Calgary. We are compassionate. We do care about the residents, and we'll be meeting with them to see how we can assist them.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier calls gouging landlords un-Albertan. His minister calls them immoral. The Premier calls his own government compassionate, yet the facts say otherwise, Mr. Premier. The facts say that this government isn't going to do anything to help the people in Mission apartments in Calgary or other renters that are getting massive increases. Why not?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again the third-party opposition leader said, you know, that we're not doing anything in this area. That is wrong. We don't have to rely on the opposition to do any of the work. We have very good programs in place. There are hundreds of millions of dollars that we're putting into housing, \$285 million. We also have millions of dollars in safety net programs to assist Albertans, not only Albertans that are here today but those that are moving to Alberta that can't find accommodations. So it's a very good program, and we'll continue to extend that program.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Municipal Financing

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This hon. leader would love to be part of the debate too, but the democratic process seems to be lacking. We'll see the numbers in the polls in a couple of weeks.

I've been out knocking on the doors of Hanna. I've been down in my own riding, and this last week the municipal assessment rolls have come out. Two weeks ago or a week ago the Premier said that the only way the taxes are going is down. It isn't correct. They're going up. It's affecting the families and the communities that I represent and those throughout Alberta. But, Mr. Speaker, what we need to do is to look at a different formula, one that the people can count on and one that municipalities can count on in order to fund them. My question to the Premier . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member is referring to tax increases for property, that's a decision made by the local municipality. In terms of the municipal funds that will be allocated to various municipalities, we have a formula in place. This last weekend the minister of municipal affairs met with all of the CAOs of both urban and rural municipalities. They've looked at the formula. They've looked at the allocation and also at the accountability, and that is important. As municipalities receive money from the global taxpayer, each municipality has to have some accountability attached to it.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, the question was that if this government would adopt a policy to return 10 per cent of the provincial personal and corporate tax back to the communities from which it originated.

My next question. The town of Magrath is suffering from lack of lots and trying to develop them, but the conditions that this government puts on funding says that they must go out and have a bid. They had a bid to develop six lots. The bid came in at \$560,000 to develop six lots. They went ahead, and they did it for \$150,000. My question is to the Premier. Will you restore the democratic process and allow the local government, like the Magrath town council, to decide what is best for their community by putting sewage and drainage ahead and making it their top priority?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe where the hon. member is coming from is the fact that in terms of procurement there is legislation in place, and I believe it's part of the internal trade agreement that says that any work \$100,000 or more has to go to tender. I believe that's what the hon. member is referring to. That can be changed. However, we would have to do that in co-operation with neighbouring jurisdictions because it's an internal trade agreement; that is, within Canada. I'm not saying that we can't do something about that. If he feels that it's important to bring it forward for discussion, we certainly will.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I'd like to, I guess, go back to May 14 again where the hon. Premier said:

Certainly we would be able to work out any issues in terms of getting that money out to municipalities and getting the best value for it. So if it's water, if it's infrastructure . . . We'll be there, we'll listen to you, and we'll make those programs work.

We have desperate situations in our constituency. Will the Premier please instruct the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to come down and meet with myself and our local mayors and Reeves to work out these issues? They are desperate. They're not being addressed, and it's water and sewage, top critical issues.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in the capital plan our budget increased 105 per cent for water and sewer. It doubled. Plus new money

going to municipalities: this year \$400 million, of course, and then it will ramp up to \$500 million, and in 2010-11 it will be \$1.4 billion. So there is considerable money today plus in the future.

Now, with respect to some issues, if there is something to do with the allocation or the accountability that's attached to the dollars—the minister met this last weekend with all of the CAOs. If there's still some issue, then he can take it up independently with the minister.

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

Affordable Housing

(continued)

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As rents continue to soar out of control in this province, so do damage deposits. One of the biggest challenges that renters face when they're looking for accommodation is finding that first month's rent and a damage deposit. At a housing forum last week I met William, who's making \$11 an hour and sleeping on the front seat of his girlfriend's car . . . [interjections] Without his girlfriend. So I think all members can understand how uncomfortable this is.

Mr. Speaker, my question for the housing minister is this: will the homeless and eviction prevention fund put money into William's pockets in advance? Because when he goes and finds a place, then his challenge is to find that money . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In our present budget, as the hon. member knows, we have added \$285 million to housing, part of it going to the concerns of the homeless. We have also given \$143 million to municipalities. Municipalities have the independence to address the needs that they feel are most important. Also, there is funding that has been allocated for the challenge . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What the minister doesn't understand is that by the time people get the funding that they need, by the time they get the supports they need from the government, they go back and the accommodation is gone. It's been rented by somebody else. They need to have something in advance so that they don't lose the opportunity. Now, let's not forget that the issue of affordable housing has been an issue in Alberta for a long time. The government was warned nine years ago by their own affordable housing symposium that this was going to be a problem, and that symposium was chaired by the current minister of immigration. The question is: how did they manage so badly to mess this up, and what did she do or not do about it?

1:50

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to share with the hon. member opposite that we do have a fund. We've had numerous applicants for the fund. It deals with evictions. It deals with damage deposits. If the hon. member would care to share his name and address, his co-ordinates or his girlfriend's co-ordinates, I will certainly try and get in touch with him and see what I can do to make sure that there's something provided for both of these young people.

Mr. R. Miller: If I can provide it, Mr. Speaker, I'll get the licence plate number for the car.

Mr. Speaker, everybody needs a home. It's now two and a half weeks since the passage of Bill 34, the Tenancies Statutes Amend-

ment Act, 2007, and confusion continues to reign. As far as I've been able to determine, the bill has yet to receive royal assent. The minister's office says that it's coming soon, Parliamentary Counsel has told me that it doesn't need royal assent, and realtors, landlords, and tenants are still wondering what the heck is going on. My question is simply this: has it received royal assent yet? Is it going to? When is it going to? How long do these people have to wait so that they understand what rules they're working under?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it has not received royal assent yet. It will soon. We are working very closely with the different departments to make sure that both landlords and tenants understand what is in the new bill. It's not very complicated, but it's not all that simple. We will work very closely with all of the information avenues we've got to bring the bill out so that both landlords and tenants are familiar with all aspects of the bill.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Deer Overpopulation

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This spring the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development allowed a cull of 1,400 deer in eastern Alberta. The farming community in my constituency has experienced a devastating effect of deer on their hay feed. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: what plans in the near future do you have to allow the culling of deer in northern Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Lesser Slave Lake for that question. We've had many requests and letters concerning the population of deer, moose, and elk in your constituency and in other northern constituencies. It's related to the harsh winter we've had up north, and the snowpack has driven the animals into the farmyards. We're looking at that closely. But I have to tell the member that the cull that was conducted in eastern Alberta was in response to a disease that the deer had, chronic wasting disease. A cull is a policy of last resort and wouldn't normally be used for this type of issue.

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: if there's an ability to allow culling for testing, why is culling not allowed for damages sustained to private property?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, both myself and all members on this side have a real concern with protection of private property, unlike members across the way here. When it comes to dealing with deer overpopulation, there's a spectrum of policy opportunities, policy choices, starting with meeting with landowners, providing fences, and that type of thing. We can also extend the hunting season. We might give multiple tags if there's an overpopulation of deer. We can also have quota hunts. A quota hunt is a hunt after the regular season. But this is done after a survey of the deer population, and this year we want to do a new survey because we don't know the extent of the damage done by the heavy winter.

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, my last question is to ask whether or not that study will be done as soon as possible in order for us to be able to address the very issue that affects my farmers.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I hear the concerns of the Member for

Lesser Slave Lake and other members from the north. My department will give it their attention. But I have to warn the member that as seductive as her proposal is, I have to consult with Bambi first.

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

Education Funding

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government continues to fumble the education ball. First it bullies the teachers over the unfunded pension liability. Then it lowballed operational funding. Now it's turning its back on school boards. My question is to the Minister of Education. How does he expect school trustees to get re-elected on a tax increase platform when this government would never do the same thing?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure I understood the essence of the question, but let me just read into the record some facts. The operational funding to school authorities has increased by 86 per cent over 10 years. The inflation rate for that same period has grown by 28 per cent, and teachers' salaries increased by 45 per cent over that same period.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's give it another go. Education funding is about priorities, Mr. Minister, and this government's priorities are clear. Bob Maskell doesn't complain about his generous salary. Horse Racing Alberta doesn't complain about their millions. Why does this government continue to put its friends ahead of educational funding in the province? Tell us the answer, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, 3.3 million Albertans we consider to be our friends, and that's who we're representing in this Legislature by ensuring that there's enough money for education going forward this year and into the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, thank you so much. Will the minister accept that plebiscites will not help the Calgary Catholic school board? Mr. Minister, they don't help.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think it should be put on the record that last week the Calgary Catholic board released a document, or it was released, that said that they were going to have this budgetary shortfall this year. Well, I recognize that school boards are going into negotiations with the ATA locals, and if I were them, I would do exactly the same thing because what they need to do is ensure that there isn't an expectation that is too high. I was asked the question: were there other ways that school boards could raise funds? I said: there is the provision in the School Act to hold a plebiscite. That's as far as it went.

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

Teachers' Unfunded Pension Liability

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I had an opportunity to meet with many teachers in Whitecourt-St. Anne as well as the ATA reps from Northern Gateway, Living Waters, and

Grande Yellowhead school regions. There were real mixed feelings on the \$25 million gift from Albertans to teachers to help offset the pension costs. Young teachers simply thanked me. More experienced teachers complained about the disparity in payments. To the Minister of Education: what was your reason for giving larger subsidies to younger teachers?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it should be clear that in the six months or so that I've had the privilege of being in this portfolio I have consistently heard that one of the issues that is a deterrent for recruitment of the best students into the teaching profession and keeping them there is the 3 per cent unfunded liability that each teacher must pay off of their paycheque. So as an effort while we resolve this issue in our budget, we made it clear that we would assist those younger teachers. Starting on September 1 all teachers that have under 15 years of service will receive approximately between 1,200 and 1,400 bucks a year.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister. Mr. Minister, you've told teachers that a task force will be established to address concerns about the unfunded debt that exists in the pension plan. Why would you tell this task force to suspend its activities in the event of a labour disruption? It hardly seems fair that one part of the province could go on strike and the rest of the province is penalized.

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, we are going to establish this task force so that it can meet with interested parties around the province to find out what would be a fair return for taxpayers in order to assume a \$2 billion liability. That task force will be up and running shortly, and it will report back to us by the end of October. What I wanted to ensure while this task force was meeting with Albertans was that if we had a situation – let's take as an example the Parkland strike, which we're all familiar with, of a couple of months ago. I believe that in that environment the task force could be unduly impacted by the negative media and opposition comments that were being made.

2:00

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister. The debt in the teachers' pension plan exists because of an equal problem between the ATA and the province of Alberta. Labour negotiations are an ongoing challenge for school boards and local unions. Why will you not treat these issues as two separate, distinct challenges? Why tie them together?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, they are in fact two separate issues. We as the government of Alberta are responsible for resolving the unfunded pension liability issue with the Alberta Teachers' Association. The individual school boards are responsible for negotiating contracts with their local of the ATA. Those two processes will work parallel to one another but, clearly, not together or in conflict with one another. So they are separate issues, and they will both go forward independently.

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

Affordable Accessible Housing

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At a renters' listening forum last week, sponsored by city of Edmonton councillors and the Edmonton Social Planning Council, a myriad of issues were raised about the hardships facing renters. Affordability is not the only

issue facing some renters. There is a scarcity of rental units that can accommodate Albertans with physical disabilities who use mobility aids such as wheelchairs. My question is to the minister of housing. In this housing crisis what can the minister offer to Albertans in wheelchairs who require rental housing to be both accessible and affordable?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, when we look at affordable housing, we need to look at all sorts of different solutions. I will say that there have been applications that have dealt with associations or agencies that have dealt with people that are handicapped, and we have tried to address those situations and supported those projects.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister. For disabled Albertans looking for accommodation, their first priority is accessibility, and then they have to worry about the cost. It took one constituent four years to find accommodation suitable for her wheelchair. What are these Albertans supposed to do when their rents skyrocket and they find themselves on the street?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, as mentioned previously, with the Minister of EII, if I could get her to answer, please.

Ms Evans: If they are concerned, if they receive an eviction notice, I would encourage them to come immediately to any of our offices or phone and establish where it's most convenient for them to learn about what's available.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. This question is directed to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. A person using a wheelchair who has lost their apartment because of high rents cannot sofa surf at a friend's or camp in the river valley. Even if they have a great job, rent is being raised beyond their means. Now, will these people with disabilities be able to access the homeless and eviction prevention fund? What exactly are the criteria? Will they be income tested?

Ms Evans: I think the best thing about this particular fund, unlike many of the previous funds, is that the director has the discretion to look at the personal circumstance of the individual involved: employment opportunities; needs of that individual, both physical and financial; the total social milieu. When I spoke to some of the workers in one of our offices, they said that the best thing about this fund is that they have the flexibility of making decisions that aren't confined to a strict adherence to a particular set of rules, but they deal with humans on a human basis, so they are entitled to identify what their needs are, and then we will look for them accordingly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Education Funding

(continued)

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Education minister owes Albertans a full explanation. He has underfunded classrooms in this year's budget and invented some half-baked excuse to claim that his 3 per cent cut to education is actually a budget increase. Calgary Catholic schools know better. They would lose 30 or more teachers with this budget. School boards across the province know better.

Just do the math. To the Education minister. Grade 6 students know that subtracting 6 per cent inflation from 3 per cent budget increase nets a loss of 3 per cent. Can the minister explain how six minus three does not equal a 3 per cent cut?

Mr. Liepert: Let me reread what I did a few minutes ago so that when we tie things to inflation, we keep it in perspective. Inflation over the past 10 years, Mr. Speaker, has grown by 28 per cent. Meanwhile, funding to the classroom has grown by 86 per cent over the last 10 years. Teachers' salaries grew by 45 per cent over the last 10 years when inflation grew by 28 per cent.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, those figures that he keeps going on about are half-baked at best. They're based on 1993, when the budget was cut to pieces, and quite frankly it's an insult to Albertans to continue to bring those up. The Education minister claims that his budget has increased, but he tells school boards to go ahead and hold a plebiscite for a separate tax increase to cover the shortfall built into his budget. Talk about a slap in the face to schools and the public. Here's a simple question. Why isn't this government giving schools the resources that they need to cope with inflation? Why not deal with this now, in the spring, before it becomes a crisis that could threaten instruction in the fall?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, if we want to talk about half-baked, we should talk about half-baked mathematics because there is no cutback in this particular budget. There is a 5.2 per cent increase in the Education budget. If we want to go back to the budget documents that were tabled in this House last year compared to the budget documents tabled this year, the increase in Education over a 12-month period is closer to 10 per cent.

You know, Mr. Speaker, just one final comment. There was a graduation class at Ross Sheppard high school this past week. Of 573 grads 236 graduated with honours or honours with distinction. It would be really good if these guys would talk about the positive stuff in education.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, perhaps we could get some of those Ross Shep grads to come and build the proper Education budget for this next coming year because, certainly, this one is not going to be functioning for the fall. School boards across this province have developed a dedicated capital reserve for expenditures. For example, a school board buys a bus and then puts money away for a replacement down the road. Maybe we could learn something from that too. The minister is now having the audacity to suggest that school boards should blow off that prudent long-term planning to make up for this government's poor budgeting practices. Did not this government learn from last spring that there's nothing to be gained and everything to lose from shortchanging public education?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I do appreciate about this caucus is that they don't hide anything. They want to spend, spend, tax, tax. At least they're not like these guys who want to say: we're going to save some money, and then we're going to spend, spend, and spend. So we have a philosophical difference of whether we're going to spend, spend, and tax or whether we're going to put a budget before this Legislature that is fair to Albertans, and that's what we believe in doing on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Trade Corridors to Prince Rupert

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been hearing a lot about the Asia Pacific gateway and the efforts to revitalize the port of Prince Rupert. There's a huge economic potential to be tapped for Alberta. I know that the federal government is putting a lot of resources into developing transportation routes to that port. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: what is being done by this government to help develop the Prince Rupert port to better serve Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question because this government really understands how important the port of Prince Rupert is to all Albertans, and we're working with other governments on strategies to develop key corridors to Prince Rupert that will benefit all of Alberta. Last week we announced a \$150 million highway interchange just south of the city – on 41st Street I think it is – in partners with the city of Edmonton and the federal government, that will facilitate a major container terminal in south Edmonton, that will be CP's new intermodal yard. Last month I was in Winnipeg and met with other transportation groups.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's important to develop the north-south corridor to benefit all Albertans, but it's particularly important to develop an east-west corridor to especially benefit northern Albertans. A lot of farmers in northern Alberta, especially in the Peace country, can't get their grain to market because there are virtually no railcars available to move grain. What is this minister going to do to address this situation?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have met with CN about this situation. As you know, railroads are regulated federally in this province, but I've spoken with CN, and they're going to do the best they can to get more cars there. Also, a little bit of a problem is how all containers work in Canada, and we're working with the federal government to try to change that. In Canada we have to have our empty containers back to port within 30 days, and we can only reposition them once. In the U.S. they have 365 days and can reposition them as many times as they like to get the containers back to port. We're working on those regulations.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is to the Minister of Finance. I know that the Alberta government made a significant loan available to the grain terminal in Prince Rupert several years ago. In the annual report from his department it shows the loan as still on the books. Can the minister tell us what the status of the loan is and how the government might be able to leverage this loan in order to make the grain terminal more effective?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back in 1981 a loan for \$106.3 million was given to the now Ridley Grain terminal. This was amortized at 11 per cent through a bond issuance. As of today we are sitting at a capital and interest payment of monies owed of around \$96 million. The loan is absolutely up to date. It is not in default. But I really must emphasize to the hon. member that we are

simply the lender. We do not have a share in the Ridley Grain terminal. We are simply a lender to that particular consortium.

