

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, June 11, 2007**

**1:00 p.m.**

Date: 07/06/11

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask for renewed strength in the awareness of our duty and privilege as Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. We ask for the protection of this Assembly and also the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, in the Speaker's gallery today is Mr. Paul Lorieau. I'm going to invite him to lead us in the singing of our national anthem, and I would invite all others to participate in the language of their 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:** Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

**Mr. Loughheed:** Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a person who is no stranger to this House. In fact, he was the second person ever to speak from the floor of this Legislative Assembly who was not an elected member. I'm talking about Mr. Rick Hansen, the chairman and CEO of the Rick Hansen Foundation, who is here today for a special announcement that was made in the rotunda. Accompanying him is Dr. Laura May, who is with rehab medicine and is also at the Glenrose hospital, and Teren Clarke, the executive director of the Canadian Paraplegic Association. They're in the Speaker's gallery. I'd ask that the members recognize them with their traditional warm welcome.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Premier.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a group of individuals I recently met at the Edmonton Super Cities Walk for MS. This group is led by 16-year-old Courtney Kieser, a grade 11 student from Bev Facey high school in Sherwood Park. Her dad, Chris, was diagnosed with MS in 1993, just six weeks after her brother Riley was born. Courtney and her family have been participating in MS walks since 1994, and this is the third year that she has organized a team to assist in raising pledges for the cause. This year Courtney and her team raised close to \$5,000. The Edmonton walk raised \$581,000.

Courtney is a constituent in the constituency of Strathcona, but I was so overcome by her enthusiasm at the walk that I promised that if she ever found time to bring her team to the House, I'd love to introduce them to this Assembly. Accompanying her today is her

team from Bev Facey high school, her parents, Chris and Susan Kieser, and two representatives from the MS Society of Canada Alberta division, Darrel Gregory and Daniella Sabo. I would now ask the group to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mrs. Catherine and Dr. Michael Bullock, grandparents of Helena Zakrzewski, a page in the House and a constituent of the hon. minister of health. Mrs. Bullock is a graduate of Stanford University in California and Dr. Michael Bullock completed medical school at the University of Alberta in 1960. They reside in Saratoga, California, and have been married for 42 years. Mrs. Bullock enjoys gardening, and Dr. Bullock has an extensive car collection. They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

**Mr. Coutts:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce two guests visiting the Legislature today. It's their first time to the Legislature, and they're visiting the capital region. It's Darwyn and Dorothy Larson. They reside in Stavely, Alberta. Stavely is celebrating its 95th anniversary as a community this August 24, 25, and 26 of the year 2007. The Larson family has been farming in Stavely since 1902. Darwyn's father emigrated from Sweden and set up the ranch and the farm in Stavely. It originally was a cattle farm; however, today they grow grains and hay and have landscape horses. The Larson family received their century farm award in 2004. They're seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

**Ms Haley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure for me today to be able to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a very good and long-time friend of mine Mr. Murray Buchanan. He's here today in his capacity as copresident of the midstream division of Provident Energy, but I know him best as a friend who's worked with me in the PC Association for our area for well over 20 years. He gets me into a lot of trouble. It's not hard to imagine, I know. He's just an absolutely wonderful person to work with. He's been a mentor of mine for, like I say, over 20 years. I'm very, very delighted to be able to introduce him to our Assembly, and I'd ask Murray to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

**Mr. Loughheed:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also in the galleries today are other people that attended the announcement earlier this morning. In the public gallery is Larry Pempeit, who works with the Canadian Paraplegic Association. In the members' gallery is Dr. Gary McPherson, formerly the chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities; Marlin Styner, a member of the Premier's council; Barry Lindemann, who works with CPA. He's from Calgary. Accompanying Marlin is his wife, Diane Gramlich, and his parents, Roy and Nora Styner. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege to rise to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a very bright, talented, and dedicated young woman, our STEP student this summer at the constituency office of Edmonton-Riverview. Her name is Anna Hopkins. She's in the public gallery. I'll ask her to rise. Anna has just finished her second year of university, pursuing a double major in political science as well as in Middle Eastern and African studies. She's a third year counsellor with a remarkable organization called the Seminar on the United Nations and International Affairs and is an active member of Equal Voice, which supports increased involvement of women in politics. I should also note that last year Anna served as a page in the Parliament in Ottawa. Clearly, Anna has a great deal of passion for politics. Her experience and enthusiasm have already been a great asset to my constituency office. I look forward to hearing remarkable things in the future of this fine woman. Please, everybody, give her a warm welcome.

Thank you.

1:10

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

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very proud today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of seniors visiting today from the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. These individuals are friends and mentors, and I'm glad to have them here today. First is Mary Tucker, Martha Tisher, Doug Lyons, Don McCrank, William Bohachyk, Vera Dziwenka, Elaine Shinbine, Doreen Maguire, Gordon Dedols, Rita Belterive, Mary Stephons, Mickey Paterson, Marie James, Helen Glatl, Doris Harasen, Marguerite Jacques, Melonie Vincent, and Ted Bale. I would ask them all to rise and please accept the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you a number of guests. These individuals from across Alberta participated in a rally today at the noon hour on the steps of the Legislature. The rally was organized by a number of organizations, including the Disability Action Hall, the Self-Advocacy Federation of Edmonton, the disability action force, and the Calgary housing action initiative. These citizens are calling on the government to guarantee them affordable housing, particularly for those on fixed incomes such as AISH recipients. Some of those who attended the rally include persons living with serious developmental and physical disabilities. These guests are seated primarily, I think, in the public gallery, but there may be some on the other side in the members' gallery. I would now request them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. I'm delighted to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Kyle Toles. Today Kyle is beginning his two-week internship with our caucus office in office support. He was born in Three Hills, Alberta, and has lived in Edmonton for the past 12 years. He graduated from W.P. Wagner high school in 2005 and has since achieved certificates in hospitality supervision and the office assistant program this year. I would now ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second introduction is Lisa DeMoor. Lisa graduated in 2006 from The King's University College with a BA in politics, history, and economics. She has worked as a researcher with the Canadian Peacebuilding Coordinating Committee in Ottawa, and she recently returned from seven months working in child rights and protections in Gambia, West Africa. In September Lisa will be returning to Ottawa to pursue a masters in international affairs from the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University. We're delighted to have Lisa in our caucus office as our STEP assistant. She has already been of great assistance this legislative session. I would now ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and introduce to you and through you to the Assembly two guests from my constituency who are sitting in the members' gallery. Laurie Huolt is in charge of my constituency office and has been for the last five years, does a great job. Laurie is accompanied by Jeff Behrens, who is a summer STEP student working in my constituency office. Jeff is a student of the University of Alberta at Augustana in Camrose. His parental home is Edson, in the West Yellowhead constituency. So I'd like to ask Laurie and Jeff to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to also greet the rest of the seniors that are in the group today up in the gallery, and it would be Pat Bale, Kenneth Marts, May Fine, Reggie Knowles, Dorothy Blace, Winona Walker, Edith Spenier, Marge Koss, Ruth McFarland, Yvonne Hardiney, Betty Lindsay, Mary Marks, Annie Rittie, Carol Lockert, Tennesie Hieppner, Dawn Maskell, and Olga Henka. I see that they've learned already and they're all standing, so would we give them the warm welcome of this House.