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

Crown Land Adjacent to Bissell Centre

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Monday on land reported to be owned by the province, west of the Bissell Centre and north of the Remand Centre parking lot in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar, the Edmonton Police Service was forced to evict homeless Edmontonians. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Why did the province force the Edmonton Police Service to evict the homeless people from Crown land last Monday?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, that's not quite exactly how it worked. Our department got a call from the Edmonton Police Service that they had a whole bunch of complaints about things that were going on in that yard, not necessarily legal things, and asked permission if they could go in and see. We did grant that permission.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister: will the province consider selling this property for \$1 to any group who is interested in constructing affordable housing units at this location, or will the province consider selling for \$1 any other suitable location across the province that could be used for homeless initiatives? You've sold land for \$1 before to developers.

Mr. Ouellette: On that particular land the same thing I will say again. What was going on in there? After the police went in there, they found lots of garbage; they found human waste; they found condoms; they found drug paraphernalia. It was very much a safety concern. To his question: we do have a housing minister, Mr. Speaker, that I think is addressing affordable housing very well, and he will talk to us if he needs any more help. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, to the same minister. Given that on the Sunday previous I had walked across that land and found none of the incidents that this hon. member has stated occurred there, my question is this: how much is the fence around this property going to cost taxpayers, and why are you building this fence now?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure. I haven't seen any of the quotes on the fence. To be very honest with you, I'm not even sure that there was a fence being built, but now that he's brought it to my attention, I can check on that.

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

Speed Limit Enforcement

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are all for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. A recent publication by the Alberta Motor Association Foundation for Traffic Safety states that there are around 100,000 vehicular collisions, 27,000 injuries, and 400 traffic deaths in Alberta every year. Almost

three-quarters of the fatalities occur on rural roads and highways. According to the foundation these crashes cost our society about \$4.8 billion per year, not to mention the toll in personal grief, sorrow, and pain. A major factor in these crashes is excessive speed. Will the minister take real action to reduce this carnage and step up enforcement of the speed laws on our roads and highways?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to let the hon. member know that this government is taking real action. We are committed to safe and secure communities. Highway enforcement is an essential element of the province's traffic safety plan. Since 2004 we've increased our spending on policing by \$31 million and put an additional 300 police officers on our streets. We now have 60 traffic sheriffs who are patrolling our highways, targeting aggressive drivers, helping reduce collisions and fatalities. In fact, on the July long weekend we'll have an additional 24, bringing that total up to 84. These sheriffs are making a difference. On the May long weekend alone they laid over 1,300 charges.

The Speaker: I think we have to go on.
The hon. member.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, many motorists speed based on the assumption that law enforcement officials will not ticket them if they're travelling 10, 15, or 18 kilometres over the posted maximum. This gap seems to be growing despite the increased accuracy of today's technology for speed enforcement. Even regular bus services between Calgary and Edmonton build speeding into their posted schedules rain, snow, or shine. Will the minister take steps to enforce the actual posted speed limit and not some nebulous and expanding limit, which seems to be widely practised by law enforcement officials?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the hon. member. We have a strong commitment to making our roads safer. I want to acknowledge the great job that's being done on our highways by our police officers. As I was alluding to, on the May long weekend over 1,300 charges were laid by our sheriffs, including 773 for speeding and another 99 for seat belt infractions. The response to sheriffs working our highways has been extremely positive since they started patrolling last September. Since that time they've handed out 25,000 tickets. As a result of their work our highways are a lot safer today than they were yesterday.

Dr. Brown: Will the minister's department support the expanded use of technology, including more speed and red-light cameras, to reduce the number of crashes in the province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly support any initiatives that are going to help reduce collisions and improve highway safety.

I would ask the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation if he may want to supplement.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you know, our department takes safety in Alberta very, very seriously, the same as this government does. We are working on a traffic safety plan right now, on implementing some of the traffic safety plan. We're looking at

speed on green right now. We would only put those at high-collision intersections to make sure that we can see what's going on, and we will put that technology in place.

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

Wind Valley Wildlife Corridor

Mr. Bonko: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. In 2003 the province developed a wildlife corridor plan for the Wind Valley just east of Canmore. Many species in the area are endangered, and they rely on this area for protection for their migration. The plan did offer that. But just last month the government sold a large portion of Crown land to a private time-share company for development. My questions are for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Is this the kind of sale that you're hoping to get with your land-use strategy? Is that the type of sale you're trying to create?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'd like the hon. member to clarify his question and say specifically who this land was sold to because I think he has his facts absolutely wrong.

Mr. Bonko: It was a private time-share company, Mr. Speaker. I'll go to my next question unless you'd like to have this one again. It was a private time-share company. I've clarified that.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to inform you and the House that this private time-share is actually owned by the members, 95 per cent of whom are Albertans. They've owned it for 25 years. They've asked to purchase another attached parcel. We haven't made a decision yet. I've talked with the mayor of Canmore. We're taking it under consideration precisely because that area is indicated as a wildlife corridor. We're discussing the matter with Canmore and other affected parties.

Mr. Bonko: The lands in question are within the boundaries of the town of Canmore. Sustainable Resource Development sent a request for comments from the council. The council passed resolutions making very clear their objections to the sale of this wilderness corridor. Is the opinion of the town council going to be ignored, or is it going to be accepted? They do not support the sale.

2:20

Dr. Morton: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member seems to be backpedaling rather quickly. I thought he began his question by saying the sale had already been made, if I understood him correctly. Now he's saying: oh, yes, this sale is under consideration. Yes, I've talked with the mayor of Canmore. As I said, this condominium complex is owned 95 per cent by Albertans. It's been there for 25 years. They're looking at an additional parcel, and we're discussing it with the mayor and the council of Canmore.

Speaker's Ruling

Oral Question Period Rules

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 90 questions and answers today.

A few comments on procedural matters before I deal with the point of order and recognize the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. First of all, there were three occasions today in which members' names were used. The two circumstances were rather different. In the case of the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Food he clearly inappropriately used the personal name of a Member of this Legislative Assembly, and I say: inappropriately used.

Then we have the Leader of the Official Opposition. In the ten years that I've had the privilege of being in the chair, I've never really run across this kind of a situation before. The Leader of the Official Opposition tables some documents in the House. Then he quotes from those documents in his questions. An appropriate quotation would have to be 100 per cent accurate. In this case it meant that the names of members of this Assembly were used. That would appear from the chair's perspective to be an appropriate usage of names although the chair doesn't really think it's very good if hon. members don't pronounce those names correctly. That leads, then, to a different kind of a subject matter. But in this case the names were pronounced correctly.

So for those members who would say, "Well, why in this case would the Leader of the Opposition be allowed to use the name and some other member not?" the chair is ruling that, in fact, it is an appropriate usage of it to ensure 100 per cent accuracy of the quotation that's found in the document. But, again, the first time in 10 years that that has happened, to the knowledge of this chair, so that makes it rather rare.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford did something which is not very nice: he brought the table officers into debate on a question. Please remember that the chair and the table officers of this particular Assembly are neutral and nonpartisan. When we have questions and answers in the Legislative Assembly, often times under our new 45-second ruling there's some debate that goes on. In the case of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, making a point and addressing it to someone else, basically saying, you know, "Is it, or isn't it?" even when I've been told by the table officers that it is, in fact, brings the table officer into the debate or the Speaker into the debate. That's something we should not do, just to make sure that we have absolute clarity and that we respect the role of the chair and the table officers. [interjection]

We're having an exciting day today, aren't we, hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor? I applaud your energy and enthusiasm, but sometimes it's best to be quiet for a while. [some applause] Well, that obviously was well received, hon. members. There's a message there.

Point of Order

Imputing Motives

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a point of order, citing Standing Orders 23(h) and (i), imputing false or unavowed motives to another member, as well as *Beauchesne's* 494 where it states that imputation of intentional falsehood is not allowed in the House.

The hon. leader of the Liberal Party has dug deep today to try to find something which, in his mind, represents some sort of secret deal that would impugn the integrity of the minister of the day, to which he was referring. That minister was rightly identified several times by the hon. member as myself at the time. In fact, he went out of his way to do so.

Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would have done his homework instead of casually tossing out what he perceives to be a scandal, he would have found and would know that the project he was referring to is one which has been in place for many, many years in the agriculture department in the province and the county that it was involved with. This is one area where the information was perhaps misleading: that there was somehow a deal between my department at the time and the company involved. That's certainly not the truth. The truth is that it was an arrangement, as we have with many counties around the province, with the department of agriculture for water and waste-water infrastructure should their water licence be approved, should their development be approved, should a number of factors move forward.

At the time, Mr. Speaker, as I recall, the county did have some urgency to their application, and certainly it is this government's role to work with our municipalities and to work with them as hard and as fast as we can so that they can move forward with these types of proposals where they want to move. As has been done many times in the past, our agriculture department has helped value-added agricultural commodity ventures grow in rural Alberta. The infrastructure/ag program in question deals with those water and waste-water issues. Our agreement, as I said, is not with the proponents but with the county.

In my previous role as minister of agriculture, food and rural development I met with many agricultural-based businesses. I'm not afraid to admit that. That was part of my job. I met this morning with some industry folks, some companies in the aerospace business because we're trying to develop those industries in our province. That is our job, and I pride myself in doing it with integrity, with honour, and with the utmost of respect to all individuals involved and, at the end of the day, with the best interests of our province in mind.

I and my family have invested heavily in the reputation which we have because that's all we have, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to this Assembly, the utmost respect to all hon. members should be given. There should not be any impugning of motives, especially when – and I have the documents in front of me that were tabled and have had an opportunity to quickly peruse but also being part of some of these documents. These documents prove my point: that there was no agreement between Agriculture and the proponent, that there was an application from the county, that the county has to apply for a water licence – they were advised of such – that no money had changed hands because no water licence had been issued, that the proponents fit all of the program criteria for the program and project that was in question.

Mr. Speaker, my issue is that knowing these facts, the hon. member still stood in his place today and gave Albertans by way of this medium a picture that would impugn the motives that I had at the time, that would impugn the motives that this government had at the time, and that certainly, I would say, even brings into question what the county and the members of the council of the day did.

In short, Mr. Speaker, the project in question met all of the criteria. The inference by the hon. member is that I approved something that was not right. This certainly makes an accusation, and it certainly in the way it was done impugns improper motives on my behalf, which I find to be offensive. I believe that the hon. member should recheck his facts and that he should apologize to this House.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've reviewed this, and I've reviewed the Blues. I'm quite prepared to rule on this matter before hearing anybody else with respect to this.

What we have here is a situation whereby a member of this Assembly during question period raises questions and has before him and tables some documents. First question, and I quote the Leader of the Official Opposition.

An e-mail dated July 7, 2006, from the former agriculture minister's EA states, quote: Doug has flipped me an e-mail asking on the status of our work with the county on applying for the waste-water program. Doug indicated that developers are looking for a letter from us today. End quote

I'm assuming that that's correct and true, factually correct.

The person referenced would be the current Minister of Advanced Education, by the way, who appears to be interrupted in a caucus meeting for this business. Will the Premier instruct his government to make public whatever letter or other communications were sent to the developers?

It's pretty straightforward. I don't see where there are any accusations or innuendo with respect to the context of that.

Second question.

Well, the reply to that particular e-mail says, and I quote: Ron and I have a meeting scheduled regarding other matters at 1:30; we'll get a draft done after that. End quote.

I'm assuming that that's factually correct in this quotation.

The subject line on this e-mail is, quote: Balzac water for county.

Okay. That's a title.

It doesn't get much clearer than that. To the Premier: exactly how many people in the government were working to make this water transfer occur?

Okay. The Leader of the Official Opposition in this case makes the statement that "it doesn't get much clearer than that." Well, under our 45 seconds you have a chance to wax eloquent. It may be clear to the Leader of the Official Opposition, whereas it may not be clear to anybody else.

2:30

I think we've afforded the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology an opportunity to clarify the matter with respect to his understanding of the e-mail in question. This is all part and parcel of the give-and-take now of the new question period. It's not a point of order. It's part of the thrust of what we've arrived at. Hon. member, *Beauchesne's* 494 says, "Acceptance of the Word of a Member." I read this the other day into the record: "On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident." In this case there are probably not two contradictory accounts. In this case there are probably two different interpretations. There's nothing in the statements that I would find to be accusatory of the former minister of agriculture, food, and rural development. But this is question period and it's answer period.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'd move that written questions on the Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that motions for returns other than Motion for a Return 4 standing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

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

Ministerial Expense Claims

M4. Mr. R. Miller proposed that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all ministerial expense claims broken down by minister submitted between December 1, 2006, and March 1, 2007.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think the intention behind this motion is quite clear. There have been a number of examples and issues raised in this House over the past couple of years regarding ministerial office expenses. Given today's

technology I would expect that it should be relatively easy for this information to be consolidated and put into a form that could be provided in the way of a written response. Obviously, this is not the sort of thing that ministers responsible would be expected to provide during question period, but given the resources that the government has, I'm confident that they can provide it to us in this manner.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, as you most likely know, there has been a commitment to post such information on the Internet by the end of this month. We're looking forward to that. Here we are on May 28, only three days away, and looking forward to all of this information being posted for all Albertans to see in the future. All we're asking now is to go back a year and provide the same information that will be posted for all Albertans to see in the future for the previous 12 months.

I look forward to the government's response. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do propose to accept this question, although I would just want to clarify that it's not the past 12 months; it's December 1, 2006. I presume the intention of the question was back to the beginning of the current cabinet, which is actually December 15. We haven't actually brought forward a formal amendment to the question, but it would be our intention to accept this question because in the interest of openness and accountability, as our Premier has indicated, we will be posting expenses of ministers on the website effective April 1. So that information will be available from April 1 on, and there's no good reason why it couldn't be made available from December 15 on. That is what we will propose to do as I assume that the wording of the question really refers to ministerial expenses of current ministers. Certainly, we'll accept the question and look forward to making that information available.

Mr. R. Miller: Nothing much more to say, Mr. Speaker, other than that I acknowledge the interpretation that the Government House Leader has made. That was the intention of the question, and I'm pleased to see that the government shares our point of view on the matter. We look forward to receiving that information and, as I said, all Albertans having access to it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. The chair has to call a vote here with respect to this, and the chair would want to be very, very clear on what the members are voting on. The members are voting on Motion for a Return 4 as it's written, which says: commencing December 1, 2006, or are the members being asked to vote on a motion that says: commencing December 15, 2006?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, if it would help to clarify. As I read the question, it's clearly for the current ministers, and those expenses actually start after December 15. But it would be good for clarification if we had the unanimous consent of the House to read that as December 15 in the motion.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. members now are voting on a motion which basically says that Motion for a Return 4 should read December 15, 2006, in place of December 1, 2006.

[Motion for a Return 4 carried]

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

**Bill 208
School (Restrictions on Fees and Fundraising)
Amendment Act, 2007**

[Debate adjourned May 14: Mr. Martin speaking]

Mr. Elsalhy: I'm pleased to rise to participate in debate on this particular bill, Bill 208, School (Restrictions on Fees and Fundraising) Amendment Act, 2007, which is sponsored by my colleague from St. Albert. Mr. Speaker, I will start my comments with one impression I've always had, the impression that with minor exceptions, very minimal exceptions, education, at least kindergarten to grade 12, is free or is supposed to be free or ought to be free.

I know that the hon. members from the government caucus always remind us in this House and outside of this Assembly that nothing should be entirely free because, to them, you have to put a dollar value on programs and services and products that the government is responsible for for people to value those services and programs because anything that is free could be abused or taken advantage of somehow. So they want to have some control over programs, services, and products that the government is responsible for for people to value those services and for them to respect those services and to, you know, take care while dealing with these services or using them.

A bit of history, Mr. Speaker. Two years ago, responding to some of my constituents in Edmonton-McClung and other Albertans from all over the province, a petition was commissioned. I put together a legislative petition and approved it with Parliamentary Counsel, and the petition was distributed province-wide in every school. It basically asked for the elimination of school fees that were for instructional essentials, schools fees for the basics. The petition did not ask for the elimination of all school fees. The petition just focused on what is deemed essential, what is deemed of instructional description.

It was widely received, and it was really telling how many people from across this province signed it. Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we occasionally get signatures, even this year, from across the province because people understand that this issue did not go away and that it still exists.

Now, I would have to emphasize, Mr. Speaker, to you and to all my colleagues in this House that parents agree that they don't want to relinquish all forms of fundraising and all control over their kids' education. What parents agree on is that there seems to be no definition or no set criteria for what is deemed reasonable and fair and what is not. Parents don't want to relinquish all forms of fundraising for their kids. They don't want to not pay any fees whatsoever. The argument is basically: what is reasonable to expect from those parents, and what should we ask them to be responsible for, and what is pushing it? Again, it's the definition of what's essential and what's extra.

2:40

When you consider technology, Mr. Speaker, computer labs in schools, networks, you know, most schools now have networks where more than one computer is connected. When a certain school tells their MLA that their network seems to be failing all the time, that you turn on one computer and all computers crash, something needs to be done. Now, is it a fair expectation to go back to the parents and say, "Please fund raise so we can actually fix the network and replace older computers with newer ones that are more stable"? A school fund raising for photocopying paper is totally

unacceptable. A school that's fund raising for desks and textbooks is unacceptable, in my opinion.

Rev. Abbott: It's illegal.

Mr. Elsalhy: Now, some member from the government caucus is saying that it should be illegal, and I agree. It should be illegal, and maybe we should investigate.

The province every now and then comes in and sets the curriculum for certain courses, say, chemistry for example. Schools have to get new textbooks to deliver that new program. So they change the curriculum, and they tell schools that they have to change their textbooks. Now, in my opinion again, I think the province should really cover that cost or at least significantly pitch in to alleviate that concern. You know, if you're changing the curriculum, then support us to bring in the textbook that basically teaches that course.

Now, sometimes different books from different providers or different authors or different sources are available to teach that very new course that the government is asking to be implemented, but the Ministry of Education insists on one of them and not the others. More frequently than not, Mr. Speaker, the one book that they select is more expensive than the others that are available out there, and parents sometimes are puzzled. Why this one in particular, and why not the other ones?

I've had a constituent, Mr. Speaker, who came into my office and told me that she actually visited the Ministry of Education library and looked on the shelf under that particular subject matter and found two other books, but when she confronted the staff and said, you know, "Why not these, and why the one that the minister recommended?" they said, "Let us find out, and we'll get back to you." Then when she didn't hear anything, she went back. She went to that same spot on the shelf, and those books had mysteriously disappeared. When she questioned the staff, she was told: "Oh, you weren't supposed to see them. Actually, we shouldn't have had them on the shelf from the beginning." Maybe she's paranoid. Maybe I'm paranoid. But she felt that, you know, something wasn't entirely above board.

The question of fundraising expectations. Again, what do we consider necessary? What do we consider optional? What do we consider fair and reasonable on the part of parents and guardians? What's really pushing it when we ask them for stuff above and beyond? Fundraising expectations, school fees, bus fees, the cost of supplies, et cetera: you add all of these up, Mr. Speaker, and definitely certain parents are having a hard time making ends meet. Now to make things even worse, you add things like food and clothing, and the situation gets even harder for some parents.

Now, remember that the former Minister of Education, Mr. Speaker, had a reputation for touring the province and meeting with school boards and parents all over the place and listening to the public and listening to educators. I know that most parents and educators agree that that former Minister of Education was really trying to do a good job, and he was better than most who came before him and certainly now is being remembered with some degree of fondness given the current minister's style and the choices he makes.

Remember when that minister told this House and when he told school boards and the media and parents that he was studying this whole issue surrounding school fees and he promised to release his findings, the report if you will, last year, in 2006, before the beginning of the school year '06-07? Then we were told that, you know, final minor details needed to be worked in and that the report was going to be delayed slightly, and it was going to come after the beginning of the school year. Then we were told that another delay

was expected and that it was coming sometime in December of 2006. Then the minister lost his cabinet post. This new minister came in, and no word of the report. The ministry staff are not willing or are not allowed to tell us what's in the report or where it is.

My question would be to the current Minister of Education. Where is that report on fundraising and school fees? What's in the report, and why has it not been released to all members of this House and to the public and to the media and to all who are concerned? If that issue was studied and if it was examined that thoroughly, then at least give us the details and give us the evidence that's contained in that report.

Now, the issue of school fees and the issue of fundraising are not new. I remind you, Mr. Speaker, and I remind all my colleagues that this has been something that the Learning Commission studied. We know that there is a tendency in this province, there is a trend developing where task forces and commissions and fact-finding missions are established. They go around the province, and they hold meetings, and they listen to stakeholders and experts. The report is produced, and then the report is shelved, and nothing is done.

Now, the Learning Commission had some 89 or 90 recommendations, if I remember correctly. The province kept telling us which ones they are accepting this time, and which ones they are accepting this time, and so on. While any progress is good, sometimes slow progress is not that good. My question is: where is this one?

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak in support of Bill 208, School (Restrictions on Fees and Fundraising) Amendment Act, 2007. First of all, I want to thank the MLA for St. Albert for introducing this private member's bill. As we all know, education is one of the top issues, and the reason for supporting this bill is due to lots of concern raised regarding school fees and fundraising.

For example, the school fees can present an unreasonable economic burden on low-income families. School fees and fundraising allow government to pass on the cost of delivering public services to parents and communities. Higher fees attached to specialized programs can affect who can and who cannot attend or take part based on the family income. Educational opportunities may differ from region to region based on the relative wealth and willingness to pay of parents as well. So school fees and fundraising puts school boards and staff in the position of having to raise money to pay for public services. This takes time and energy away from educating and administration.

Mr. Speaker, the main purpose of Bill 208 is to eliminate school fees and fundraising for all curricular activities. The Department of Education will be ultimately responsible for ensuring that public education is funded adequately following this change. The impact of Bill 208 is that fundraising will not be allowed for raising funds for educational materials but is allowed for extracurricular activities, including clubs, school sports, and extracurricular trips.

2:50

Eliminating school fees, Mr. Speaker, will divert responsibility for school fees from parents back to the provincial government. Eliminating school fees would also ensure that quality of education is not determined by the wealth and willingness to pay of parents. The impact of this change will be determined by the willingness of the government to replace this lost source of revenue with government funding.

This bill requires that the minister report to the Legislature with a study to ensure that school programming and instruction will not be negatively affected by the reduction of the school fees. To ensure that students and school boards are not negatively affected by the loss of revenue, the Minister of Education must make a report to the Legislature detailing how the department will ensure that restricting school fees will not negatively affect the quality of education in this province.

Article 26(1) of the United Nations declaration of human rights states: "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages." School fees can create a financial burden for families, for low-income families in particular. High school fees for some extracurricular activities, including things like band class, field trips, can be prohibitive for some students, leading to a situation in which students obtain different educational experiences based on their financial resources. A refusal to introduce a cap on fees and fundraising or provide a province-wide guideline on these activities leads to confusion and vast differences from school board to school board.

Currently students enrolled in public school face different school fees based on where they live and what school board their school is in. This creates inequalities in the level of financial contribution, a contribution parents are expected to provide for their children's schooling based simply on place of residence.

Mr. Speaker, this government is happy to pass on the cost of public services, and in this case parents and school boards are the ones picking up the slack. Alberta has the money to make public education truly public, so why isn't it moving forward on eliminating school fees? The revenue from school fees represents less than 1 per cent of the Education budget, yet the government refuses to provide the funding necessary to eliminate school fees. Other provinces have done it. Why can't Alberta?

In the year 2005 Alberta parents paid over \$40 million so that their children could attend public school. That's an average of \$70 per student each year, but fees for things like band classes and class trips can be much higher than that. Ability to pay should not affect the education of K to 12 students.

This year the department provided only a 3 per cent increase in the operational funding. Without reasonable funding for operational costs, school boards will have no choice but to pass on the cost of education to parents. We need action on school fees now to ensure that parents are not paying for this government's refusal to fund our education system adequately.

Following the Alberta Learning Commission report the government pledged to take action on school fees, but instead they have done nothing to address this issue. The government has not even provided a set of guidelines or recommendations for what school boards should charge.

Rev. Abbott: It's called the School Act. You should read it.

Mr. Agnihotri: School Act. Okay. Thank you very much. Thanks for your advice, member sitting on my right-hand side.

An Hon. Member: Far right.

Mr. Agnihotri: Far right, yeah.

Mr. Elsalhy: Extreme right.

Mr. Agnihotri: Extreme right. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about school fees in Alberta very briefly. Currently the School Act allows school boards to charge

fees to cover the cost of instructional supplies or materials. Tuition fees are not allowed. In the year 2005 the Alberta School Boards Association released a report showing that while income from school fees remained relatively stable from the year 2000 to 2003, around \$31 million, they began increasing thereafter and reached \$40 million in the year 2005. This amounts to an average fee of \$70 per student each year. There is currently no cap on what school boards can charge in terms of fees, so this means that students in one jurisdiction can pay fees that are entirely different from students in another. Furthermore, there is no unified policy on how to address parents who are unable to pay. Recently there was some controversy in Alberta when a school board directed a file to collection agents.

The government has firmly supported the right of school boards to raise funds through school fees but has also refused to provide adequate funding to school boards. Fully covering the amount of funding gained through school fees would represent only .78 per cent of the current Education budget. Revenue from fundraising in Alberta's schools, Mr. Speaker, has been going up since the year 2001, and the total is about \$142 million in Alberta, \$280.58 per student.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, then Edmonton-Gold Bar, then Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to address Bill 208, School (Restrictions on Fees and Fundraising) Amendment Act, 2007. I wish to point out the importance of education. A highly educated citizenry is of utmost importance to Alberta's prosperity. Knowledge will enhance Albertans' quality of life. Education shapes the lives of those who partake in it. A reputable and educated workforce will attract investment. Technical training is crucial to the advancement of Alberta's economic success, and education will drive our province to be a world leader.

In 2003 the government of Alberta thoroughly examined our education system through months of extensive consultation and study. The government's aim was to make a great education system even better. Ninety-five all-encompassing recommendations resulted from the Commission on Learning. One specific recommendation is highly relevant to the debate on Bill 208, and that was recommendation 86, which stated:

Clearly define and set province-wide policy on what is considered "basic" and what are considered "extras" in relation to fund-raising by school councils. Limit school councils' role in fund-raising to "extras" consistently defined across the province and require schools and school councils to report annually on their fund-raising activities and how the funds were used.

The commission was concerned about the variation across the province of what was termed as basic and extra when fundraising. In some cases library resources, technology, computer equipment, and playgrounds were considered basic, and therefore fundraising was not allowed. In other schools fundraising contributed significantly to these areas. Consistency is needed across Alberta's school districts to ensure that all students receive an equal level of quality of education.

The commission was reluctant to exclude fundraising altogether. A number of special events and extracurricular activities add value to education but are clearly beyond a core curriculum. Preventing fundraising entirely would result in many of these special events and activities being completely eliminated or the burden being shifted entirely to individual students and their parents, many of whom

could not afford the extra costs. Among others, recommendation 86 was supported by the government of Alberta.

3:00

In April 2006 Alberta Education reported on the status of the recommendations and reported that during the 2004-2005 fiscal year the minister supported a project plan for province-wide consultations to determine and set province-wide guidelines on what is considered basic and extras in relation to fundraising. Consultations started in spring 2005, and during the 2005-06 fiscal year, Alberta Education consulted with stakeholders, and a draft summary of the findings was prepared for stakeholder comments. Recommendations are being considered in the development of a policy on fundraising.

School fees allow for flexibility and variety within our large education system. Some parents choose to enrol their children in specialized programs and courses, for example. Fees allow these children to get the specific type of education and training they believe is most beneficial to their growth. Because different children have needs and ambitions that sometimes exceed a basic level, I cannot support the restrictive nature of Bill 208.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak in support of Bill 208. Speaking as a father of three sons who have been through the Edmonton public school system, I can tell you that this bill speaks to me. I have in my time spent an awful lot of money on extra fees, and I would like to discuss that for a moment here.

Now, I recall that two weeks ago, May 14, when this issue was debated previously, there was some discussion about textbook rental fees and how textbook rental fees were actually meant to provide an incentive to return the books. This isn't quite the case, Mr. Speaker. I have a \$75 fee for my son in high school right now. If it really was an incentive to return the books, I'd get that \$75 back, but I don't get it back. That \$75 is gone. It doesn't matter whether I return the books in tattered condition or whether I return them in pristine shape because he hasn't opened them all year. I don't get my \$75 back, so it is not really an incentive to return the books. It is actually a way to raise money for further textbook purchases.

There was also some discussion about how this bill would ban fundraising for extracurricular activities. In fact, it does nothing of the sort. It very specifically says that fundraising for extracurricular activities is allowed. We've heard a lot of discussion about: oh, well, we'd have to go to the minister and ask for money. Wrong again. This bill says very specifically that you can raise money for extracurricular activities.

Now, I have here a list of student fees from the school that my son attends. It starts off that this year I paid \$226 in compulsory student fees. I got off lucky. A friend of mine actually has three kids at that school, so her bill came to over \$1,000 in compulsory fees. That started off with \$75 for textbook rental; a student ID card worth \$5, this is like an eighth of a cent of paper; a student handbook, \$8; athletics, access to the fitness centre, and intramurals, \$13; learning resources – library, periodicals, and novels – \$5. I can understand asking for money to rejuvenate a library, so I don't have a problem with that. But there are also technology resources, which includes computer maintenance, printing, and mail-outs, \$20; student locker rental, \$5 to rent space in the school to put your coat – for some reason you get a dollar back at the end of the year, but I don't know

why – and student leadership activities, another \$5. That came to \$136 in compulsory fees. This is not: you have the option. This is: \$136, you must pay this.

There was also – and this goes back to the textbook rental fee – a student caution fee of \$90 which is refundable when you return the books. So what it's telling you is that that textbook rental fee is actually a fundraising thing for schools, and it is not the incentive to return your books in good shape because the incentive is the \$90 student caution fee, which I also had to pay.

Now, there were also fees for a variety of other courses. Art, \$20 or \$30 for supplies, I assume. There's a class called communication technology information processing, which is essentially a form of – well, it's like typing class really, and for some reason there's an additional \$15 for that one. Food studies, \$25; industrial education, \$30; fashion studies, \$25; English Shakespeare notes, \$7; physics 20 and 30 workbooks, \$13; phys ed 10 gym uniforms, \$25. This uniform, believe me, is not a \$25 uniform. The gym uniforms when you get into phys ed 20, which also includes out-of-school trips and speakers, are \$80. I can understand some extra money for out-of-school trips – I have no problems with that – but there's also a charge for the phys ed locker, another \$4. So you've got \$5 for your regular locker and \$4 for a phys ed locker. There's a workbook if you're taking Spanish that costs \$17. French student resource fee, I don't even know what that means, \$10. Instrumental music, understandable that there's some money involved in that because there's equipment, but there's also choral music, which as I understand it is voices, and there's a \$20 charge to, I guess, bring your voice.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are an awful lot of charges that accumulate for a typical school, and I believe a lot of it is just designed not as incentive to return books. It's really very small, sort of, nickel-and-dime fundraising things, and there should be a limit put on this. I'm very, very supportive of the Member for St. Albert for bringing forward this bill. Particularly, as I said, as someone who has paid out thousands of dollars over the years, I'm wondering exactly why I've been paying out this much money.

I know that previously the Minister of Education has indicated that it wasn't his government's responsibility to feed and clothe students, but is it not the government's job to fund education fully? We're talking about textbooks, technology, and the whole range of issues that I've discussed in this list of student fees that I have in front of me.

Mr. Speaker, I know where this bill is going. It's going down to defeat, but I certainly would wish that the members opposite would give it some thought. It's legitimately an honest bill, and it would do a lot of Albertans a lot of good.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 208, the School (Restrictions on Fees and Fundraising) Amendment Act, 2007, is aimed at stopping schools from charging students or parents for services or supplies required by courses of study or education programs.

The province determines education funding to school boards. School boards are then responsible for the allocation of funding to the schools. Alberta's education system is a balance between provincial responsibilities and directions, local school board autonomy, and considerable flexibility for individual schools and communities.

Alberta is not alone in allowing schools to charge for services or supplies. Up until last fall parents in British Columbia were required to pay school fees. The B.C. Supreme Court ruled that a school board is not permitted to charge student fees for any materials required to successfully complete a course for graduation. While this ruling is not binding in Alberta – and I understand that our two systems are very different – the effect of the passage of Bill 208 could be similar.

After the B.C. Supreme Court's ruling it became clear that optional programs and enriching activities like music, trips, and apprenticeship training would soon be eliminated for lack of funding. Charging school fees was the only way to maintain these programs at a high level of quality. This ruling left schools in British Columbia no option but to start cutting some worthwhile programs. This is not the position that anybody wants schools in Alberta to be in. The loss of revenue caused by the passage of this bill would be significant; it's estimated at about \$41.5 million in instructional resource fees. Schools in British Columbia could not accommodate a similar loss of fees.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The government of British Columbia has now introduced Bill 20, which does nearly the exact opposite as Bill 208 here. Bill 20 allows school districts to charge fees for some courses and materials, including noninstructional costs for specialty academics and costs in addition to those of a regular education program, the purchase or rental of musical instruments, and the purchase or rental of tools and materials for a student's personal use in trades training or apprenticeship programs.

3:10

British Columbia's Bill 20 will not impose financial hardships on students or parents. School boards will be required to have a policy in place to enable participation by students for whom the fee may be a financial hardship. Fees for specialty academics must also be approved annually by boards and school planning councils.

Continuing to permit the charging of reasonable fees to enhance school programs will maintain the exceptional quality of public education in Alberta. Again, while our education systems are far from identical, the example of British Columbia should urge us to seriously consider the potential impacts of Bill 208.