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

**Ms Calahasen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly one of the bright stars from the aboriginal community here in Edmonton and my good friend. He's the author of *Patches the Beaver: Welcome to Harmony Woods*, the first in a series of children's books. He has a bachelor of education with distinction and a master of education in educational psychology from the University of Alberta and is currently pursuing his masters in liberal arts and management at Harvard University while working. He has worked as a research communications manager at Métis Settlements child and family services authority and is currently the aboriginal senior policy analyst for the prevention of family violence and bullying division of Alberta Children's Services. He is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that Mr. Shane Gauthier please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

#### Spinal Cord Injury Initiatives

**Mr. Lougheed:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning I had the honour of attending a very special announcement regarding research

services and supports for persons impacted by spinal cord injury and other neuromuscular conditions. The hon. Premier along with the ministers of Health and Wellness, Seniors and Community Supports, with the support of the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture, announced a \$12 million contribution to the Rick Hansen Foundation. This investment will support initiatives to assist Albertans with spinal cord injuries and other mobility impairments to integrate back into the community. As such, these initiatives will work to improve the quality of life of those with spinal cord injuries by increasing their independence and self-sufficiency.

Today's announcement helps to highlight the great work of the Rick Hansen Foundation that it does in support of people with spinal cord injuries. Since 1988 the foundation has distributed over \$200 million to spinal cord injury research and programs to improve quality of life. The foundation connects the people doing innovative research to the resources they need. The foundation is able to conduct such great work thanks to the leadership of someone who is no stranger to this Assembly.

Rick Hansen set out on a journey in his wheelchair from 1985 to 1987 that led him through 34 countries and raised \$26 million for spinal cord research. Since then, Rick has been a very visible spokesman for spinal cord research. He has received numerous accolades, including the Order of Canada and several honorary degrees. Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, Rick was inducted into Canada's Walk of Fame.

Rick has been an ambassador for a fully accessible and inclusive society, and thanks to his work we are reaching that goal. Thanks to his foundation's work we are getting closer to finding a cure for spinal cord injuries. This new investment transcends the full continuum of research and support.

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

#### 1:20 Leduc No. 1 Oil Discovery

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we come to the close of the spring session, I would like to make my colleagues and the Alberta public aware of an event taking place in my constituency this summer. This is a celebration of a major turning point in Alberta's history, something which forever changed our province and continues to drive Alberta's economy today.

That event is the discovery of oil at the Leduc No. 1 site on February 3, 1947. That bitterly cold day Imperial Oil's Vern "Dry Hole" Hunter, based on his success to that point, drilled his 134th well and tapped into what is now the Leduc-Woodbend field. Since that day, Mr. Speaker, more than 1,000 wells have been drilled, and the field has produced over 300 million barrels of oil.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, there was already a celebration held on February 13 at the Canadian Petroleum Discovery Centre in Devon, which was attended by our former Premier, Mr. Klein, and the Minister of Energy. That event was the kickoff to the centre's diamond anniversary year and the unveiling of the Ralph Klein Learning Lab.

This summer, on August 11 and 12, during the town of Devon's Discovery Days the Canadian Petroleum Discovery Centre will be wrapping up the 60th anniversary year of the Leduc No. 1 well discovery. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to invite all my colleagues to attend and to help commemorate this most important Alberta milestone.

Thank you very much.

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

#### Patches the Beaver Book Launch

**Ms Calahasen:** Thank you. May 29, 2007, was a delightful day not only for me but for all the children and friends present at Norwood school. It is indeed a rare occasion for anyone to be invited to witness the launch of any book, but this was not just any book. *Patches the Beaver: Welcome to Harmony Woods*, written by author Shane Gauthier, whom I introduced earlier, is targeted at educating grade 3 children about diversity and multiculturalism. The book is based on research showing that without diversity programs our children's appreciation of diversity may actually decrease.

I witnessed first-hand the wonderment of the children present at the storyline as Shane read page after page. The book not only entertained but captivated their interest and sparked in them an awareness of the importance of accepting those that are different than we are. All the people present were charmed by the characters Mr. Gauthier had created. This author ingeniously brought the reader into an endearing world made up of loveable animals such as Patches the Beaver, Star Squirrel, Feather Goose, Duke of Cannot, Speedy Tortoise, and Lucky Rabbit, all based on true characters.

His writing is clever enough to hold the attention of any child long enough to teach children that we are all patched together by friendship no matter where we are from, who we are, or what we look like. It is infinitely clear that Mr. Gauthier is passionate about bringing the teachings about ethnocultural education and awareness to all children as this is the first book in *Patches the Beaver* series. As the Hippy Hop Herald stated: Amazing; no other book has captured the heart and soul of beavers and beyond; this book is for the whole animal kingdom.

Congratulations, Shane, for your dedication to supporting and working towards bettering the lives of all children, youth, and families and to the importance of ethnocultural education awareness. I look forward to reading the next antics of Patches the Beaver.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

#### Canadian Work Skills Competition

**Mr. Herard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, Calgary will be hosting a World Skills competition in 2009 and a national and provincial skills competition in 2008. These competitions test and recognize the outstanding skills of hundreds of our secondary and postsecondary students across the province.

In preparation for these upcoming competitions almost 700 of Alberta's most talented high school and postsecondary students, including apprentices, recently competed in more than 35 different areas of trades and technology a few weeks ago at the provincial skills competition right here in Edmonton. Fifty-one of our high school students and postsecondary apprentices qualified for the national competition in Saskatoon last week. The Canadian Skills competition brought together 550 youth from across the country to participate in 42 different areas of skills competence.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that many young talented Albertans have done an outstanding job of representing this province. Four of these remarkable individuals took home gold medals: James McNeice, a student from Lacombe composite high school; Matthew Hebert, a student from Notre Dame high school in Calgary; Lloyd Van Maanen, a postsecondary apprentice from Picture Butte; and Garrett Pearman, a postsecondary apprentice from Allied Projects in Calgary.

Alberta also did very well in the silver and bronze categories, Mr. Speaker. Fifteen participants won silver medals, and six took the bronze. This is an extraordinary achievement, and the success of our students is a clear demonstration of our strength in the area of trades and technology education in every part of the province.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very, very pleased to rise today and honour all of the students who participated in this national competition. I'd like to recognize the parents, volunteers, and educators who support them.

Thank you.

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

### Contaminated Sites Cleanup

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are increasingly anxious at the pace and scope and financial liability of growing oil, gas, and industrial development in this province. A growing number of contaminated sites are leaving a massive financial liability to future generations for remediation. Part of the problem is the ambiguous responsibility for contaminated sites resting with two ministries: Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and Alberta Environment. There are also serious regulatory deficiencies reflected in, one, the lack of will to make polluters pay; two, the lack of enforcement of legislation requiring immediate spill cleanup and timely reclamation; and three, the lack of adequate monitoring to ensure that the land is returned to, quote, equivalent land-use capability, end quote, as required under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act.

Bill 29, passed last year, allows companies to, quote, manage and, quote, monitor contaminated sites forever rather than clean them up completely. This has created a multimillion dollar business to transfer responsibility for pollution from the offending party to the orphan fund and in many cases to the public purse. Current liability management programs and financial security deposits in the upstream oil and gas sector are not sufficient to ensure reclamation and prevent transfer of liability to the public purse. In the downstream oil and gas sector there's still no orphan-style fund to cover the cost of an industry that walks away from its responsibility, again left to the public purse.

The existing level of environmental fines issued by this government is small and rare. Fines and the cost of cleanup are allowable deductible expenses from corporate income tax and royalties. The legislative requirements to immediately clean up a spill have not been enforced, resulting in the persistence and migration of contamination to thousands of sites throughout Alberta.

Finally, it's our understanding that a proposal is being developed by this government for parties responsible for causing contamination to self-evaluate a remediation process specifically designed to terminate their liability. Is this the Alberta advantage?

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

### Respect for Seniors

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are two mistakes we can make when we talk about seniors. One is to assume that we know what we're talking about when we begin. The other is to assume that talking with or about seniors is about the past.

The first mistake is evident in predictions we made about population. For decades we said that our pensions and health care were unsustainable with increasing seniors coming of age. It hasn't happened. Seniors are working longer, living longer, in better health, taking new courses, and undertaking new challenges.

The second mistake was the youth fixation of the '50s and '60s. Youth are the hope of tomorrow, we heard, and waited for them to save the world. Fixation with youth is a reactionary trend, for it has adults looking backwards. Adolescence may be full of energy, but it is not free. Teenagers are tyrannized by peer pressure and a market that exploits us.

It's no accident that the most reactionary regimes of the last century seduced the young as a path to success. Hitler Youth and Mao's Red Guard enforced conformity by cutting ties between generations. It is in intergenerational contact that maturity evolves. Societies in continual revolution are in perpetual adolescence. It's as we calmly evaluate our experience and learn from it that progress is made.

It was not under younger braves, hot to prove themselves, that the west was developed but under Crowfoot. Crowfoot was a brave and fearless warrior, so fearless that he didn't need to prove anything. He could see where continued warfare would lead and chose peace.

It is not ultimately in their needs, real or imagined, that seniors deserve our attention. We need them for balance and wholeness in our lives. We need to recognize them not on the basis of past achievements any more than we recognize children on the basis of future potential but simply for their being here among us. Our First Nations are rediscovering strength through the wisdom of elders. We would do well to follow the example.

head:

### Oral Question Period

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

### Contribution to Premier's Leadership Campaign

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The matter of the donation to the Premier's leadership campaign from the Beaver waste management commission has raised some serious concerns, and no adequate investigation has been undertaken by this government. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier admit that having a minister who supported his campaign sitting down with the CAO who supported his campaign to investigate an unethical donation to that campaign by the very commission headed by the CAO does not meet any reasonable standard of accountability?

1:30

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, this matter, that the member brought up the other day, is very clear. In fact, after the leadership campaign was completed and we were preparing for the disclosure, this donation came forward. I said: "Send it back. It's the perception issue, even though, apparently, the legal interpretation was that this is what the commission can do. So just send it back." We sent the cheque back, and the matter is completed, period.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday in this Assembly, if you turn to page 1615 of *Hansard*, you'll see that the President of the Treasury Board said that this government's ministers don't have time to investigate this issue. My question, then, is to the Premier. Given that his ministers don't have time to investigate issues like unethical donations, will the Premier refer this matter to the appropriate policy field committee?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, once again, the member reads very selectively. But just setting that matter aside, whatever money was donated went back to the commission. I have asked for the co-operation of both leaders of the opposition to work with our government in preparing rules, legislation with respect to leadership campaign donations and how we should handle it, and I hope they come to the table and offer their suggestions. Like I said, I'm not in any hurry to leave, but maybe on the other side they may have some other intentions, and that's why I'd like to put those rules in place as early as we can.

**Dr. Taft:** Well, given that there are serious environmental issues with the Beaver waste management commission and the landfill it operates and that the commission is up for review and renewal of its licence, the credibility of the whole licensing and review process has been tainted. My question is to the Premier. What is the Premier going to do to restore the credibility of the environmental approval processes relating to this commission's landfill?

**Mr. Stelmach:** First of all, the words that the member used earlier are wrong. If there is proof of some environmental damage, then bring it forward. Don't make allegations in the House and try and have this House protect. Present the proof here.

Secondly, I don't give the approvals. There are certain processes that the government has in place. They're very strict. I believe they're the strictest in Canada in terms of environmental approvals. The people that best know how to make those decisions, reviewing all the evidence that comes forward from various engineering studies – that's the kind of information that goes into the approval process, not what some person may feel is right or wrong. It's the information that comes forward. The safety of the residents around that site and everywhere else in Alberta is paramount to this government.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government seems to take convenient holidays when it comes to ethics. Double standards abound. This government continues to invest heavily in tobacco companies through the heritage fund, yet the Premier said that his leadership campaign did not accept a donation from a tobacco company because it would be unethical. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier do the right thing and end this government's practice of investing the heritage fund in tobacco companies?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I believe this question was answered the other week with another member, but I'll ask the Minister of Finance to report on what we do.

**Dr. Oberg:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we do have some investments in tobacco companies. We have about \$18 million or \$19 million – million, with an "m" – out of \$16 billion directly and about another \$30 million indirectly. We have to ensure that we get the best benefit for the taxpayers, and that is the mandate that has been given to the heritage savings trust fund: to ensure that we get absolutely the best bang for the buck.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you. The Premier's leadership campaign has publicly said that it developed policies in advance to protect the anonymity of donors if the donors wanted it, but no policies to protect ethics were ever developed. As a result, the campaign was caught soliciting and accepting donations from a public commission and only months after the fact returned the donation. To the Premier: when double standards on ethics abound, will the Premier admit that his office is setting a poor example to other provincial agencies when it comes to ethics and money?

**Mr. Stelmach:** You know, Mr. Speaker, this gentleman across the way refers to always bringing in some sort of legislation. It hurts every day when you get up in the House and you listen to these kinds of allegations. I go back to October of 1986, when I was running for the position of municipal councillor in the county of

Lamont. I will say that I forgot to mention to my dad and my mom that I'd be seeking the position. Well, of course, the advertising was out in the mailbox, so my dad over coffee one morning looked up from the paper and said, "So you're seeking public office." I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, whatever you do, don't ruin the family name." That's the kind of ethics I follow, not what the Liberals raise in this House.

**Dr. Taft:** Well, it's a great story, but soliciting donations from public bodies, bodies subject to the regulatory authority of this government, is unethical. The Premier has admitted that, yet he and his ministers have refused to disclose which other PC leadership campaigns solicited money from this commission. The CAO himself said that they were approached by others. Albertans have a right to know. To the Premier: will this Premier finally do the right thing and tell this Assembly which other PC leadership contenders approached this public commission for money?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I've done the right thing. Upon review we sent the money back. If there is any other, even the biggest conspiracy that the Liberals can ever put together in this House, if there are any members that have approached, they're all in the House, and they can answer to it. I trust them day in and day out. But, of course, here's the Leader of the Opposition, that is running on ethics. Perhaps today – today – he could rise in the House and inform this Assembly how much he billed, very secretly, the Alberta taxpayers for his radio ads. I didn't see on the bottom of the radio ads saying how much he asked the taxpayers to pay. Come on. Tell.