I appreciate the intention of the Member for St. Albert in introducing this bill, but I don't think legislation is needed to address this issue. Because I do not want the quality of education in Alberta to suffer in any way, I will not be supporting Bill 208.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity. I have reviewed the bill thoroughly and read it, and I've been listening to the comments made by members on both sides on this bill. I find that perhaps I may contribute to this debate somewhat from various perspectives: from my past, somewhat limited experience in the teaching profession but more so now as a parent of a child in a public system where I am sitting on a parent advisory council actually involved in fundraising for a school.

Some of the comments that I hear from the opposition relevant to registration fees and fundraising fees are not the comments that I'm gathering from my parent colleagues on the parent advisory council and parents of the children with which my daughter attends. If you

were to pose the question to taxpayers – do you want fees? – the answer is obvious. The answer always will be: no, I don't want fees. It's like asking somebody: do you want to pay taxes? The answer would be no.

The fact of the matter is that any and all of those services which are provided in schools can be broken down into two categories. There are those mandatory curricular services, which constitute the basics that have to be delivered, which the government of Alberta imposes on school boards, which are further, then, superimposed on schools. Then there are those which we, probably all in this chamber, would agree are good for children. They are beneficial to children, and they enrich their school experience, but they are not the core basics, instruction of which are required by Alberta Education, and are not the basics on which students are tested in various parts of their academic career, particularly grades 3, 6, 9, and 12.

Now, if you look at the bare bones of education, the requirements, all that is within the budget which the school boards then schools receive. Just to put a little bit more factual information on it, it would be of interest, I imagine, to those who are viewing this debate right now or who are interested to read the *Hansards* later that approximately \$27 million is spent per day – \$27 million per day – on education between kindergarten and grade 12. We would agree that that's a lot of money.

Somebody will say: well, you have to spend money on that. Indeed, we do. Education is a priority. It's the second-highest expenditure in Alberta's budget. But we also have to compare ourselves to others. How do we compare relative to other provinces? The fact of the matter is that numbers are funny; you can play with them in many different ways, but if you're really honest, if you really compare apples to apples, we do spend, right now, the most on per-student funding between kindergarten and grade 12 in Canada. Budget 2007 ensures that operational grants to schools will increase by 3 per cent in September 2007 in addition to more funding which will be allocated for the small classrooms initiative.

That takes care of the basics of education; now let's talk about those extra activities. As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, when I say extra, I don't mean that they're not important. They're very important, but they're not mandated by Alberta Education; hence, taxpayers don't have to be on the hook for those expenses. We as parents want our children to have as rich an educational experience as they can; hence, we volunteer to raise some extra dollars. Those include intramurals, which keep our kids active during lunchtime. Those include field trips. They include uniforms, Mr. Speaker. They include the building of playgrounds on school properties, that we all volunteer for. As a parent I would be hard pressed to say that I ever had another parent come to me and complain about the fundraising.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you that having had the chance to work a casino for the school and having had the chance to attend numbers, hundreds of these meetings, they are positive. There's probably more positive that stems from those meetings than negative because those meetings give parents an opportunity to discuss their children's education in a given school, they allow parents to partake in decision-making in a school, and they allow parents to then be involved in the decision-making on how the school will be operated and how dollars will be spent within the school.

Now, if I was to yet put a third hat on, a past hat that I used to wear prior to being elected to this Chamber - I was a chair of the Citizens' Appeal Panel, which is the highest level of appeal for any social benefits in this province – I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that there isn't one family in this province who is in receipt of social services who would be faced with children's registration fees that

could not request from the department a supplemental benefit for that particular expenditure because the department does have funds allocated for registration of children. It's actually very common. If you were to speak to any social worker within the ministry, they will tell you that in the month prior to registration of children to school many families reliant on social assistance do apply for additional benefits to offset the extra costs of registering kids at school. Furthermore, most schools, if not all schools, very often waive these fees for students whose parents have multiple children, where the fees would pose a hardship on the family, or where it is known to the school that the family simply is not in a position to pay these fees, and these fees are offset by other parents who pay for their children.

So to say that there is gloom and doom in the system and that there are children who are denied public education is simply not true. It's inflammatory, and it doesn't contribute to a good, knowledgeable debate in this House. The fact of the matter is that if you don't pay for these fees out of your right pocket, hon. Member for St. Albert, you will pay for those fees out of your left pocket because those are services that need to be delivered. Unless you argue that we as government should only be mandated to provide our students with basic education, based on which we test our children in grades 3, 6, 9, and 12, if that is the argument, then indeed we can eliminate all these extra fees, and only that will be provided to our students. But if you are of the opinion that we should enrich their educational experience as much as we can, you have a choice of which pocket you want to pay for it from, your right one or your left one, because either the minister will fund it through your taxes or he will fund it through what can be called a user fee, being parent paid and paying for it directly.

I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that the system right now works very well. I have yet to receive phone calls from my constituents saying that their child has been denied registration to his or her school because they couldn't afford to pay. It simply doesn't happen. Are there other activities that we as parents would prefer to do other than sometimes attending a meeting or fundraising? Perhaps. But one of the benefits and one of the pleasures of having a child is to do those things. It's to coach soccer, it's to fund raise, it's to do bottle drives and attend scouting meetings, and that's what we as parents do. Now, to pass a law that will disallow parents from doing that, I don't find it would be productive and conducive to education.

Mr. Speaker, I can't vote in favour of this bill even though it is motherhood and apple pie because, simply, it is not addressing an issue that is out there. At least, it's not an issue that should be at the forefront of our debates in this House. I would suggest to the Member for St. Albert that there are many more important issues that we should be addressing than perhaps putting bills forward that, one could argue, would definitely attract the attention of many parents because you're asking them, "Do you want to pay, or don't you want to pay?" but will do nothing for our children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to get this opportunity to participate in the debate on Bill 208 this afternoon. I appreciate the efforts of the hon. Member for St. Albert in bringing this much-needed bill forward, and I would certainly encourage all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly to give it serious consideration when we have the opportunity to vote on it.

Before I go too far with my discussion this afternoon, I would like to remind all hon. members of Bill 208, section 49.1(2). Mr.

Speaker, it reads: "Nothing in subsection (1) restricts a school operated by a board from raising funds for extra-curricular activities offered by the school." Some members may be confused, but this clearly gives schools and school boards the option for extracurricular activities for fundraising.

3:20

What we find and what I think my hon. colleague is trying to do with this bill is follow the guidelines from the Learning Commission. The Alberta Learning Commission, when it reported, indicated that the government perhaps should take action on school fees. As I understand it now, the government has not even provided a set of guidelines or recommendations on what public school boards should charge or should not charge. Certainly, school fees can be an economic barrier for some.

In fact, yesterday I had an opportunity to have a look at an American newspaper, and on the front page of that paper was a story about how the education system in America was setting up an economic barrier. Very able students with a lot of academic ability from families who had low incomes, they were finding, could not participate in getting a good, solid formal education. Surely, we are not advocating that in this province. I certainly hope not, but after I listened to the remarks from the last speaker, I'm unfortunately concerned because one of the merits, one of the great benefits of a public education system is that everyone has an equal chance regardless of household income. If we don't start to control some of the fees that are being charged, then some people, unfortunately, through no fault of their own, Mr. Speaker, will be left behind.

Now, this government in the past has been very happy to pass on the costs of public services. There's no doubt about that. In this case parents and school boards are the ones again picking up the slack. Alberta has the money to make public education truly public, and I would urge all hon. members to support Bill 208 to ensure that that happens. There's probably not a member in this Assembly that at one point or another has not been involved in school fundraising projects. The hon. member talked about attending a casino or whatever to raise money. Everyone in this day and age is forced to do that.

With the changing curriculum, with the changes in information technology, it is not unusual for schools to organize campaigns to raise money for computers and computer labs and even security systems. Some parent advisory councils have discussed at their meetings whether or not they should spend money that was raised by the parents on a security system. Some school councils have replaced burnt out stoves and fridges that no longer work in home economics classrooms. That's not the role of parents, Mr. Speaker. Parents are already contributing through the tax system.

If there is more money needed to provide a basic public education, then perhaps the government should look at its priorities. One of the priorities that the government could change is the pool of cash that we're allocating through the lottery funds for the subsidies to the horse-racing industry. Well, perhaps we should look at ending those and putting that money directly into the public education system.

It's interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that in 2005 Alberta parents paid over \$40 million so that their children could attend public schools. That's an average of \$70 per student each year, but fees for things like band classes and class trips can be much higher than that.

Again, I would emphasize that the ability to pay should not affect the education of a K through grade 12 student. The \$40 million that we are using to subsidize thoroughbred horse racing: well, perhaps we got our priorities wrong, and we should just pool that cash into our public education system. If that wouldn't be enough, some of the golf courses that we are giving direct grants to could perhaps pay

their own way. I'm a golfer. Maybe I've got to pay 50 cents more for a green fee or a dollar more for a green fee. Well, maybe I should pay that.

Maybe these outfits should stand on their own merit and not be going back year after year to the lottery board for money for golf courses. Why should some golf courses get money from this government and not others? It's not fair to the ones that are family owned. It's just so ironic that some golf courses would be getting money from the lottery boards in this province, others are not, yet we're debating about whether or not there should be school fees or there should not be. I think it's another example of how this government has its priorities all wrong, and I would again urge members to please consider support for the hon. Member for St. Albert's Bill 208.

Now, how much revenue comes from school fees? Well, the information that I have, Mr. Speaker, is that revenue from school fees represents less than 1 per cent of the Education budget, yet the government steadfastly refuses to pay. Other provinces have done it. I don't understand why we in this province cannot. In fact, we are recruiting people from all over Canada to come to work here. One principal that I had discussion with last week told me that a lot of the parents that are getting set up in this province are concerned about the school fees. They're concerned about the school fees because a lot of them don't have a lot of financial resources when they first come here. They always respond to the principal in this way: well, where I came from, we didn't have school fees.

Mr. Lukaszuk: That's why they came here.

Mr. MacDonald: Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs says that that's why they came here, and they certainly came to better themselves economically. Perhaps not as many would come if they knew the consequences and how often they would have to open their chequebooks just to get what is considered a basic public education service. Maybe they would decide among themselves that they would be better off staying where they were and that perhaps it's not to their economic advantage to come here. If you have two or three children and you're paying the school fees, whether it's in high school, whether it's in junior high or even in elementary, it's a significant amount of cash in September and, in some cases, then again in January. Everyone, hon. members, should have a chance to participate.

This year the Department of Education is providing only a 3 per cent increase in operational funding, and this was debated and discussed in question period. It's quite interesting to listen to those exchanges, but without reasonable funding for operational costs school boards will have no choice but to pass on the cost of education to parents. So what is the likelihood that the fees are going to go up? Hon. members, it is significant.

Rev. Abbott: It's zero, zero.

Mr. MacDonald: It's not zero as the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar is indicating. I wish it was, but unfortunately it will not be. We need action. We need action right now on school fees to ensure that parents are not paying for this government's refusal to fund our public education system adequately.

Thank you.

3:30

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take a great deal of interest in speaking to Bill 208, which is to restrict extra fees and fundraising

by parents and by community groups for schools. My arguments today are in balance, I would suggest, because certainly with a long experience in regard to school fees as a teacher and a parent I have a great deal of reservation as to the effectiveness towards public education that school fees, in fact, employ. The fundraising that schools are basically obliged to do to meet a certain standard of education, again, I found to be quite onerous as both a parent and a teacher. Particularly, I found the use of casinos to fund schools personally very difficult to reconcile in my mind.

It's a problem that only seems to be continuing as parents and schools require a broader range of funding and must seek the sources that will provide that funding in the biggest possible way, which is of course to get a casino licence. But then, you know, the problems associated with that, societal problems being the least of which, make it a difficult choice, I would suggest.

Anyway, as I said, I'm going to present both the pros and cons of this bill. I certainly do have some tentative support for it, though not without some quite significant reservations. This bill seems to add a section that would prohibit fundraising through parents, a provision of normal ministry . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member for Edmonton-Calder, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for St. Albert to close debate on Bill 208.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate, by the way, all the members participating in the debate, but I think what we have to look at here is the question of leadership. We have a new Minister of Education, and I think we have, I believe, a commitment from the government to look at this issue. You know, we have a wonderful information technology division in the Department of Education that we're spending millions of dollars on.

The elimination of school fees for basic education items, providing guidelines for school boards on what fees can be levied, and setting caps on fees were recommended by the Alberta Commission on Learning 2003 report. Now, why do I mention that again? It's because this information technology division – there was a pledge made by the provincial government that they would define and set province-wide policy on what is considered basic and what is considered extra in relationship to the fees. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I think the Department of Education has failed us. They've passed out on the achievement test. They haven't passed it.

The failure of the Department of Education to provide guidelines as to what are considered basic and mandatory fees has led to confusion and complexity involved with varying fees across the province. We have a fee in the Lethbridge school system of \$40 in elementary, \$53 in junior high schools, \$71 in high school, and a band fee of \$65 for a total of \$229.

Now, I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, there are some people in this province, believe it or not – your own document says 1 in 5 – that go to school poor. I think the onus is on this Ministry of Education to look at this matter and give us some direction on school fees. Define what basic education is. Let's look at it carefully. These new texts that are coming out are a tremendous cost to parents, and that's what they're going to have to pay. The discussion of extracurricular: I couldn't believe what I've heard. Let's define it as allowing – remember, this bill allows individual schools to carry on with that funding, and that seems to have been missed.

Mr. Speaker, I have enjoyed the debate. I'm quite disappointed. I want to emphasize, you know, that the Minister of Education has talked many times about some new directions in the province, taking the bull by the horns and providing us with some new direction. So

far I have seen nothing. I'm waiting. When's he going to come out with something? This was a pledge, a pledge made by this government, a pledge made by this ministry to do something. Maybe the trustees are supposed to be doing it, the Alberta School Trustees' Association. Maybe they've got all of the material over at their office, and they're afraid to give it to us. I don't know. Are they working for the government? I'm not sure.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for allowing me to speak on this. I'll await the vote. Again, I'm going to remember this as something the government has pledged to us. They don't seem to want to take action.

I think there are some trustees in gallery today. I know that I talked to several school boards in Lethbridge, Alberta, last week and southern Alberta. Very disappointed. Some of them are going to be writing the minister and want him to come down and talk to them, see him eyeball to eyeball and talk about the real issues in education. I think this is one of them, and I think this government is missing the boat today.

You know, they set up these situations to listen, but nothing ever happens. The school fees are a perfect example of that. This was a pledge that the government made. Nothing has happened. The commission recommended that they look at this, and nothing has happened. I feel sorry for the parents today, but I'll sit down.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for your tolerance, and thank you very much.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:38 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Agnihotri	Elsalhy	Pastoor
Blakeman	Flaherty	Swann
Bonko	MacDonald	Tougas
Eggen	Mather	

3:50

Against the motion:

Abbott	Evans	Lund
Ady	Forsyth	Mitzel
Amery	Goudreau	Oberg
Calahasan	Horner	Oberle
Cao	Jablonski	Rodney
Cenaiko	Johnson	Snelgrove
Coutts	Johnston	Stevens
DeLong	Liepert	Strang
Doerksen	Lindsay	Tarchuk
Ducharme	Lougheed	Webber
Dunford	Lukaszuk	

Totals:	For – 11	Against – 32
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[Motion for second reading of Bill 208 lost]

Bill 210 Gaming Planning Act

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

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [some applause] Thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. It's my great pleasure and honour today to begin debate on Bill 210, the Gaming Planning Act. I recognize that not all MLAs are given the opportunity to bring forward their own bill, so I am grateful for the opportunity, and I hope that we have a fruitful and thoughtful discussion about the merits of Bill 210.

Bill 210 is quite straightforward. The Gaming Planning Act calls for the creation of a nine-member all-party committee whose mandate is to investigate and report on the gaming industry in Alberta. This committee will conduct the first fully public investigation of all aspects of gaming in this province. The committee will assess the amount of gaming revenue that is allocated to charities and how it is distributed, examine whether we should re-establish the community lottery boards, evaluate the role of charitable organizations and gaming activities, address the social impact of gaming, and examine the role of gaming in Alberta in the future in regard to the number of casinos and gaming machines in the province. In short and in less legal terminology, Bill 210 will allow for a sweeping public review of how gaming is conducted in Alberta and ask Albertans what future they see for gambling in the province of Alberta.

Now, why a public review of gaming? Simply put, gaming is big business in Alberta, very big business. In fact – and this may surprise most hon. members – Alberta has the widest variety of legal gambling options available of any jurisdiction in all of North America. Yes, even the state of Nevada, the world's gambling mecca, does not have as many legal gambling options as does the province of Alberta. For the record the missing element in Nevada is a state-run lottery, which, oddly enough, is illegal in that state.

The dollar figure most often used in discussions of the economic impact of gambling on the Alberta Treasury is the bottom-line figure of profit. For 2005-2006 that number is \$1.4 billion. That number tells only part of the story. The amount of money actually gambled, coins put into machines, tells an even more remarkable story. According to the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission's annual report of '05-06 Albertans poured more than \$11 billion into slot machines and more than \$10 billion into VLTs for a total of more than \$21 billion into gaming machines alone. There are more than 8,600 gaming machines and casinos in Alberta and another 6,000 VLTs in bars for a total of more than 14,000 gambling machines. There are now 17 casinos in Alberta and nine others in the final stages of the approval process. Little by little gambling has become a very big, very important industry in this province. This is an industry that is crying out for full, open, public scrutiny.

If I may, I'd like to give a little background on why I proposed Bill 210. Under the previous government there was a ministry of gaming. I asked to be assigned to be the critic for the gaming ministry because I truly believe that gambling in Alberta is both a social issue and an industry worthy of scrutiny. While I was gaming critic, I had on a number of occasions asked the minister of gaming what he saw as the future of gaming in Alberta. Was it an industry that we should grow, or should we rein it in? Did the gaming minister have long-range plans for gambling in Alberta? Was there any upper limit on the number of casinos or slot machines that would be allowed in Alberta?

Now, I asked these questions on a number of occasions, and repeatedly I received no substantial answers. After two and a half years of asking the government questions, I was not at all surprised by the nonanswers, but I started to wonder if the government didn't have a long-range plan for gaming, or if they did, were they keeping it a secret? It seemed to me that Albertans deserved an answer and that the public's opinion on gaming should be heard.

When I was the gaming critic, I was inundated with questions from the public about gambling. Was the government addicted to gaming revenue? Was it morally correct for the government to profit from gambling? Was it necessary to have volunteers work long hours for casino funds? Was the division of revenue equitable? The questions just kept coming.

Oddly enough, Mr. Speaker, I believe the government itself is of two minds about gambling. While it is happy to reap the benefits of a hugely profitable industry, it knows that there are moral implications to the whole issue of government profiting from what is still considered by many to be a vice. The government's confused attitude towards gambling is evident in its policy towards promoting the gambling business. While it has allowed and even encouraged a healthy domestic gambling industry, there still remains a prohibition against using gambling imagery in tourism promotion, yet the AGLC annual report notes that the new trend in the industry is destination gaming to attract tourists and businesspeople. It almost seems that the government acknowledges the gaming industry it has helped create but is not really proud of it.

Mr. Speaker, there has not been to my knowledge a full public debate about gaming in Alberta. I know that the government response will be that there was a major review of gambling in Alberta as recently as 2001. This review called *Achieving a Balance* was a gaming licensing policy review and was quite wide ranging, but it varied significantly from the committee that I am suggesting in Bill 210. The objective of the 2001 review was to "address issues of growth in gaming and continue to ensure the effective regulation and socially-responsible delivery of gaming activities in the province." However, the 2001 review did not hold public hearings into gambling and did not include the all-party element. The gaming licensing policy review of 2001 also did not include a widely distributed report. In fact, the final report was not even tabled with the Clerk of the Legislature.

It is also worth noting that the objective of the 2001 report was to "recommend gaming licensing policies" that spanned the following five years. Well, those five years have passed, and I think it's time for another more all-encompassing review that will set the course for the gaming industry and the administration of the charity model for the next decade. There has also been significant growth in gaming since the 2001 report. In fiscal year 2001 gaming activities in Alberta generated gross sales, that is before prizes, of \$14.6 billion from all forms of gambling in Alberta. In '05-06 gross revenue in gaming came in at more than \$22 billion.

There is certainly precedent in other provinces for a full review. In 2005 the government of Nova Scotia released its gaming strategy called *A Better Balance: Nova Scotia's First Gaming Strategy*. Nova Scotia has taken the unusual step of forming the Nova Scotia Gaming Corporation, a Crown corporation governed by the provincial Gaming Control Act that is charged with leading an economically sustainable and socially responsible gaming industry for the benefit of Nova Scotians and their communities.

Should all gambling in Alberta fall under the umbrella of a Crown corporation? Perhaps, but that is just one idea that could come forward during a comprehensive review of gambling in Alberta.

The Gaming Planning Act would also give the committee the right to retain experts. We are fortunate in Alberta to have some renowned gambling experts such as Dr. Garry Smith, a gambling research specialist at the University of Alberta, and Dr. Robert Williams at the University of Lethbridge. You can applaud the University of Lethbridge.

Where will the final report on the Gaming Planning Act take us? Well, clearly there's a public taste for gambling. For the overwhelming majority of Albertans gambling is simply another form of

entertainment. Public opinion has changed dramatically when it comes to gambling. While once considered a vice that had to be curtailed at all costs, gambling has gone mainstream. The fact that we now have televised million dollar poker says a lot about how gambling has grown in public acceptance. Back when I first began studying the gaming industry in Alberta, shortly after being named the gaming critic, I would have bet, if you'll pardon the pun, that the public would have been opposed to growing the gaming industry in Alberta if they were asked. Now I'm not so sure. I suspect now that the public's attitude towards gambling overall has changed dramatically, so much so that it could be that today Albertans might even welcome the growth in gaming.

Could Alberta become a Las Vegas north? It may be time to look upon gambling as an actual growth industry and tourist attraction. Could gambling become an economic pillar for Alberta once the oil runs out? Again, another question that needs to be asked. And what of Internet gambling? Clearly, many millions of dollars are spent by Albertans on Internet gambling. Should the government tap into this revenue source as well or let millions in potential revenue slip away? And what of the volunteer sector? I have heard from many charitable groups who have concerns about the volunteer aspect of casino gambling and the tremendous pressures it puts on the volunteers. Even some casino operators I've spoken to have found the volunteer aspect to be problematic.

There are also questions about who qualifies as a charity. Why, for example, should one minor sports team with limited financial needs get the same revenue windfall as a social service agency that serves the needs of hundreds or thousands of disadvantaged people? Should all lottery dollars, regardless of where they're earned, go into a common pool for all Albertans to share? Again, these are questions that need to be asked, and I think Albertans would like to express their opinion on these matters.

4:00

Hon. members, before this government or any other government takes further steps in the gambling industry, I believe it is time to consult with the people. It is, after all, the people of Alberta who most benefit from gambling and who have the most to lose.

Hon. members, this is not a witch hunt or an attempt to derail gambling or to promote it. This is not an attempt to embarrass the government in any way. Bill 210 would ask Albertans in the most open and transparent manner possible exactly how they feel about gaming and where we should take the charitable model in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to put this bill before the House, and I look forward to the debate. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to spend a few moments this afternoon discussing Bill 210, the Gaming Planning Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Bill 210 proposes a review of gaming policies in Alberta through an all-party gaming review committee. This committee would examine current revenue sharing policies for charities, roles of volunteers and casinos, social impacts of gaming, the future role and scope of gaming in Alberta. There may be many gaming opportunities in this province. This includes VLTs, casinos, lotteries, and horse racing.

Albertans partake in these activities as a source of entertainment and enjoyment. That said, gaming activities must be balanced with the need to be socially responsible. Gaming activities must also be conducted within a legal framework which discourages fraud and corruption. I believe that Alberta's approach to gaming respects and promotes that balance. Most importantly, proceeds from gaming activities benefit Albertans.

Albertans reached a consensus on gaming activities in 1998 as a result of the Lotteries and Gaming Summit held by the provincial government. A number of recommendations emerged from the summit. In general, the recommendations stated that, number one, resources be dedicated toward gaming research, particularly towards prevention and treatment of problem gambling, the social impacts of lotteries and gaming, native gaming issues, and emerging gaming activities; number two, a charitable model for operating casinos and bingo be maintained; number three, all gaming and lottery profits collected by the province be directed to charitable and nonprofit community initiatives; and four, gambling addiction, prevention, and treatment programs be increased. Our current gaming system reflects those recommendations.

Overall the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission regulates all charitable gaming activities in the province. The AGLC strives to maximize the economic benefits of gaming in Alberta. By monitoring gaming establishments and ensuring compliance with gaming regulations, the AGLC delivers on its commitment of generating gaming revenues that benefit community and nonprofit organizations.

The AGLC is one part of the gaming system in Alberta. The other part of the system is the Alberta lottery fund. The Alberta lottery fund collects the government's portion of revenues through gambling activities and lotteries. In this fiscal year the Alberta lottery fund will distribute \$1.45 billion to numerous initiatives that improve quality of life, build a stronger Alberta, and provide safe and secure communities.

I want to mention a number of important initiatives supported by the Alberta lottery fund. As announced in the recent budget, the lottery fund will be supporting two major initiatives to improve community facilities in our province. The major community facilities program will provide \$280 million over the next two years to assist municipalities and nonprofit organizations to upgrade and build large regional community facilities to encourage community participation and individual well-being. This program will support the construction of sports, recreational, cultural, and wellness facilities. Such facilities are needed to address the expectations of Albertans as they make the province a desirable place to live, work, and grow. The other component of the community facilities development announced in this budget is grants for recreation and sports facilities. The lottery fund will allocate \$90 million for this purpose in Budget 2007.

In addition to these two new programs the Alberta lottery fund provides funding to communities through the community facility enhancement program and the community initiatives program. CFEP provides funding to communities to construct and approve community use facilities throughout Alberta. In 2007-2008 CFEP's budget was \$38.5 million. The municipalities, First Nations, nonprofit organizations, and regional child service authorities can apply for CFEP grants. CIP supports community projects such as libraries, seniors' services, culture, sports, recreation, and health and wellness initiatives. CIP funding is approved on a matching grant basis. The maximum grant would be \$75,000 per project. CIP's budget for 2007-2008 is \$30 million.

The lottery fund supports research into the effects of gambling. The Alberta Gaming Research Institute examines the implications of gaming from a number of perspectives. This includes the impact on the health care system; sociocultural, economic, psychological impacts; and the impact on government and industry policy as it relates to gaming. This research institute is a partnership between the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge. The institute will receive \$1.6 million from the lottery fund in 2007-2008.

Communities receive additional benefits from gaming activities beyond the Alberta lottery fund. Charitable organizations receive a portion of gaming revenues as a result of volunteering at bingos and casinos, for example.

Mr. Speaker, I believe it's very clear that Albertans benefit from our gaming system. By striking a balance between offering a variety of gaming activities and providing social benefits that improve quality of life, Alberta is a model for other jurisdictions to follow. As a result, I cannot support Bill 210.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again and speak in support of Bill 210, the Gaming Planning Act. I want to thank the MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark for introducing the bill. I really appreciate his time and efforts to prepare all the paperwork for this very important bill.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 210 would allow for a sweeping public review of how gaming is conducted in Alberta and ask Albertans what future they see for gambling in this province. This bill establishes a committee to plan the future role of gaming in Alberta. Part of the mandate of the committee is to reconsider re-establishing community lottery boards for distributing gaming revenues.

I still remember some time ago, when one filmmaker received \$5 million within a very short period of time and some other filmmakers were struggling. I just want to ask the minister if he could give us a brief summary, brief details, of how they assess the applications. I just want to make sure favouritism in awarding the grants doesn't happen in any of the programs under this Gaming Planning Act or the CIP grant or CFEP or other programs and general grants in different departments.

I think there should be a fair system for all. We are not against the grants as the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs mentioned in his private member's statement today. I just want to say a few words in response to his private member's statement. We always try to make sure the integrity of all the institutions is protected. We are not against awarding grants to any community. We just want to make sure that the system should be fair for all the recipients. We asked questions recently about the other initiative programs for which we don't have even the rules. We are always talking about the openness, transparency, and accountability, and we are always asking to make sure that the rules are not broken.

4:10

Unfortunately, the government made the rules, and they break their own rules. That is not acceptable to us, and that's the reason we raised a few questions about CIP grants and CFEP grants and, for example, the Applewood community. I'm still not sure, even after the investigation in the Auditor General's report, whether that money was recovered or not. I would request the hon. minister because this is a long time, okay? The public wants to know whether that money is recovered or not. Ordinary people, if they don't pay even a small amount of money to the government, receive one letter after another. Then they, you know, collect the money through different agencies.

My question is: why, so far, has this government failed to collect that money which the government is owed from the misused money in one of the grants? It's not only one grant I mentioned, the CIP grant; it was 43 grants. Rules were broken, but the minister very tactfully ignored. He hardly accepted that the rules were broken. Sometimes he said: it's a fraction of people. This was the wording used. Then he said: we give grants to thousands of people, and that

was only 43 grants. You know, it's not the number of people, the number of the groups. I mean, he should admit that the rules were broken.

Rev. Abbott: He did. Under his discretion.

Mr. Agnihotri: Listen. Let me finish. I just want to know whether in the future the government maintains the rules they make. That is what we were asking.

The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs keeps on saying – it appears to me that he was trying to portray that we are against awarding those grants. It's not true. This program is good. We always appreciated that. Lots of people see that the rules are broken and that favouritism is going on. If the ruling party MLAs or ministers are involved, they get the grant easily. That was the question.

Now I come to the little bit of background of this Bill 210, the Gaming Planning Act, Mr. Speaker, a general and useful chronological listing of the gambling in this province, gaming history and facts. For example, you will find that community lottery boards were eliminated in 2002. Bill 210 addresses the gambling planning in Alberta. Recent government gambling planning initiatives include: 1990 to 2000, gaming licensing policy review initiated; Gaming and Liquor Commission undertakes a review of gambling in Alberta; casino moratorium issued. In the year 2001-2002 the gaming licensing policy review was completed, with 61 recommendations. According to the report the objective of the review was "to recommend gaming licensing policies that will address issues of growth in gaming and continue to ensure the effective regulation and socially responsible delivery of gaming activities in the province over the next five years." It's on page 2-1.

One of the problems with this study is that nearly six years have passed since its completion. In addition, the gaming licensing policy review was commissioned by the Gaming and Liquor Commission without all-party involvement or significant public consultation. During this period, Mr. Speaker, the casino moratorium was lifted. The minister of gaming established the MLA Review Committee on Charitable Gaming Licensing Eligibility and Use of Proceeds in January 2002. Yvonne Fritz was the sole MLA named to the committee.

An Hon. Member: Hey, you can't use the name.

Mr. Agnihotri: Sorry. I'm just giving the reference in the past, Mr. Speaker. I'm not trying to name anybody.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, you were in the Assembly this afternoon when the Speaker did make some rulings, and I know that you're aware of it.

Mr. Agnihotri: Yes. I understand. I withdraw that remark.

Mr. Speaker, in 2003 that MLA Review Committee on Charitable Gaming Licensing Eligibility and Use of Proceeds made 42 recommendations, and now, after 2003, my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark introduced this Bill 210.

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

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for bringing this forward. As a former AADAC chair I've seen first-hand some of the negative sides of this industry, and surely continued diligence is required.

Now, Bill 210 as presented, the Gaming Planning Act, proposes establishing an all-party gaming review committee to conduct a

sweeping review of gaming practices in Alberta. This would not be the first time that gaming practices in Alberta have been closely scrutinized. The 1998 Lotteries and Gaming Summit, an open, public forum on all aspects of gaming, recommended maintaining the charitable model for operating casinos and bingos, and this model seems to have affected and served Albertans well. It directed all gaming and lottery profits collected by the province to supporting charitable and/or nonprofit community initiatives. The charitable gaming model allows eligible charitable or religious groups to apply for licences to fund raise with casinos, bingos, raffles, and pull tickets. Thousands of charitable and religious groups conduct charitable gaming activities to raise funds for their worthy projects and services.

Last year about a quarter of a billion dollars was invested in Alberta's communities through these initiatives. The government's revenues from ticket lotteries, slot machines, video lottery terminals, and electronic bingo and keno are directed to the Alberta lottery fund. These revenues totalled nearly \$1.4 billion in 2005-2006. Each year the lottery fund estimates are voted on right here in the Legislature. These revenues are then allocated through 12 ministries in support of public initiatives and the foundations and grant programs. Due to the support that these monies provided, thousands of volunteer, public, and community-based initiatives are able to proceed each year.

CIP, or the community initiatives program, provides support for project-based initiatives in areas like community services, seniors' services, libraries, arts and culture, sports, education, health, and recreation. I'm sure that pretty much every member has seen this in action and probably heard a lot of positive feedback from CIP.

Now, CFEP, or the community facility enhancement program, provides support for expansion and upgrading of Alberta's many community-use facilities. The Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation, the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Wild Rose Foundation, and the human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund – that's a mouthful – also provide support to causes that improve Albertans' quality of life. It's very affirming to have these people come forward and express their appreciation.

4:20

Albertans are probably familiar with some of the government programs that the Alberta lottery fund supports. Last year over \$14 million helped support the Alberta film development program, to international acclaim; \$4.5 million was dedicated to the prevention of family violence and bullying initiative, something I think all of us in the House can agree on; and \$2.3 million helped support learning television. Hundreds of millions more supported other invaluable community services. I wish we heard about this more in the newspapers. Perhaps the news is too good and wouldn't sell enough papers.

In any case, Mr. Speaker, the 2007-2010 business plan for the Solicitor General and Ministry of Public Security sets a goal of ensuring that Alberta's gaming industry operates with integrity and social responsibility and benefits Albertans. In 2005-2006 92 per cent of Albertans reported that they were satisfied with the gaming activity they participated in and that it was provided fairly and in a responsible manner. I recognize that there is a certain percentage missing, and we must continue to take care of that remaining percentage. I believe our AADAC programs are aimed at exactly that: not only treatment but prevention and information.

But back to the task at hand. Given the support of Albertans' volunteer and charitable efforts that gaming affords, the level of satisfaction with gaming in this province, and the fact that the

Solicitor General and Ministry of Public Security conduct reviews of gaming policies, legislation, and regulations, I do not believe it's necessary at this point to create yet another committee to review gaming practices in Alberta.

Once again, thank you to Edmonton-Meadowlark. I look forward to the rest of the proceedings.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will certainly start by congratulating and thanking the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark for working hard and developing this Bill 210, the Gaming Planning Act. I think that the Gaming Planning Act is needed. It certainly would allow for a good public review of how gaming is conducted in Alberta and ask Albertans themselves what future they see for gambling in this province.