**The Speaker:** Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

#### Affordable Transportation for Seniors

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the greatest extent possible seniors want to remain independent and take advantage of opportunities to participate in the community and meet their own needs. For many seniors, though, including many of my constituents, finding accessible, reliable, and affordable transportation is difficult. To the minister of seniors: what is the minister doing to ensure that seniors have affordable transportation options that allow them to preserve their dignity, maximize their independence, and protect their quality of life?

**Mr. Melchin:** Mr. Speaker, we have long since agreed that the best thing we could do is to ensure and facilitate that seniors can stay in their own homes as long as they possibly can, stay in their own affordable housing facilities, and transportation becomes very key to that. Accessibility is very instrumental. We work with the municipalities. It is a topic that I want to continue to encourage, that between the province and municipalities we work. How do we ensure that all people have access? Sometimes it's beyond just the seniors.

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

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When seniors are no longer able to drive, they face a difficult transition that includes a sense of loss and dependency due to limited mobility options. This may jeopardize the physical and mental health of seniors since they now depend on assistance for things as simple as doing their own shopping, going to see their grandchildren, or travelling to appointments. Will the minister consult with seniors about what actions this government can take to ease this transition?

**Mr. Melchin:** Mr. Speaker, in that respect we have the Seniors Advisory Council, chaired by the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, who with a council for seniors goes around the province literally for that aspect: to consult with seniors to ensure that we have the design, the right programs to meet the needs of seniors. They do exemplary work in that regard, and I'm very proud of the ideas that they bring back. Transportation, accessibility: those questions are part of what they are providing.

1:40

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

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you. Will this minister commit to working with health regions and local municipalities to design a co-ordinated, user-friendly transportation system for seniors who require assistance accessing services?

**Mr. Melchin:** Mr. Speaker, we'll continue to work with our Seniors Advisory Council in looking at those things that we assess to be the greatest priority. Thus far, really, what we have done is ensure that our programs are targeted to those in the greatest of financial need. Our Alberta seniors' benefit program was designed for that. How do we improve some of the financial capacity for them to take care of what their unique circumstances may be rather than a universal program per se?

That said, transportation is a very good issue, and we'll be happy to continue to follow that up.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

### Provincial Labour Legislation

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Friday's landmark ruling by the Supreme Court recognizing the collective rights of people is an unprecedented step forward in recognizing the rights of working people. This government's own former Bill 27, which removed the right to strike for mental and community health workers and threw dozens of collective agreements out the window, may well now be considered unconstitutional. But this government's long history of antagonism towards working people extends beyond Bill 27. Alberta is well known to have the worst labour laws in the country. My question is to the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Given the Supreme Court's ruling, will the minister commit right now to a comprehensive review of all of Alberta's labour legislation to identify and remove all provisions which violate the workers' Charter rights?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, I do take some exception to the hon. member's observation about the labour laws in Alberta. Be that as it may – and I will respect his right to be wrong on that issue – we have a 99 per cent record of no strikes or lockouts in this province. We have better labour peace in Alberta than anywhere else in the country. So be that as it may, we are doing outstandingly well.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta Justice is looking at the decision of the Supreme Court, and when it's appropriate to make comment, no doubt we will. There are many implications with a decision like this. It's important that we look at it thoroughly.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I would like to ask the Premier, then: if aspects of Alberta's labour legislation are found to be unconstitutional given this ruling, will the Premier

commit to bring forward amendments to this Assembly to make sure that Alberta's labour laws are constitutional?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the member says "if." It's speculation. Of course, we wouldn't want to break any laws that are set in the country, so the issue would come forward, and recommendations will come to our government from the Minister of Justice after he reviews all of the relative information.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In May of 2005 this government gave a special deal to CNRL under division 8 of the labour code which allowed the oil sands giant to bypass agreements negotiated between construction trades and sign a sweetheart deal which required no vote with the employer-friendly CLAC, the Christian Labour Association. This is to the minister. Will the government admit that it was an unconstitutional intervention into the process of good-faith bargaining and act to rescind CNRL's division 8 exemption?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, this is before the courts. It would not be appropriate to make comment.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

### Municipal Taxation

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So many problems, so little time for questions. To paraphrase Einstein's thoughts, that the people who create the problems are usually unable to solve the problems, rings out loud. We have a major problem in our communities: conditional funding, or micromanagement from Edmonton. This government is addicted to power and control, and their policies and programs are eroding the quality of life of our families and communities. To the Premier: will he do the right thing and keep his promise and return the equivalent \$1.4 billion education tax to the community of origin and do it without conditions?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, we are. The 2010-2011 budget will have the full \$1.4 billion in the budget for municipalities. There will be some accountability for the funds. You don't send out \$1.4 billion to municipalities without knowing where and how the money is going to be spent. It is by far the most generous support to municipalities ever, not only in this province but, of course, in Canada. Some mayors are saying that it's something like four times per capita more than other provinces have offered. So it's a good move. Now we work with all municipalities to ensure that they use these funds as best as they can.

**Mr. Hinman:** Mr. Speaker, to quote from the Premier's campaign web page: I firmly believe that municipalities must receive more and more foreseeable long term funding; I will provide municipalities with an annual amount equivalent to 100 per cent of the education property tax; this fund will be fairly distributed based on an equalization assessment formula. The Premier promised a formula, not a partisan gift or a grant to apply or beg for. If there is a formula, it must be worse than the federal equalization formula that no one understands though it is great for partisan payments to buy votes. To the Premier: if your government has a formula, which I question, will you restore a little faith with municipal leaders and taxpayers by releasing the formula for all to see? Be honest. Be open.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the \$1.4 billion is going to municipalities based on agreements reached. All of the CAOs met, I believe, now two weeks ago: better clarification of the funds and how they'll be distributed to municipalities, the ramp-up time. Everybody is really excited in terms of the \$1.4 billion. Now they can plan. It's sustainable funding. It's predictable. Now they can really tackle the issues with respect to each and every municipality. Every municipality is different. They have different needs. Some have more maintenance to do. Others will be spending more on infrastructure. I mean, it's up to those individual municipalities to bring forward their plan, and the money will be there.

**Mr. Hinman:** Mr. Speaker, it's a phony partisan formula, and it's not open for the people to see.

Mr. Speaker, if this government is going to continue with its chokehold on our communities and micromanage them, will they at least be open and honest about it? To the Premier: will the government admit that they don't have a 10-year plan for communities across the province and commit to make one and release it so municipalities can know when the money is coming and make real plans for the citizens? Again, be open. Be honest.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the \$1.4 billion is there, a full \$1.4 billion by 2010-11. I don't know what the word "partisan" is. It's an agreement reached with municipalities. They all share in the \$1.4 billion. It's a formula, an agreement that was reached with the CAOs and the elected officials, and we're just eager to go ahead. This year it's \$400 million, next year \$500 million. Like I said, by 2010-11 it will be \$1.4 billion. That's a considerable amount of money, and that \$1.4 billion was exactly the amount of money paid for the purpose of education through property tax last year in the province of Alberta.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

#### Affordable Housing for Seniors

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday at our Calgary-Varsity seniors' appreciation tea held at the Dalhousie Community Centre, an 85-year-old constituent approached me. He was concerned with a very heavy-handed condo conversion that he and other vulnerable fixed-income seniors were experiencing. To the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. When this constituent approached one of your ministry's offices, he was left with more questions than answers. What advice are the EII outreach offices providing for fixed-income or otherwise vulnerable seniors facing serious housing troubles?

**Ms Evans:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I've actually been very pleased that this hon. member has taken advantage of following up on many of the circumstances his constituents have. I know that our staff have been working with his office to make sure that we're working in a co-ordinated fashion. Relative to everybody that comes in, as I've said in this House, it's on an individual basis. We'd be pleased to find out exactly what the circumstances are. To date we've given out over a million dollars to about 1,200 people and households. If the hon. member would care to provide me the information, I will do my due diligence and find out exactly what are the circumstances. There is not a blanket circumstance for seniors in these situations because homelessness and eviction is something that we are not going to be tolerant of.

1:50

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. Seniors have weathered a number of storms in their lives, from the Great Depression to wars. They shouldn't have to continue to battle with the Alberta government. They're a proud lot and reluctant to ask for a hand up, heaven forbid a handout. To the minister of seniors: my constituents would like to know why this government forces seniors to apply for subsidies which just translate into extra profits for landlords rather than temporarily controlling rent increases.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

**Mr. Melchin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would say that we are very proud of the heritage that our seniors bring to this province. They're the ones that have brought the great principles of hard work, industry, self-reliance, independence: all of those things that have made this country wonderful. They've looked always to themselves first, to their families second. Certainly, the government was never meant to be the provider of first resort for everything. That said, we have always built our programs to assess those in the greatest of need. That's why the Alberta seniors' benefit program is there: to supplement those federal and provincial programs to help those seniors to be able to sustain their living.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. Again to the Minister of Employment, Industry, and Immigration: can the minister explain what co-ordination exists between her ministry, Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Seniors to ensure that vulnerable seniors trying to keep a roof over their heads aren't punted back and forth between ministries? I'd like to know, and so would my constituents, who is in charge.

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, in the case of Municipal Affairs and Housing we've done a lot of collaboration on the committee framing the terms of reference for the homeless and eviction and have worked together in the offices with staff complementary to each department, working in the same office relative to seniors currently with the seniors' ministry on a number of issues, not only housing and income supports but on those supports for people with special and unique abilities to engage in the world of work. Our staff at the administrative level of assistant deputy minister are working well together. It seems to me that the hon. member is making a case, raising questions about co-ordination. Again, if there is some particular issue affecting a resident, especially a senior, we'd like to follow up on that.

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

#### Disaster Services

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The storms of last week caused considerable damage in central and southern Alberta, including flooding, damaged roads, and a possible tornado touching down. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Is the government and your department prepared to help people in the storms' aftermath?

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There's no doubt that last week's storms had a major impact on several municipalities in Alberta, and noting the hon. member from Calgary, there were severe storms that took place in his city. We do understand the urgency, and we're working as quickly as we possibly can to respond to the emergencies of residents of the city, working together, trying to compile the data that's necessary for support for those individuals and municipalities.

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

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, minister, for that positive answer. Now, my only other question to the minister is: could the minister inform the House and Albertans as to how a disaster recovery program would assist affected municipalities, individuals, and small businesses?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Mr. Speaker, the disaster programs are very much that: to support municipalities, residents, small businesses that have been affected by uninsurable damage that has been caused, for example, by overland flooding. If I can say, I was in Calgary over the weekend to see what damage did occur. Our department is very much looking to see how quickly we can expedite the process, making sure that those residents aren't facing undue hardship.

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

#### Electricity Deregulation

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Conservative candidate in the Drumheller by-election stated that deregulation is a failure. He went on to say that it did not produce lower power bills. Everyone seems to know this but the government front bench in this province. My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Will the Department of Agriculture and Food continue to support permanent high electricity prices in Alberta or will it finally admit that deregulation is a dismal failure and adopt the Alberta Liberals' low-cost power plan?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** This is quite a decision, Mr. Speaker. However, I think the hon. Energy minister has answered this question adequately so many times that I'm not going to follow up. Alberta farmers do not pay more for their power than anyone else. It's a mistaken belief that they keep coming back to and coming back to and coming back to on deregulation. It's not hurting us. We are doing just fine, thank you very much, in rural Alberta.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. minister is telling us that the candidate for the Progressive Conservative Party in the by-election is wrong. Now, Alberta consumers paid 15 per cent higher prices in 2006 than in 2005 for their power. As recently as last Wednesday the hon. Minister of Energy claimed that electricity deregulation has been a complete success. To the Minister of Energy: is the minister willing to admit that he was wrong in claiming that deregulation has been a success, or again is it the Tory candidate for Drumheller-Stettler who was mistaken? Which one is it?

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

**Mr. Knight:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I can tell this House is that I am not a candidate in any by-election, so I don't have to go and make ridiculous claims about anything.

What I can tell you is that the statements that I made last week are the statements that I'll make this week. They'll be the statements that I will make next week. They still remain true today. This government – this government – has a plan to build a stronger Alberta, and the restructuring of the electrical utility in Alberta is part of that plan.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: given that – and I will reread this quote for the Premier's benefit – deregulation is a failure, and the candidate goes on to say that it did not produce lower power bills, does the hon. Premier consider that the Progressive Conservative candidate's description of power deregulation is ridiculous, like the Minister of Energy?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, we have a very good candidate in Drumheller-Stettler in the person of Mr. Jack Hayden, who not only served as municipal councillor; he was president of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties and also participated tremendously in the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. Every candidate brings forward their opinions on various issues. In this particular case we're going to see movement in terms of new sources of energy in Alberta from bioenergy. The hon. member mentioned: follow the Liberal plan. If we followed their plan, unfortunately, in this province electricity would have quadrupled, given their environmental plan.

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

#### Criminal Justice System

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The families of young people murdered at the hands of other youth in the Edmonton area have been rallying together and circulating petitions to call for tougher sentences for violent crime. Their loved ones' lives were cut far too short by the senseless violence of strangers. Their petitions highlight the concerns many Albertans have about lenient sentences for young offenders and the perceived increase in violent youth crime. My first question is to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Can the minister tell us what his department is doing to ensure that young offenders receive stiffer sentences under the law?

**Mr. Stevens:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell the hon. member and, indeed, all Albertans that the Alberta government is concerned about youth crime and appropriate sentencing. It is our belief – and we've been saying this for some time – that the federal legislation which governs this particular matter, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, needs to be overhauled, needs to be reviewed in its entirety, does not appropriately deal with violent crimes or chronic offenders. As a matter of fact, I had an opportunity to say this to my colleagues across the country last October in Newfoundland, when we met at an FPT, or federal/provincial/territorial, meeting at that time.

2:00

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

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Can the



minister tell us what his department is doing to reduce youth violence in this province?