Now, if we were to adopt this bill, Mr. Speaker, we would establish a committee to plan the future role of the entire gambling industry in Alberta. Part of the mandate, as I understand it, of the committee is to consider re-establishing community lottery boards for distributing gaming revenues. Certainly, if for no other reason than that, I would urge all hon. members to vote for this bill because we know that back in 2002, when this government got rid of the community lottery boards, there was considerable disappointment in the community. We went to this sort of grip and grin, with Conservative MLAs going across the province with cheques.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, yes. Big, phony cheques.

Mr. MacDonald: Big, phony cheques with their own names on as if it was their own money. This is what happened.

Ms Blakeman: They got caught for doing that.

Mr. MacDonald: They certainly got caught by doing that, and I think it was the diligent research from the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark that caught them. They were going across the province with their own names on the cheques. They were embarrassed into stopping this procedure. As far as I know, some of them may still be at it, but it's wrong. It's totally wrong.

In fact, one Tory MLA wound up in the Edmonton-Gold Bar constituency, and he was late, an hour late, with the cheque. He didn't know his way around the constituency. The local community league phoned me, and they had a great laugh about this. They thought it was hilarious that the Tory MLA didn't know his way around Gold Bar. The meeting was over by the time the cheque presentation was to take place.

An Hon. Member: It sounds like a problem.

Mr. MacDonald: It is a problem, hon. member. It certainly is a problem. That's why we need to go back to the community lottery board model. The allocation of gaming funds I think would go much smoother, much better because the community knows best. There is absolutely nothing the matter with allowing a group of citizens from the community to get together and decide which projects have merit and which ones should be funded and for how much.

Now, do I think golf courses would be getting all these megabucks that they're currently getting from this government if we had this community lottery board plan? I don't think so. I do not think that golf courses would be getting so many lottery board grants. In fact, it's a play on the whole idea of green fees, you know, and the Tory party I think should reconsider through this government this whole

plan of supporting some golf courses and not others. We talked about that earlier this afternoon, and I'm not going to continue on that.

I think we need to have a general and a useful listing of gaming in Alberta. If we look at the history and facts of gaming, we will see where it has grown from an industry, or whatever you want to call it – I don't know if industry is the correct term. But it has grown from a source of revenue for this government that was a little over \$20 million to what it is now: \$1.3 billion, \$1.4 billion. In some years it could go as high, Mr. Speaker, as \$1.5 billion.

There are 8,600 slot machines in Alberta casinos; 6,000 VLTs in the bars. That's over 14,000 gambling machines. That's a lot. I think it's too many. In fact, I was a volunteer at a casino up in Manning, and I couldn't believe the number of slot machines that were in there, yet there is another casino at Northlands, just a little bit to the south. I don't know how they actually stay in business. If we adopted this bill before we expand the number of casinos, perhaps this committee could have a look at it.

There has been a study that estimates that close to 5 per cent of problem gamblers in Ontario in 2003 accounted for 36 per cent of Ontario gaming revenue. Now, if we were to pass this bill, perhaps our committee, in a public review, could find out exactly what is going on in this province. In this study, according to Dr. Williams, a leading expert on gambling research, First Nations citizens have the highest rate of problem gambling in North America. Now, this is in North America, and I think we should have a look at this for our province. This, again, would be a role for this committee to perform.

Now, we know that there are racetrack slots, casino slots, VLT terminals, and we know the various percentages there to the retailer and to the government. We're talking about a considerable amount of money. Alberta needs not only a plan for gambling but it needs a plan in general, and it's evident to me that there is a plan for neither. How truthful was the former Premier when he finally admitted that this government has no plan. Bill 210 would be a way, certainly, for this government to develop a plan for gambling. Albertans need a say in how the gambling industry will operate in the future. Bill 210 will evaluate best management practices for the gaming industry concerning rural, urban, and aboriginal or First Nations communities.

4:30

When we're talking about casinos and we're talking about expanding casinos on First Nations land, I don't know what's next with this government. I would caution all hon. members about this. Legally I don't think there's anything that could be done, but we're setting up these destination resorts for gambling on First Nations land. I suspect that this government is also planning or encouraging private hospitals to be located on those First Nations lands. That'll be the next thing, and there are absolutely no rules or no laws against this. First Nations land is independent. They're autonomous, and if they wanted to set up a private hospital, there would be nothing to stop them. I certainly hope that this government is not using that as a way to finally get their private hospitals in this province, that they've been quietly promoting for the last dozen years or so.

Now, Mr. Speaker, again, Bill 210 considers re-establishing community lottery boards as a means of distributing gaming revenue. That is, as I said earlier, very, very important. Let's get on with it. Let's vote for this bill.

When we would establish under Bill 210 an all-party committee to investigate and report on the gaming industry in Alberta, I, if I was privileged to be a member of this Assembly, would like to sit on that committee. Now, with this committee we would assess the

amount of gaming revenue that is allocated to charitable organizations; evaluate the role of charitable organizations in gaming activities, including religious and other volunteer organizations; evaluate the existing formula for allocating gaming revenue to charitable organizations; examine the role of gaming in Alberta . . .

I'm sorry my time is up, Mr. Speaker, but thank you.

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

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise and join in the discussion on Bill 210, the Gaming Planning Act, which has been proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Alberta's gaming industry is a very important part of community action in this province. Gaming activities contribute to Alberta's quality of life by providing opportunities for charitable groups to raise funds through the provision of entertainment options to adults in Alberta. Our community organizations are able to benefit financially for their respective causes. These revenues, as was indicated, total well over \$1.3 billion each year and are used to annually support thousands of volunteer, public, and community-based initiatives.

While there is no all-party committee in place to review gaming policy, I'd like to make it clear to the hon. members that this government is committed to ensuring responsible gaming activities in this province. Certainly, as a ministry we review the gaming activities, and on the funding side we constantly review that. It will be noted that the First Nations funds were developed following some very extensive consultation with existing groups in the province of Alberta.

Alberta's gaming policies are founded on the basis of community giving. This Assembly can be sure that this goal will remain a guiding principle. The public expects the government to control and manage gaming activities in a socially responsible manner and expects appropriate measures to be taken on an ongoing basis.

The shape of the industry is determined by the legislation, regulations, and policies governing gaming activities, or the gaming policy framework of our province. Because we have such a sound system, Albertans have indicated to us in a 2006 survey on gaming that 74 per cent of respondents were pleased with the process of gaming in the province. Of those Albertans who had taken part in gaming activities in the previous year, more than 90 per cent felt that the service was provided in a reasonable and equitable manner.

Having cohesive gaming policies in Alberta means a stronger bond with charitable giving. Promoting a compassionate society is a part of this government's mandate, and we are consistently looking for ways to bolster this mentality. Mr. Speaker, as hon. members know, as Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture I was given the mandate from our Premier of setting up a community spirit program. This involves charitable giving to support increases for private charitable donations through tax credits. As per our Budget 2007 Alberta's tax credit system for total annual charitable donations over \$200 will increase to 21 per cent from 12.75 per cent. When combined with the federal charitable donations credit, Albertans will receive a 50-cent tax credit for every dollar donated over the \$200 threshold.

Volunteerism, Mr. Speaker, encompasses the importance of community spirit in this province. When organizations come together and partake in bingos, casinos, and the like, it presents communities with the opportunity to showcase a sense of pride in the causes for which they are raising funds. This sort of community benefit wouldn't take place without the participation of volunteers.

At the present time gaming proceeds may be used to reimburse volunteers for approved expenses that may be incurred as a result of participating in the administration of charity gaming events. According to the 2003 MLA review committee on charitable gaming report a credit is a value placed by a charitable group on the contribution of that member to volunteering at gaming events. It may be used, for example, to offset the cost of registration fees or competition fees in an acceptable, charitable activity, such as amateur youth athletics or dance. Volunteers working a licensed event may receive credits to help offset the cost of registration fees, competition fees, travel expenses, or other uses currently approved by the AGLC for an approved charitable activity conducted by the licensee.

Mr. Speaker, given the ongoing review of gaming policies that is undertaken by AGLC in conjunction with the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, the role of volunteerism in gaming is continuously being re-evaluated in order to ensure that their safety, reimbursement, and general best interest are certainly front and centre. The cornerstone of Alberta's approach to its gaming and liquor industry is that all activities are conducted in a socially responsible manner, including the role of our volunteers.

Over the course of the past two decades there have been a variety of reviews that have allowed the government to connect with the public and clarify the gaming needs of Albertans. Given the new structure of our government, we can remain confident that the appropriate competencies will be aligned to ensure maximum community benefit in an open and transparent manner. Given the presence of an appropriately regulated gaming industry in Alberta, hon. members can rest assured that the best interests of our volunteers are at heart as well as those of all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to join in – well, I can't call what I've heard a debate – an exchange on Bill 210. I really appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark bringing this forward in a very thoughtful way. I can tell by listening to his opening remarks that he had really thought about this. It's frustrating to hear other members respond to it by just reading something off a website because I think what the bill was designed to do was to generate a fulsome discussion about where we are with gambling in the province of Alberta. Is this really where we wanted to be in 2007? Are these really activities that we want people partaking in? Is this really the way we want to fund or reward our volunteer and charitable sectors? Do we feel that we are flowing an appropriate amount of money through to those who have problems with gambling? I think those are questions that should be discussed, and they aren't.

If I may indulge in a little historical vignette here, a little wander backwards in time, I always find it really interesting that this province got into gambling because they wanted to get in ahead of organized crime. Yup. Good reason for getting into gambling: so you could get in there ahead of organized crime. But that is indeed what is on the books as to why this province got into the whole VLT business.

4:40

Then in 1997, or it could have been the end of 1996, there was a plebiscite on VLTs across the province. Frankly, it didn't turn out too well. It was really, really close to 50-50. I think that scared the bejesus out of certain people in the government caucus because it really was people saying: "We don't like this. We don't like what

it's doing to our communities. We don't like the fact that it's inciting people to gamble more money than they can afford. This is not entertainment." It was really jeopardizing a huge revenue source for the government. I mean, we're well over a billion dollars, and it was VLTs that took us there. The amount of money the government has made from ticket sales, 6/49, our share of the Western, and all of that kind of stuff has been consistent at around the \$200 million, \$300 million mark. Consistent. It was the VLTs that really vaulted us from that sort of \$200 million, \$300 million up over a billion dollars. It just rocketed. It's a steady line upwards on the graph if you watch across those years.

So having that plebiscite really scared people, and two things came out of that. One was the gambling summit. It was very fashionable between '97 and 2001 to have summits on everything. We had a justice summit and a gaming summit and a whatnot summit. Lots of summits. Anyway, there was a gaming summit that was held in Medicine Hat, very interesting, and I attended that. Out of that gaming summit came a number of recommendations, most of which have yet to ever be implemented. The then Member for Lacombe-Stettler, Judy Gordon, who served this province very well and very faithfully around gaming issues and how to best find that balance between the community and the money-making aspects, led that gaming summit, gambling summit.

You see it right there; right there is something really interesting. Everybody else was calling it gambling. The government's Public Affairs Bureau kicked into gear, and now we're all going to call it gaming because that made it seem, well, kind of fun and kind of not so dangerous and not such a dark side. It's just about entertainment really, but there's no negative side to that. That's exactly the kind of mindless spin that this government has done over and over and over again. Don't deal with the issue; rename it and give it a better spin.

Anyway, coming out of that gaming summit we had quite a long review that was led by Judy Gordon, and we ended up with community lottery boards, which was a very good idea as a way of distributing those lottery funds back into the community. What was the problem that the government had? They had a whole bunch of communities saying: get rid of this gambling; we don't like it. There was a range of, you know, "We think it's evil" to "We think it's not a good idea" and everything in between. That really scared the government.

So, fine, we're going to give each community a little piece of that action. They can make up their own minds about how they spend it, and guess what? It actually worked. I don't think they intended it to, but it actually did work. Communities very thoughtfully put together committees of people, some of them on a regional basis, and distributed that money. There was no cap to the amount of money they could give out. It was based on a per capita as to how much they actually received in each community. The committee, the lottery board, could decide that "Look, what we really need here is, you know, a new recreation centre, and we're going to put all of our money towards that," and that's what they did, and it worked out. Localized decision-making.

The second thing that flowed out of that VLT plebiscite was core funding. Up until then really the gambling money had only been used for extras, funding the arts, funding the foundations that existed at that time: Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife; the Wild Rose Foundation; Multiculturalism; the Foundation for the Arts; those foundations. That's where the money went.

How could the government make it so that everybody needed to have that lottery money and nobody was going to say: "Well, we don't need it that badly. We'd rather not have the gambling"? All of a sudden – and you guys can go back and find this – the 18 departments found programs that had to be funded through lottery

programs. We went from having none of the core funding of core projects funded by lottery dollars to 18 departments having several projects in each of their departments being funded exclusively from lottery dollars. So you can't now say, "Oh, well, we would get rid of gambling completely in the province," because, oh my goodness, that would be capital funding for hospitals and schools, that would be an aboriginal program, that would be some farm programs plus all of the original foundations that had been disseminating money. Very interesting to watch that happen. We're still doing it. Fourteen departments get programs funded by lottery dollars. So it's very hard to say: let's get right out of gambling. The government does its level best to entrench gambling.

I would like to see some of the questions raised in Bill 210 actually discussed because I think the question "How much is enough?" has still not been answered by this province. How much gambling activity is enough? How much revenue generated by gambling activities is enough for this province? Is it limitless? Do citizens in Alberta really want to just keep going: more casinos, more bingos, more VLTs, more slots, more whatever, forever, ad infinitum? I think the answer to that is no, but I don't know where that threshold is reached, and I would like to have that discussion.

What are the consequences of having our funding for the voluntary, charitable sector primarily coming from gambling dollars? What are the consequences for the volunteer sector? Is this really where we want to spend our activities? When we go out for those volunteer activities, we want to help somebody. We want to deliver Meals on Wheels. We want to learn something by going and volunteering for a group that could teach you, like Habitat for Humanity. You could learn a new skill doing that. Or we want to have fun. You could volunteer at any number of festivals to have some fun doing stuff.

That's, I think, what people want to do, not work a casino to raise the money to offset the cost of having your kid play hockey. Is that really how we want to be spending our precious nonworking, nonhousework time, working a bingo or a casino so we can raise money for ourselves and our kids to participate in whatever time they've now got left because they're all spending it working casinos and bingos to raise the money? There's just a ridiculous treadmill that we start to get on with this. I think a lot of people would argue: let me off of this treadmill; this is not what I anticipated around this.

Do we really need this money to be doing that? Shouldn't it be just funded by regular sources through general revenue? All of those questions. We don't get the opportunity to discuss it. Why? Because the government squelches it. They darn well need that money, and they're going to weave it into the texture of everything to try and make sure those tentacles are really deep and can't get pulled back out again by another scary thing like a VLT plebiscite.

I've heard a number of references here to the voluntary sector. That's one thing that I keep raising here: the fragility of that voluntary, charitable, NGO sector right now. It has been hollowed out by choices that this government has made. We have a number of organizations that exist to serve or provide services in that sector who are literally hollowed out. They're quite fragile. Why? Well, because they're having to try and raise a number of their dollars for operation, thereby subsidizing the services that they're offering to make the province a better place. In a number of cases they're actually contracted by the government to provide services, and they're still having to go and raise charitable dollars to subsidize those services that the government is giving.

Please vote for Bill 210.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Bill 210, the Gaming Planning Act, is aimed at establishing an all-party gaming review committee to undertake a review of gaming practices in the province. The provincial gaming industry is appropriately regulated and controlled. Reviews have been conducted to improve Alberta Gaming practices. Regular annual reports occur, falling in line with the Alberta government's priority of being open and transparent. The 2006 survey of Albertans' views on gaming-related matters indicated that 74 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the conduct of legal gaming in Alberta. Of those who had participated in a gaming activity in the previous year, over 90 per cent were satisfied that the activity was provided fairly and in a responsible manner.

The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission provides recommendations to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security regarding the procedures, licences, and licensing of gaming in the province. This ensures that key policy objectives are being met according to legislative and regulatory requirements.

Each year the lottery fund estimates are voted on right here in the provincial Legislature, ensuring transparency and full accountability. Thousands of volunteer, charitable, and nonprofit groups across the province benefit from the Alberta lottery fund each year. A complete list of lottery fund dollars allocated to the various ministries and a searchable database containing the groups and communities that receive funding can be found online at albertalotteryfund.ca. Using key strategies, like ensuring that lottery fund revenues are appropriately allocated and helping to inform Albertans about lottery-funded initiatives, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission manages the Alberta lottery fund to enhance the quality of life for all Albertans.

4:50

The committee that Bill 210 proposes to create would look at re-establishing community lottery boards to distribute lottery funds. Now, the community lottery boards were locally administered and made up of community representatives who were recruited or appointed by regional nominating committees. The community lottery boards were discontinued at the end of the 2002 fiscal period and replaced by the community initiatives program in order to increase transparency.

The government of Alberta created the CIP to establish standard criteria for CIP funding. This allows lottery funds to be allocated according to the priorities of Alberta communities and ensures that the funds are being utilized by communities appropriately. The CIP provides funds from the Alberta lottery fund to enhance and enrich project-based community initiatives throughout Alberta. We're all aware of these. They happen in all of our communities.