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

**Mr. Lindsay:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows, this government is committed to providing safe and secure communities for every Albertan. We are definitely concerned about youth crime and the violent behaviour of some young people in this province, and when I say “some,” I mean a very small minority. However, preventing this behaviour is a joint responsibility of government, law enforcement, the community, and family. This year we are providing nearly \$1 million in grants for crime prevention, restorative justice initiatives, including programs aimed at drug and alcohol awareness, youth activities, and mentorships. We are also providing \$350,000 to 122 youth justice committees. These committees partner with the community to give back to these young lives . . .

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

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. What services does the department provide for families of homicide victims to ensure that they get the support they need before, during, and after court proceedings?

**Mr. Lindsay:** Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta believes victims of crime should be heard, and we continue to develop programs and services that ensure that victims are treated with compassion and respect. In April we unveiled the very first step-by-step guide ever developed in Canada to help victims of crime through the criminal justice system. The Victims of Crime Protocol also lets victims know what their role is, the type of information they can receive, and what services they can expect from the time a crime is committed to when an offender is released. Our department also provided over \$4 million in grants to victim assistance programs across this province.

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

### Confined Feeding Operations

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A month ago I asked the Minister of Agriculture and Food whether he was concerned by this government’s weakening of the regulations regarding minimum distance setback of confined feeding operations. His response was disturbing in its lack of knowledge of this portfolio. He said, and I quote: I’m not familiar with the specific regulations. End quote. These changes matter. They matter very much indeed to those living next to confined feeding operations. To the same minister: has he studied the regulations regarding reduced minimum setback distances from public buildings, and could he not answer the question now why this government allows this relaxation?

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

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the regulations are set out by the AOPA and are governed by the NRCB, but these regulations are not necessarily relaxed. There are some that are grandfathered in. But at that time he was talking about churches and schools and whatnot, which are generally in urban

areas. Of course, we’re not going to have these institutions closer than the regulations would permit. If they’re not good enough, there is a dispute settlement committee that you can report it to, and they will take care of it.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two months ago I went to visit a number of landowners east of Airdrie, including John and Laurie Harnack. They have been affected by a confined feeding operation, the Thorlakson feedlot, which withholds surface water and whose waste manure has on a number of occasions passed onto their land and into public ditches through flood irrigation. Letters of complaint to the NRCB over many years have had little or no lasting solution but symptomatic coverage, and the letters to the Minister of SRD have gotten no meaningful response for these folks. They’ve asked serious questions about what this ministry is doing to protect their interests. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: why is the government and the NRCB, in particular, being so lax in enforcing the property and health rights of neighbours of confined feeding operations?

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, I’m afraid the hon. member is simply not right in his assertion here. The Natural Resources Conservation Board has inspectors throughout the province who respond to concerns, such as the ones he’s indicated, about livestock operations. The Natural Resources Conservation Board works closely with other agencies like Alberta Environment, Alberta Agriculture, and the regional health authorities, and it’s the experience of the Natural Resources Conservation Board that the vast majority of operators are responsible and doing their best to comply with the environmental standards that govern this province.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Several weeks ago I was contacted by the McCullochs who farm next to the AAA feedlot near Didsbury. They and several of their neighbours of the feedlot have been concerned about the cattle feedlot, which has appeared to be abandoned, leaving both live and dead cattle on the site along with vast amounts of manure. The waste ponds were overflowing when the McCullochs called, and I have pictures, which I’ll table in the House today, of filthy water pouring off their land next to the feedlot. But, again, letters to the NRCB and the government since March have gotten nothing, no accountability. Will the minister accept that something is not working with the licensing and monitoring and enforcement of confined feedlots in this province?

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, what I’ll accept is that I think the hon. member is grandstanding in here. If Albertans have concerns, they call up the NRCB. Inspectors will be sent out. There was a successful prosecution with a very significant fine, \$50,000, just in the last few weeks. The system works. These are serious allegations. I appreciate that. But the place to take them is to the NRCB, not to grandstand in here.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

### Affordable Housing

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Conservative housing policy has created absolute chaos for renters. Desperately needed

workers are being forced to live in Edmonton's river valley because of the lack of affordable housing. Thousands of people are vulnerable and facing rent increases that could make them homeless. The new fastest growing industry in the province is the food bank because of rising rental rates around here. My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. What is the government prepared to do now in the short run to help out thousands of vulnerable renters?

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

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you dwell completely on the short term, if you think that putting a band-aid as the solution in the short term is the right answer, then you do what the Liberals and the NDs want: you put in rent control, and then you create a much greater problem down the road.

This government has taken the approach that we will work with all the related industries to try and develop the long-term solution, which is more housing. We have in place many, many programs that are based to support those in need to get them through these tough times. This government has a great deal of compassion for those in trouble right now, but we also know that the problem is solved in a long-term solution and not simply forgetting all of your principles and selling out for the short-term solution.

**Mr. Martin:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that they're glad that the minister is compassionate because there are thousands of them being hurt out there right now. The reality is that in Canada Mortgage and Housing's April figures there are less rental units in Edmonton and Calgary than there were last October. Things are getting worse before they get better. I guess I'd say to the minister: when is he going to take off his ideological blinkers and do the right thing for thousands and thousands of Albertans in this province?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, it is certainly a problem to be stuck with ideological blinkers as opposed to ideological blinders. Canada Mortgage and Housing has indicated that nearly a full quarter of the houses in Canada were built in Alberta. These houses are not sitting empty. Albertans that have come here or Albertans that are trying to improve their housing lots move into these homes, and it opens up other homes. For them to suggest that our blinkers have stopped us from doing what's right is simply wrong. The solution is in more housing. That is from a stable market, from working with the private investment groups, from working with the government departments, and putting a long-term solution to this issue.

**Mr. Martin:** Mr. Speaker, that's an absolutely ridiculous answer because it's going to take three to four years to bring on housing. Surely, the minister is aware of that. What do we say now to thousands of Albertans – thousands, literally – that are paying 50, 60 per cent of their income on accommodation? What do you say: wait for three or four years till things get better?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** No. Mr. Speaker, we pick up the magic ND wand and wave it. Apparently, that's what they think is a solution to this problem.

It's a real problem, and we know it, but the problem is dealt with on many aspects. We support those who qualify for our programs. We've brought the departments together to make it simpler. We tried very hard to meet with those affected individuals who need our help both temporarily and long term, and we're working with private investment and with government departments and municipalities towards a long-term solution to this temporary situation.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

## 2:10 Crop Insurance for Seeding

**Mr. Marz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Due to the cold, late, wet spring and the inability of farmers to get their crops seeded on time, many producers in many parts of the province are concerned about potential losses. Many have already invested significant dollars in chemicals, rent, fertilizer, seed, and equipment. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Will the current crop insurance be enough to cover these basic input costs if these acres don't get seeded in time?

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

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're certainly aware of how the weather has impacted seeding this year, and the AFSC has already taken some proactive steps. Last month we extended the 2007 seeding deadline for crop insurance to June 5 for a number of crops and to June 15 for barley, spring triticale, spring rye, and Polish canola. As a result the farmers continue their seeding as planned, and thanks to recent good weather most are almost complete now. The extended deadlines have also helped those who may have had to reseed because of the extended flooding.