The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission manages and controls the growth of Alberta's gaming and liquor industries responsibly and with integrity. This means that all industry players compete on a level playing field where the rules are fair, clear, and consistently applied. It means that sound policy and effective regulation work hand in hand with monitoring and enforcement. It means a commitment to working in partnership with charities and private businesses to deliver high-quality services to the public. It means a commitment to excellence, openness, and accountability.

Now, charities report on the use of proceeds on an ongoing basis through the annual Charitable Gaming in Alberta review document, which includes tables that summarize how charitable and religious groups use the proceeds from gaming. This annual review provides information about Alberta's charitable gaming model, including which groups are eligible for gaming licences, how charitable gaming funds are used, the amount generated by charities from each

gaming activity, and how the province maintains the integrity of gaming activity.

Many reviews have been conducted regarding gaming practices in Alberta. These reviews have produced numerous recommendations that have been implemented to improve the transparency of gaming activity. A Lotteries and Gaming Summit was held in 1998 to fulfill a recommendation of the 1995 lottery review. The committee called for the impact of changes in gaming to be monitored on an ongoing basis. Now, the summit produced eight core recommendations. Recommendation 7 dealt directly with transparency and accountability. It recommended that lottery and gaming regulators and the provincial government improve accountability and disclosure of gaming activity in the province. This would include keeping citizens better informed of the amount, type, cost – both social and financial – and the benefits of gaming activity in the province. All of these recommendations were adopted by the government of Alberta.

Now, the MLA Review Committee on Charitable Gaming Licensing Eligibility and Use of Proceeds report included 42 recommendations that were adopted by the Alberta government. Building on these recommendations, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission has consolidated the current licensing eligibility and the use of proceeds policies into one set of policies.

In addition to the variety of reviews that have taken place, the provincial gaming industry remains properly monitored and controlled. Past reviews have produced recommendations on ways to ensure that gaming practices in Alberta are accountable and transparent, and most recommendations from these reviews have been adopted and are current practice.

Bill 210 is redundant and unnecessary. The Alberta government conducts reviews and continually monitors gaming activity to ensure that the scope of gaming in Alberta is open and transparent and meets the needs of the citizens of this province.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

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

Disclosure of Political Donations

508. Mr. Mason moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce legislation to amend section 2 of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act to make donations to leadership campaigns subject to the same contribution limits and disclosure requirements as other political donations.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to indicate that the Alberta New Democrats have been actively advocating this particular approach for a considerable period of time. It became evident to us during the recent leadership campaign of the Progressive Conservative Party that this particular piece of legislation or clause of legislation was absent and that it could give rise to significant difficulties thereby. During that particular campaign race we raised the issue repeatedly and actually were partially successful in getting a number of the candidates to reveal part of their list of donors and the money that they had raised.

What was clear, Mr. Speaker, during that campaign was just how much money was actually being donated to the various campaigns,

the various leadership races. In particular, there were campaigns that raised and spent over a million dollars for the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party. For example, TransAlta, Telus, and a number of law firms donated a considerable amount of money. I won't bore members of the House because it's a matter of public record exactly how much some of the candidates received. The fact remains, though, that there are considerable gaps in the public's knowledge, considerable gaps because there is no legislation which requires leadership contenders to disclose. However, if these donations were given to a political party, then disclosure would be required.

In our view, a number of the leadership contenders, including the Premier, have failed to demonstrate openness and transparency because they have not disclosed the contributions of all of their donors to their leadership campaigns. The Premier has failed to disclose the sources of 80 of his contributions, totalling almost \$163,000. There might be talk about transparent and open government, but Albertans know that corporations who donate to political parties or to candidates for the leadership of political parties expect that their issues and concerns will be taken more seriously. The claim that this government is committed to governing with transparency and accountability rings false in the ears of Albertans when even the Premier refuses to reveal who his supporters are.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that big energy companies in particular donate tens of thousands of dollars to the Progressive Conservative war chest on an annual basis, but we don't know in full whether they made similar donations to any of the leadership candidates either before the leadership vote was held or after cabinet appointments were announced. Open disclosure of campaign contributions actually protects former leadership candidates and ministers in particular from even a whiff of wrongdoing. The Premier's aim to govern with transparency and accountability got off to a bad start with their proposed \$5,000 access-for-cash fundraiser. Had that particular event taken place, it would have placed the Premier as well as the ministers of health and Finance in a conflict of interest.

5:00

Although the scheme did not occur, resulting in the Ethics Commissioner clearing the Premier and the ministers of any wrongdoing, the May 11 report of the Ethics Commissioner says:

There have been numerous media items about the lack of "rules" for leadership campaigns and, most specifically, the fact that no candidate is required to disclose publicly the names of contributors and the amounts contributed. Political campaign contributions are often viewed in media items and by "watchdog agencies" as potential conflicts of interest and even potential corruption.

In the interests of protecting leadership contestants in all parties from the slightest appearance of conflicts of interest or the perception of corruption, it's vital that the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act be amended to include the leadership contestants and guide and govern the financing of their campaigns.

The government has time and again voiced its support for legislation governing the financing of leadership campaigns. In fact, the Premier has vowed to introduce legislation on leadership campaign disclosure following the approval of his party. We believe that this position was adopted as a result of the pressure which the Alberta New Democrats applied throughout and following the conclusion of the PC's leadership race. The approval for that was gained when delegates to the PC convention in early May endorsed the development of provincial legislation that would set campaign finance contribution and disclosure rules for leadership elections for all political parties in Alberta. It's now time, Mr. Speaker, for the government to act on this endorsement.

I want to just add that federally and in provinces including Manitoba, Ontario, and British Columbia there is already legislation

that governs contributions and disclosures for party leadership campaigns. This legislation allows residents in those provinces and all of us at the federal level to monitor who is supporting our leaders and to keep an eye on whose interests the government is promoting. Surely, Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve the same respect and consideration.

Section 2 of Alberta's Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act presently reads:

This Act does not apply to campaigns and conventions carried on or held in relation to the leadership of a registered [political] party or in relation to constituency association nominations for endorsement of official party candidates.

So, in other words, Mr. Speaker, the current legislation includes a clause which specifically exempts leadership races or races for constituency association nominations, and it could very simply be remedied if this particular exemption was removed from the legislation.

The act also stipulates that contributions made to a candidate in a provincial election that in the aggregate exceed \$375 during the course of the campaign must be reported with the contributor's name and address to the Chief Electoral Officer and will be a matter of public record. This is very simple. This is very straightforward. It ought to apply in leadership campaigns as well.

The Alberta NDP has established leadership contest financing rules which set the limit at \$50,000. All contributions and expenses must be reported to the provincial executive. The maximum individual contribution limit is \$5,000. Those are the rules around leadership races in the New Democratic Party.

The PC government has made a number of statements on financing legislation. On Wednesday, February 28 of this year, the Premier avowed to the *Calgary Herald* editorial board that he would introduce legislation demanding that all donations to party leadership campaigns be fully disclosed. He said that he would run it by the party first.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate that we believe that this is essential. There are very good and sound reasons why disclosure rules are applied in the case of political parties, and that's been accepted by everyone. That's been accepted by the Conservatives and the Liberals, and this should also be accepted by all sides of the House.

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

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I couldn't agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood more. As a matter of fact, I do appreciate the opportunity to join in the discussion of Motion 508, and it is important that we address Albertans' concerns regarding the sources of campaign financing.

Mr. Speaker, the most recent leadership race of which our great Premier, Alberta's 13th Premier, the Hon. Ed Stelmach . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, you were here in question period today when you heard the Speaker make remarks about naming other members in this Assembly. This is the second time this afternoon that the same thing is occurring, so I'm cautioning you. Please.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill is rising on a point of order on this matter?

Point of Order
Referring to a Member by Name

Dr. Brown: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Speaker has already ruled once today on *Beauchesne* 484 that it's not the custom in this House to

refer to members by their proper names. My friend has just done so, and I'm rising on that point of order.

The Acting Speaker: I think the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar wants to withdraw his remarks so that we can proceed with the rest of the debate.

Rev. Abbott: Absolutely. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do apologize sincerely to the House and to the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill as well.

Debate Continued

Rev. Abbott: Mr. Speaker, the most recent leadership race directed attention towards leadership contests and the disclosure of the contestants' financial contributions. The disclosure of a contestant's finances for a political party leadership campaign is an issue that is being dealt with by the government of Alberta under the direction of our new Premier, the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. How's that, Mr. Speaker? [some applause] Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, accountability and transparency are characteristics of our new government, and I want to emphasize that we will continue to take appropriate action to improve the democratic process when necessary.

[The Speaker in the chair]

For example, Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the successful review of the Local Authorities Election Act, which was conducted in 2005. It demonstrates our ambition to further improve the democratic process for Albertans. The review took place after general, municipal, and school board elections, and it was an enhanced review that concentrated on the elimination of any discrepancies associated with municipal elections. The review was led by an MLA committee that focused on the following local election procedures and issues: voter identification and lists, special ballots, campaign advertising, and terms of office. The committee also integrated the recommendations from the Clark inspection report, which analyzed the alleged irregularities in the 2004 Calgary ward 10 election.

Mr. Speaker, the public was encouraged to provide input throughout the review process. Public participation in the election process is essential to the success of democracy. The mandate for the review included the following objectives: number one, promoting "integrity and public confidence in the election processes by setting appropriate election standards that [would] result in more secure and transparent election processes; number two, ensuring that "legislation permits small and large jurisdictions to respond to their specific election process needs by permitting some discretionary procedural options within the legislation's framework."

At the conclusion of the review, Mr. Speaker and hon. members, recommendations were provided, and, yes, these suggestions are being considered for the upcoming 2007 municipal and school board elections. My wish is that we will be like PEI and that we will see an 85 to 90 per cent turnout for these elections.

5:10

In closing, our government has been actively engaged in making sure that all election procedures and activities in Alberta are held to adequate standards; in fact, let me even say excellent – excellent – standards, Mr. Speaker, the highest in the country. The Alberta government will not remiss on the concerns put forth by Motion 508. As the hon. Premier has promised, he will continue to investigate all of the factors that impact the disclosure of party leadership

campaign contributions and make an informed decision that is in the best interest of our democracy. He will do what's right for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a list of some six speakers, and we'll go in this order: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, then the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, and I'll convey the remaining speakers later.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and participate in the debate on Motion 508, limitations and disclosure of leadership campaign finances. I support this motion because this motion fosters openness and transparency.

This motion supports the Alberta Liberal appeal for democratic renewal in Alberta. This motion brings openness, accountability, and transparency to elections, leadership campaigns, and the government. By having combined maximums for donations to the party, candidate, or constituency associations, no Albertan or lobby group will have a stronger voice in the Legislature. We cannot stop at campaign finance reforms. We need a lobbyist registry, whistleblower protection, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is dramatically behind the federal government and other provinces' initiatives to create transparency during leadership campaigns. If full disclosure is important for Ottawa and other provinces, why is it unnecessary here in Alberta? Albertans have a right to know who financially backs leadership candidates and at what price. By disclosing who is contributing and what the contributors may expect in return, it would offer a step in the right direction to correcting the democratic deficit in Alberta. Unless the Premier fully discloses leadership donors, concerns about potential conflicts of interest will continue to plague him.

Mr. Speaker, it's time for action on this issue. We are sick and tired of listening to lip service from this government. If you don't, stop claiming that the government is accountable, transparent, and open.

I have read so many articles from the media indicating that they were unsatisfied with the lack of regulation on their donations and disclosure being up to the discretion of the candidates themselves. Moreover, Democracy Watch cautioned against using broad donation categories and suggested that donors over a set amount should be named with the exact amount given.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to talk a little bit about the background of this issue. In British Columbia leadership candidates must file their campaign contributions for amounts greater than \$250 with Elections B.C. but are still allowed to list anonymous donors. In Ontario every leadership candidate must fully disclose all their patrons who donate more than \$100 even though there is no cap on donations. In the year 2001 Manitoba amended their Elections Finances Act to regulate a \$3,000 combined maximum that individuals could donate to any party, any provincial candidate, or to any constituency association. Moreover, Manitoba changed their legislation so that registered political parties, candidates, constituency associations must disclose to Elections Manitoba the details of all contributions, not just the contributions of \$250 or more. With the recent passing of the Federal Accountability Act, December 2006, federal party leadership candidates must disclose their donors who give more than \$200 up to a maximum of \$1,000 and have their finances audited when the campaign is finished.

In Alberta the regulation of donations to leadership campaigns is notably absent. Over the past year the concern for the lack of legislation governing leadership candidates was evident, especially

through the recent PC Party leadership campaign. Adequate guidelines are required with adequate disclosure. Until full disclosure is given, everyone in Alberta should assume that the Premier is in conflict of interest until he proves that he isn't when he discloses all his donors.

In August 2006, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Klein made an announcement of his retirement. The Tory leadership candidates began raising money unofficially for campaigns, which raised questions regarding public disclosure. After that, everybody knows, the former Premier, Mr. Klein, resigned, and then the leadership started. Four of the present ministers were candidates at that time, and at least three of them, you know, did not disclose the full statement. One or two might have an anonymous donors list.

If this government claims that they are open, they are transparent, they are accountable, it's about time they show what they believe in. It's what Albertans are looking for. They expect all of us to be open and transparent. Why do we delay?

Already so many questions have been asked during the question period time. Wherever I go, I mean personally, in my riding and outside my riding, the people keep on asking the same question again and again. Why some ministers . . . [interjections] Okay. Settle down. Maybe it's not a big issue for you guys, but Albertans are serious.

They want to know the reason why this government is hiding the money they received from – I have to choose the words because I should be very careful. What is the government hiding? Why don't they come clean and show Albertans the money they received, from \$1 to maybe \$1 million – who knows? – and what benefits they are going to get if somebody pays them huge amounts of money. I don't hesitate to say that if this is true, then this is corruption. I mean, why put the people in the dark?

All the candidates who were involved in the Tory leadership contest, I would request them: please come forward; please provide the full details, not the anonymous donors only but a full, complete list. Then we will believe that, yes, you know, the government is serious and they act on whatever they said. Otherwise, not only myself but the majority of Albertans will suspect that this government is just giving us lip service, nothing else. Okay? It's about time.

I already mentioned some background in other provinces and even the federal government. I mean, if they can do it, why can't we do it? It's a very serious thing if the government doesn't come clean, if four or five of the present ministers who were involved in the Tory leadership contest don't disclose their donors list. Lots of people can assume that they are hiding something. There will be many, many questions not only from my constituency but from all over Alberta. They are suspecting this government . . . [Mr. Agnihotri's speaking time expired]

5:20

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have to move on.

As this is a topic of considerable interest, it's 8:20 in Prince Edward Island, and the projections are that there will be a new government in Prince Edward Island. The Liberals are currently leading, projecting 18-plus seats.

The hon. Member for Red-Deer South, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order?

Mr. Lukaszuk: That's right.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Point of Order Allegations against Members

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I have risen prior, but I haven't had a chance to capture the chair's attention. Hence it seems a little out of order.

The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, Mr. Speaker, has been making allegations that definitely need to be dealt with by this chair.

Ms Blakeman: Citation?

Mr. Lukaszuk: I will get to my citations in due course.

The Speaker: Hon. member, please have a chair for a second, okay? Today is private members' business. If there's a point of order, make it very, very brief because I don't want this Assembly to use its time, which is only 60 minutes for this matter, dealing with procedural wrangling. So make it very brief.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This matter is really important. The citation is 23(h), (i), (j) of the Standing Orders. The Auditor General has dealt conclusively with the issue of donations to the Progressive Conservative Party leadership race. To be making comments – and he is attributing to certain members. He names the minister. He names the Premier of this province. He tells them to come clean. He makes allegations to the fact that they have received large amounts of money and that now they need to come clean to Albertans, which by reference – I don't think I'm drawing a long, far-fetched reference – means that they are not clean, that they're doing something dirty – come clean on the money that you have received – and that they're being influenced by certain donors on decisions that they are now making in their official capacity as ministers of the Crown and Premier of this province. It's simply unacceptable . . .

The Speaker: I'll interrupt the hon. member to say that the whole purpose of this motion is the debate. So the chair and hon. members will look forward to the hon. Member for Red Deer-South making exactly those points if the hon. member chooses to.

Debate Continued

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to enter into this debate. I want to actually approach this motion through a series of questions that, actually, the motion begs. The first question is: should there be disclosure requirements and contribution rules in leadership campaigns? That will be the first question that really has to be answered in this motion. If the answer to that is yes, then the second question should be: should this be governed by individual parties or governed by an act of this Legislature? If the answer to that question is yes, then you move to the third question, which is: if you agree that legislation should govern all parties, what should the rules be? In fact, you could ask a fourth question, although I'm not going to deal with the fourth question today. The fourth question would be: should those rules be put in place for municipal elections, et cetera?

I want to deal with the questions in the order that I've listed them. On the first question: should there be disclosure requirements and contribution rules in leadership campaigns? I think that quite clearly the answer to that is: yes, there should be. In our party, the party

that I represent, we grappled with that particular question at our most recent annual general meeting. Quite clearly on that question overwhelmingly the answer was: yes, there should be disclosure requirements and contribution rules in leadership campaigns.