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

**Mr. Marz:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to hear that these adjustments have been made, but I'm not quite sure they're going to be enough. From what I understand, there'll be some smaller areas of the province that won't be seeded at all due to the weather. To the same minister: what's being done for those farmers?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, Mr. Speaker, first, I'd like to point out that this province has the best crop and production insurance in the country. The unseeded acreage benefit under production insurance will compensate producers up to \$60 per acre depending on their input amounts. As well, producers with unseeded acres who have production insurance will also be eligible for an additional \$15 per acre from the federal cover crop protection program.

**Mr. Marz:** Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: is the minister proposing any further changes to the Alberta crop insurance program to address these late-seeding issues?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, Mr. Speaker, as already noted, our programs are very responsive and either enhance or are enhanced by the national programs. For example, producers with lower than average seeded acres and high input costs also benefit from the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program, better known as CAIS. The provincial government will continue to monitor the seeding progress across the province and the effectiveness of our agriculture insurance programs.

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

## Not-for-profit Sector

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has neglected the labour issues in the voluntary sector for too long. In the next five years Alberta's not-for-profit organizations are

expected to lose 80 per cent of their executive directors as they are lured away to corporate and government work. The loss of this institutional memory and leadership will be devastating. To the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. The ministry's plan to release a not-for-profit labour force strategy later this year is too late. What concrete action is this minister prepared to take now to prevent these people from being lured away?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, with our 10-year strategy on building and educating tomorrow's workforce, there are many sectors which we realize are really struggling to retain staff, principally because there are so many jobs available that they tend to move on to other enterprises. So one of the strategic things that we're trying to evaluate is just exactly what the needs are in the various sectors and how we can do better with employers to ensure that there's some sensitivity around labour mobility. If I may, I had the same degree of difficulty when I was minister of health watching nurses go to cook at camps. When people choose to move, we just simply try . . .

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Workers in Alberta's not-for-profit sector have become accustomed to being overworked and underpaid, but now the funding, labour, and housing crises have pushed staff in the voluntary sector to the breaking point, and even some volunteers have had to return to work to offset housing costs. My question is to the minister of housing. What specific housing actions have been developed to work in tandem with the strategy from EII that will open opportunities for those working or volunteering in the charitable NGO or voluntary sector, particularly for live/work artist spaces?

**Mr. Danyluk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we continually try to look at providing spaces and housing for all individuals that need that support. As was mentioned previously by the president of the Treasury, the work that is being done in order to try to increase the number of units available is critical to the focus that this government has in order to provide units that would be available for seniors, for those that have special needs, and for students.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, the current definition of a charitable or voluntary organization is based more on how the charity spends its money than on the services it provides. This has long been regarded as an unsatisfactory and overly narrow approach. My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. When is your department going to come up with a made-in-Alberta definition of a charitable sector, and what actions have you taken to work with your federal counterpart to create a definition other than the one used by Revenue Canada?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, as Treasury Board president we work with all of our departments to develop consensus around issues like this. We've brought forward the community spirit program, we are working with the minister from parks, culture, and recreation, and we understand how completely important to this government the volunteer association is. I've had no discussions with any member of the federal government with regard to this issue. I would wonder what the hon. member's had.

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

## International Trade

**Mr. Cao:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday I had the privilege of taking part in the government of Alberta's hosting more than 65 members of the consular corps at the annual consular briefing. These ambassadors and high commissioners and consuls general and honorary consuls are important to Alberta's economic prosperity. Our efforts attract highly skilled people to our province. My question today is to the Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations. What is being done to ensure that Alberta maintains and enlarges good relations with the consular corps and their countries?

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

**Mr. Boutillier:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's exactly events like this that build the bridge from the rest of the world to our province. I might say that at the meeting on Friday – I thank the many ministers of government and MLAs that attended, but many consular representatives have told us relative to the government of Alberta that they enjoy greater access to the government of Alberta than any other government across Canada. That truly speaks of the open and transparent approach of our government in terms of what we're doing in building relationships with the rest of the world.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's in the news that there's another important delegation visiting Alberta tomorrow. It is the Prime Minister of the Netherlands. So my question is to the same hon. minister. What is planned for the Prime Minister's visit?

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

**Mr. Boutillier:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a very busy day, and I'm very pleased to say that the Prime Minister of the Netherlands chose our province to visit. I think it really speaks of the role that our province and our government plays with the rest of the world. I want to also thank so many Edmontonians and others. The Premier will be hosting tomorrow a special luncheon at Government House but also will be meeting with the Dutch Canadian Club tonight with the Prime Minister as well as Mayor Mandel tomorrow and many others because of the important relationship we've had over the many years, from the liberation of the Netherlands to the important role that Canadians played with Allied troops towards that end.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the same minister. Alberta's strong economy depends on tourism. To increase guided group tourists to their countries, other jurisdictions have created guided tour group visas, which we don't have. We only have the normal, lengthy, more difficult to obtain visas for visitors, even if they're guided tour visitors. So my question is: what are you going to do to help Canada to implement tour group visas to increase tourism in Alberta?

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

**Mr. Boutillier:** Thank you very much. I'm working closely with my colleague the minister of immigration and employment. Essentially, the United States did have tour group visas, but since 9/11 they

cancelled them as well. We are working very closely with the federal government. We'll continue to do so because of the tremendous tourism opportunities we have right here in our province of Alberta.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, that was 82 questions and responses.

head: **2:20 Presenting Petitions**

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today to table a petition with 105 signatures on it. The petition notes the Conservative government's continued refusal to protect Alberta families from rent gouging and urges the government to immediately introduce temporary rent guidelines. This brings the total signatures on this petition to 287.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions. The first one has 20 signatures, and it reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government . . . to work with the City of Edmonton to ensure that the traffic noise from the Edmonton Ring Road near our neighbourhood of The Woods is evaluated immediately and again in six months, and that if the noise levels measured are found to exceed acceptable provincial or municipal thresholds, that noise attenuation and reduction measures be implemented as soon as possible.

The second one has 38 signatures, and this one reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Edmonton, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government . . . to complete, as soon as possible, the overpasses and interchanges at the locations where the Anthony Henday Drive (Edmonton Ring Road) intersects Lessard Road, Callingwood Road (62 Avenue), and Cameron Heights Drive.

Thank you.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition with roughly 120 names from Tanya Woodruff, Cindy Iverson,\* and Wendy Hugh\* of the Tomahawk area of Alberta, requesting the government of Alberta to take the lead in protecting the quality of life for us and future generations in the climate crisis in relation to sour gas development near schools in that area.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Notices of Motions**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, and in accordance with Standing Order 42 I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time I intend to move that the Assembly

refer the matter of the unethical donation from the Beaver Regional Waste Management Services Commission to the Premier's campaign for the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party to the Standing Committee on Managing Growth Pressures, constituted under Standing Order 52.01(1)(c), for a full and independent inquiry.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

**Bill 43  
Appropriation Act, 2007**

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 43, the Appropriation Act, 2007. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, from the delivery of the budget back on April 19 by the Minister of Finance the Assembly has spent a lot of time, 60 hours, debating the budget, by far the biggest thing we've done, except for, of course, our one-night stand on rent control. I want to congratulate the members of the Assembly on both sides for not only the patience but the courage to take on a new approach and to try out different things to try and understand our budget better.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll give it to the page.

[Motion carried; Bill 43 read a first time]

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

**Bill 44  
Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007**

**Mr. Stevens:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to request leave to introduce a bill being the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2007.