That moves us to the second question, which is: should this be governed by individual parties, or should this be governed by an act of the Legislature? On this question there are actually compelling arguments on both sides to either agree with that or to not agree with that. There would be a really compelling argument that party business is party business and that you wouldn't want government to reach their hand into party business on all sorts of matters, including this one. In fact, that was one of the arguments that was presented at the annual general meeting.

Conversely, one of the reasons that I think this matter became evident during the last leadership campaign that our party had is because we invited all Albertans to participate in the leadership race, regardless of whether they might currently hold a membership in our party at the time. Our process was such that it was open to all the people of Alberta. They could participate, and they did so because they knew that the chosen leader of our party would also become the Premier, and hence I think they also demanded greater accountability. So in my own view that is a compelling enough reason to answer this second question also in the affirmative, that in this case because of the process that our party, in fact, has established, making it open, there should be requirements in legislation to make this happen.

Again, there are compelling reasons on both sides of this debate, and as our own party grappled with that question, it was not so clearly defined. It was probably more 60-40 in favour of legislation versus having it dealt with internally. I think, frankly, there are good arguments to be made on both sides. In my case, as I've said, I land in favour of the legislation.

This motion proposes, really, to make some rules, and it basically says that the rules should be the ones that are in effect currently for other matters of general elections. On this one I'm not so categorical. I think that is a good framework from which to start the discussion, but there are many more elements to rules for leadership that need to be discussed, including what form of legal structure you might accept for how you would accept donations, for time periods, for spending. So on that one, even though I'm going to vote in favour of this motion, I want it to be clearly understood that I'm not so categorically stuck to that last phrase in the motion that says these are the rules we're going to follow. I think that discussion has to happen yet in this Legislature and among all parties before we decide what the rules, in fact, are going to be on the motion.

I will accept the member's intent on his motion, that he, in fact, wants to create this transparency and accountability to Albertans. On that basis I will support the member in this motion.

The Speaker: The results from Prince Edward Island, if hon. members are interested: 293 polls out of 319. I guess at 8:28 P.E.I. time, so far unofficial results: Liberals 23, PCs 4.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to participate in the discussion or the debate on Motion 508 this evening, certainly a motion that I intend to support. I thank the hon. member for bringing it forward. It certainly doesn't go, in my opinion, far enough. We need to have a significant review of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, but it's a start. To amend section 2 to deal with donations to leadership campaigns certainly has merit. I would urge all hon. members to support it.

We should go even further than this. We should change the act so that prosecution – and this goes to section 52, Mr. Speaker: “A prosecution under this Act may be commenced within 2 years of the commission of the alleged offence but not afterwards.” Well, I think we should open that up too, hon. member, and also the restrictions here under section 53: “No prosecution shall be instituted under this Act without the consent of the Chief Electoral Officer.” I think if the Alberta Justice officials or any other officials would like to go after someone for a mistake or an error, then they have every right to do so. I don't understand why the office of the Chief Electoral Officer should have this power in this case.

5:30

Specifically to section 2, there has been a long list of campaign donations to respective leadership hopefuls from across the aisle. Some of those leadership hopefuls have given disclosure; others have not. Some may at some point give disclosure. But what I find interesting in this discussion is that we are not talking about limiting the amount an individual can give, and I think that there should be strict limits on the amount of money that can be donated, whether it's to an election campaign or to a leadership campaign. There should be strict limits. I personally would like to see corporations and unions prevented, prohibited, from donating to political parties. If your name is not on the voters' list, you should not be able to donate to the political process. This is my personal view, Mr. Speaker.

That being said, this is a very competitive occupation. One has to get donations. If you're going to compete with the Progressive Conservatives, you've got to take donations where you can get them. But I think we would be better served in this House and in this province if we were to take Motion 508 and expand on it so that we limit the amount of money that can be donated and where it can come from. I think we would have a better democracy.

Now, I'm pleased to see that at the May 4, 5, and 6 AGM that the Progressive Conservative Party held in Edmonton there was financial reform in the air. There was a notice of motion for a constitutional amendment from Calgary-Foothills, I believe, Mr. Speaker, and there was an effort with this notice of motion to make transactions and affairs that occur during the year regarding financial reporting more consistent. I commend the Progressive Conservative Party for doing that, and I have to ask the question: why?

Well, when we look at the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, we can see where there have been examples in the recent past where things just haven't worked out, and I'm referring, Mr. Speaker, to the foundation fund. I was going through the books up there last fall at Elections Alberta, and I saw reference to this foundation fund in the act. Some years where the Progressive Conservative Party was obligated to report the expenditures from this fund, they didn't. They didn't. The fund is of significant value. It's \$1.6 million, as I understand it, and only the interest from that fund can be transferred into the general revenue of the party. There were years where there was no disclosure of how this money was spent. You had to look through other parts of the financial statement to try to determine where the money went.

Some years, Mr. Speaker, there was half a million dollars – no, I think \$240,000, I should say; excuse me, I stand corrected – transferred from the fund to the party. Other years it's as little as \$40,000, \$50,000. But it is quite interesting. I'm not satisfied with the explanation I got from the office of the Chief Electoral Officer in regard to this matter. In fact, I had to wait a long time, from October 31, 2006, through to March 22, 2007. I'm willing to quote here, Mr. Speaker, a part of this letter, and it reads:

It is unfortunate that neither the records nor the annual reports themselves, for the missing years, were found. While the public

files maintained by this Office are lacking some of the annual reports, we have been assured by the Association and their Auditors that no were added to the Trust, and that the only expenditures from the Trust were the transfer of earnings back to the Association for the period in which annual reports were not filed.

Now, this letter that I received, I think there's a word missing there because it certainly doesn't make any sense to me at this time.

This is yet another example of why we have to support the hon. member with his motion. Not only do we have to support it; we have to expand on it because there are many things that we can do here. I understand that each political party has volunteers that do a lot of their work, and mistakes can be made. Mistakes can be made. We've made mistakes.

An Hon. Member: No.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. The Conservative Party, by my calculations, has made mistakes, and certainly the New Democrats have made mistakes in addition and subtraction. Everyone who campaigns knows that there is a group of volunteers that do their very best. These rules seem complex. Volunteers can make mistakes, and that's why you have an auditing process. None of these disclosures should be rubber-stamped, just checked over and "Yeah, that's good; that's good enough" and left to be filed. I think the election office should have a good look at all parties' respective filings before they put them in public view and make sure that they're right. Make sure that they're right. Hopefully, in the near future when there are leadership campaigns, regardless for which party, that will be part of the disclosure that's available in that little room that's off to the right as you go to the office of Elections Alberta. Regardless of who they are, they can go there and see for themselves who gave what money.

With that, Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of individuals who have expressed interest in this matter, and I will cede the floor to another hon. member of the House. Thank you.

The Speaker: I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, then the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Just to give you the final update with respect to P.E.I., at 8:36 this evening it shows that with 296 polls out of 319 reporting, the Liberal Party, with 52.9 per cent of the vote, has 23 seats; the Progressive Conservative Party, with 41.5 per cent of the vote, has four seats; the Green Party, with 3 per cent of the vote, has zero seats; the NDP, with 1.9 per cent of the vote, has zero seats; and the independents, with 0.8 per cent, have zero seats.

I've received an impassioned plea from the leader of the third party for me to announce the results of the Manitoba election, which showed ND 36, PC 19, Liberal 2.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Motion 508 proposes that the government include donations to political party campaigns under section 2 of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. This would make donations to a leadership campaign subject to the same guidelines as donations received by political parties.

The topic of leadership campaign donations is especially popular at this time, as we all know, because of the recent prominent leadership contest. I don't know if Mr. Speaker would like to announce the results of the latest election here in this province. I'll just continue on with my speech, though. That leadership contest recently resulted in the election of the hon. Member for Fort

Saskatchewan-Vegreville – and I will not say his name, Mr. Speaker – to the office of Premier.

5:40

The first priority of the hon. Premier is to govern with integrity and transparency. We hear about that very regularly here, including with Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act, which will let Albertans know who's accessing government and who's providing services to government. All-party committees have been established, allowing for additional debates on bills and items of importance. I'm looking forward to working with our colleagues from various parts of the House on that. They include the Affordable Housing Task Force, and they allow members on both sides of the House to co-operate in the development of legislation, I trust, a huge step forward.

Since taking office, this government has posted flight logs from government aircraft on the Internet, and soon ministerial office expenses will be posted online for all Albertans to see.

There is no doubt that this government is taking great steps in acting in an honourable, transparent manner. However, Mr. Speaker, that does not mean the government is standing still or is closed to new ideas. Our Premier is committed to discussing the issue of donations to leadership campaigns with the membership of the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party. We know that, and we know that it's critical because leadership campaigns are a function of political parties, and political parties are critical stakeholders in this process no matter what political stripe we wear.

If you know the hon. Premier at all, you know that listening is one of his greatest assets, an admirable quality, and in addition to discussing leadership and campaign financing laws with members of the PC Party, he is keen to hear from all Albertans on this topic. Therefore, today's motion is very much accepted.

Mr. Speaker, briefly, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act may be the right model for disclosing leadership campaign contributions. The act requires political parties, constituencies, and candidates to disclose contributions by filing two reports, one outlining all contributions less than the magic number of \$375.01 in aggregate form from any single contributor and the second listing all contributions that exceed \$375 in aggregate from any single contributor. The act limits contributions to political parties, constituency associations, and candidates as follows in any year: \$15,000 to each registered party and \$1,000 to any registered constituency association, \$5,000 in aggregate to the constituency associations of each registered party. Furthermore, in a campaign period campaign contributions are limited as follows: \$30,000 to each registered party, \$2,000 to any registered candidate, \$10,000 in aggregate to the registered candidates of each registered party.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that these guidelines have served our political process well, and I want to thank the hon. leader of the third party for beginning this discussion in the Assembly. The hon. Premier is committed to looking at the issue, and the discussion must continue with all Albertans before concrete action is taken.

I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate. We don't have much time, so thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join in the debate on Motion 508, proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood essentially to amend section 2 of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, making donations to leadership campaigns subject to the same contribution limits and disclosures as other political donations. I support this as

an individual, as a legislator, as a member of the Liberal caucus. I think it's important that we achieve fairness and some certainty around this issue.

Mr. Speaker, I was really interested when I attended the COGEL conference a number of years ago to find out, you know, how they do it somewhere else, because one of the great values of attending those conferences is that in comparison you understand your own system better by seeing how other systems work. I was really interested in the American system, in which donations are a free-for-all there. Like, anybody can donate any amount of money to anybody for anything, but you absolutely, positively must disclose it. And I thought: "Well, that's a no-brainer. Why wouldn't you disclose it if there was no limit on who donated or how much? Why would anybody want to sneak around and try to hide that? I don't understand." The more you look into it and you talk to some of the other people that were at the conference, I did start to understand what this was about. Really, it's about the public's trust in us as individuals and in us as legislators and politicians. They want to know that we're approaching our job as we should, with all of that good heart and bright mind, and that we're not carrying forward somebody else's agenda because, essentially, we've been paid to do so. The public wants to know that.

So why would the Americans be so caught up in being interested in not disclosing? That just did not make sense to me, but when you started to look at it, you thought: well, yeah, if you had a politician and it was out there that they had received a significant amount of donations or all their donations from a particular sector, then everybody would start to think they're going to want to support that sector. And I don't care what sector it is; you're dealing with both a perception there and a reality. To be fair, that legislator may not care that they got all their money from a particular sector, and they may not be interested in carrying that message forward at all, but there's going to be a public perception of that. That's why the Americans structured the system in the way that they did: anybody can donate to anybody for anything for any amount, but you have to disclose it and no sneaking around.

Some of the things they get involved with there are things like someone that owns a medium-sized or a large company basically giving money to their senior executives and saying: you go and donate that money to so-and-so. That was a way of filtering more money through to a candidate without it appearing to be coming from either a particular individual, the owner of the company, or from a particular sector. That kind of stuff was hunted down with great fervour by a whole legion of lawyers that work for the equivalent of their ethics and chief electoral officers.

I was just fascinated by that because our rules are all about total amounts and at what point you disclose, and there are a lot more limitations on how much people can donate and to whom. The idea that you could have it wide open on one side but very clear disclosure and why you would need that disclosure was a real eye-opener for me.

The situation we have in Alberta is, I think, to a number of people not a level playing field in that they can't get their own certainty. They can't get assurance that any leadership candidate, if they don't have to disclose where they got the money, how anybody is able to look at the facts and go: "Okay. I know what's going on here. I can research this. I can look at the facts. I can see where this leadership candidate from any party got their money, and I can make my own decision based on this." We don't have that opportunity right now.

We have very specific rules that are set in place around political donations during an election campaign for all candidates and for all parties, but when we get to leadership contests – and those leadership contests can be very important. We've seen here in this province that in running for the leadership of one political party, in

effect, when they came out of that leadership race, they were going to be Premier of this province. That raises very, very high stakes, and with that I think we need to have very, very high standards as legislators.

We have an opportunity here to support this motion and to move very quickly toward getting legislation into this Assembly that would set in place a level playing field. It would give us that certainty that I think legislators, people interested in running for political office, but also the public are seeking.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that Albertans are quintessentially fair-minded, and they really, really get annoyed when what they see is one person getting an advantage over another person. That really irks them, whether it's somebody getting an advantage over them in their own lives or whether they see that situation somewhere else. I think that's the situation that's been set up here with the lack of requirements for leadership candidates, people seeking the leadership of a political party, not having to disclose anything about their donations. They don't have to disclose who; they don't have to disclose how much – nothing – or how the money came to them, whether they raised it through a special-access cocktail party or through a plain old cheque or selling chocolates. We don't have any information on this, and I think it muddies the water as we try to restore respectability to political representation.

5:50

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I think the battering that politicians have taken we are mostly responsible for ourselves. As we call each other names in the House and out of the House, as we allow and we participate in running down other elected officials, where we step in and, in fact, replace elected officials, where in Alberta we've had school boards replaced, we've had municipalities replaced: we've done that to ourselves. So it's very hard for us to look out in the public and say, "You should respect us. We're doing a good job. We're all working hard here," when we don't treat each other with very much respect and where we call each other names and get into long, protracted sessions in knocking each other down. You know, we've trained the public to think of us in a very poor light.

This opportunity presented through this Motion 508 by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood gives a venue to start to restore some of that credibility – I can't say this is a profession, and I don't think it should be a profession – to a calling, and I would support that. I support the motion. I think it's a good idea for everyone in this House to support this. I think it would also fulfill a desire from Albertans for us to do a better job as politicians, as representatives, as legislators.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this, and I urge all of my colleagues to support this motion.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise today and join in the debate on Motion 508. Since I only have a few minutes, I find myself in the unique position where I actually agree with the leader of the third party because this was a motion that was debated at the grassroots level of the PC Party of Alberta. The majority of people who were at that meeting also agreed with the member of the third party. [interjections] On this point only.

This motion aims to encourage the government to introduce legislation to make party leadership campaign donations subject to the same contribution limits and disclosure requirements as all other political donations. This is a timely issue and deserves discussion in the Assembly.

Alberta currently has policies in place to ensure that there is responsible conduct in electoral politics, and these processes have

served us well. But I'm pleased that we are taking the opportunity today to discuss this matter and that if we proceed with this motion, we will have a level playing field for all parties in Alberta. This Legislative Assembly is the entity that has control over electoral matters, so it's appropriate that we approach this topic. Our government is always committed to exploring opportunities to make the political process more accountable for parties and voters alike. So, Mr. Speaker, as I said at the beginning, I'm very happy to support this motion.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you. Very briefly, I just think it's interesting that this party here has had one leadership campaign in the last 14 years. The Liberals have had five, NDs have had four, and all the other parties in Alberta have had around 10. It's kind of interesting that when we have a leadership race, well, we've got to put all the money out there, or as one hon. member said: you should assume that anybody who gave money to this Premier, he's in conflict. That's what he said: you should assume that. Well, that's not what I assume most Albertans think. But it's interesting that they seem to have all the leadership races. You know, at a three-year average I think maybe they're getting ready again pretty soon. So I look forward to the campaign contribution openness that they would certainly like us to do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to close the debate.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate very much all of the comments from all members on all sides of the House with respect to this motion, and I appreciate that it seems that most or all of the members who did speak are supportive of the motion. I actually have some hope, then, that this motion will pass,

and I will look forward to legislation when it does come from the government.

I also want to indicate that I heard a number of members say that Albertans need to be consulted on this matter, and I agree with that and, secondly, that all political parties need to be consulted on that. I look forward to that as well, if that should come to pass.

I think it's time that we took this step. This is a small step. There are other steps that need to be taken as well, Mr. Speaker. Particularly, we need to look at the role of corporations and unions in the financing of the electoral process. I believe, as does my party, that the financing of the political process needs a great deal of scrutiny and careful rules, but particularly we also believe that individual citizens are the components of our democracy and ought to also be the bedrock of the financial support for the political process. But that's for another day.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate that I think this is an important step, and making sure of transparency and openness in government and in our political process is of the highest importance and not just a matter of words. But certainly, I think that it is an important step, and action is important. I thank members opposite for their support, and I will avoid responding to the hon. President of the Treasury Board and his somewhat provocative statements. We're not expecting a leadership race any time soon in our party, and we certainly think there's a chance that you may have another one soon, perhaps right after the next election.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 508 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 7 o'clock this evening, at which time we would reconvene in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m.]