This particular piece of legislation typically comes in at this stage of the proceedings in the Assembly, and in this spring session there are two bills that will be impacted by this Bill 44: the Forest and Prairie Protection Act and the Public Service Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 44 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

**Mr. Coutts:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and table five copies of the 2006 Climate Change Central progress report. Climate Change Central, known as C3, is one of the foremost organizations in Alberta. It is concerned about the environment all year long. It has solar heating community programs, on-farm, and car heaven programs as well as biodiesel research.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Rev. Abbott:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of questions and responses on Bill 29 from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I'd like to table these at this time.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is an article from the *Calgary Herald* from Saturday, June 9 of this year, and it's to back up my question today in regard to the distancing of the candidate in Drumheller from the PC Party on electricity deregulation.

The second tabling I have today is a letter that I received this morning from the hon. Minister of Energy. It's dated June 6, 2007,

\*These spellings could not be verified at the time of publication.

and it's a partial explanation of the steam line rupture which occurred at MEG Energy Corp.'s site on May 5, 2007.

Thank you.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of information released by the Alberta Liberal caucus on March 19 around the radio ads that the Premier was inquiring about, outlining various policies and procedures as to the financial accounting that was done in accordance with the rules that are set out for caucus expenditures through LAO.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, do you have one?

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies of photographs of the AAA feedlot operation near Didsbury that I referenced in question period.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a letter from Edmonton-McClung constituent Barbara Hollman complaining about the noise from the traffic travelling the Anthony Henday Drive, which she can see and clearly hear from her house. She wants the overpass at Callingwood Road and 62nd Avenue made a priority. But until that project is again looked at, she asks that something gets done in the interim to intercept or reduce the noise, something like a berm.

The second tabling is a set of 13 pictures, Mr. Speaker, taken from Barb Hollman's deck and backyard showing how flat the landscape is between her neighbourhood and the Anthony Henday Drive. You can clearly see the traffic and can probably imagine the constant, unrelenting, and intrusive noise that Ms Hollman and her neighbours have to endure. She doesn't want to leave her home but hopes Infrastructure and Transportation delivers on their promise to attenuate the noise as promised.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, did you want to proceed today?

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll proceed later.

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

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is from my constituent Chris Goss. I'm tabling five copies of e-mail letters on his behalf. Chris is concerned about seismic activities in Utikuma Lake causing fish kills and not using that information in relation to plans for seismic activities in Marie Lake.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is five copies of e-mail letters from my constituent Glenda Murphy. Glenda is also concerned about seismic activities in Utikuma Lake causing fish kills and not using that information in relation to plans for seismic activities in Marie Lake.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling documents from 37 low-income Albertans. All of them support rent guidelines and have experienced significant rent increases. They are of course finding it very difficult to make ends meet.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a document with 512 signatures. The signatories are urging this government to take effective action on the housing crisis that's hurting tens of thousands of Albertans, particularly the problem of skyrocketing rent increases.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling one document here today. I'm very pleased to table an explanatory document from the Canadian Association for Disabled Skiing. I'm pleased to do so on the day of the visit of Rick Hansen. We got this at the abilities lodge meeting on Friday.

Thank you.

head: 2:30

### 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 Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry, Workers' Compensation Board, Alberta, 2006 Accountability Framework Report.

On behalf of the hon. Minister of Education, memorandum dated June 7, 2007, from the hon. Minister of Education to the hon. Member for Strathcona regarding grade inflation in Alberta's kindergarten to grade 12 education system.

On behalf of the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, responses to questions raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on May 28 and 29, 2007, Department of Advanced Education and Technology 2007-08 main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Minister of Energy, a response to a question raised by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead on May 30, 2007, Department of Energy 2007-2008 main estimates debate.

head: **Motions under Standing Order 42**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition with respect to a Standing Order 42 application.

### Contribution to Premier's Leadership Campaign

Ms Blakeman on behalf of Dr. Taft:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly refer the matter of the unethical donation from the Beaver Regional Waste Management Services Commission to the Premier's campaign for the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party to the Standing Committee on Managing Growth Pressures, constituted under Standing Order 52.01(1)(c), for a full and independent inquiry.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The province is indeed facing tremendous growth pressures, and managing these is supposedly one of the Premier's top five priorities. Now, certainly, regional planning and service delivery is a critical piece of this. There are approximately 50 such regional service commissions

in this province, and the issue of whether they're operating effectively and whether there's clarity about their mandate and adequate accountability measures is critical. The stakes are very high.

Mr. Speaker, I'm mindful of the urgency test from *Marleau and Montpetit* found on page 584.

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, there is no urgency test. Please sit down. Under Standing Order 42 the member gives a very brief explanation. The chair then asks if there's unanimous consent. There's no urgency. It's simply that you get a shot for a minute or two, then I ask the question.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed. The minister of municipal affairs has had the power to call for an independent inspection of the commission. He has refused to do this. He said that he would do his own review and that they would be looking at the financials. But this minister was very public in his support for the Premier during the leadership race. The CAO of the commission is a personal supporter of the Premier.

We need something that is more rigorous and definitely more independent to ensure that the citizens of the member municipalities can be confident that their interests are protected. The issue is broader than the Beaver regional waste commission and looking at their financials. The policy field committee would be able to look at this issue in the broader context of the accountability and clarity of mandate of these public bodies.

The government has indicated that the Assembly is likely to rise this week. I believe it's important that the Assembly refer this issue immediately to ensure that there is time and accommodation over the summer to look into both the specific example of the donation but also whether other public bodies were targeted, donated, and what needs to be done to fix that problem.

As well, last week the President of the Treasury Board indicated that ministers of the Crown didn't have time to even call commissions or public entities on what they may or may not have done. Granted that, then this is the opportunity to do it, with a policy field committee, where adequate accountability measures could be suggested to be put in place.

Indeed, the time is possible to do so. Policy field committees have now been constituted. They have been staffed and peopled. They are up and running, and some of them have already been charged to meet and report back before the fall session. So this is within their mandate, given the standing order.

**The Speaker:** I think, hon. member, please, let's move forward now. If the House agrees to it, we'll have the debate. Then the member will be recognized for X amount of speaking time. Right now we do have a question, and it requires unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

[The Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

#### **Energy and Utilities Board Hearing Costs**

Q15. Mr. MacDonald asked that the following question be accepted.

What was the total departmental cost for staff time, legal fees, and consultative services to prepare the MLA for Fort

McMurray-Wood Buffalo for his presentation to the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board 2006 hearings on Suncor Energy Incorporated's Voyageur project?

#### **Rate of Recidivism for Sexually Exploited Children**

Q16. Mrs. Mather asked that the following question be accepted. What is the rate of recidivism for sexually exploited children apprehended under the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act since its implementation?

head: **Motions for Returns**

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Wednesday, June 6, it is my pleasure to move that motions for returns 7 and 8 be dealt with today. There being no additional motions for return appearing on the Order Paper, there are none to stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

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

#### **Meeting with Fort McMurray Mayor**

M7. Mr. Chase moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents, including briefings, letters, memos, policy proposals, cabinet minutes, talking points, faxes, correspondence, and discussion papers, relating to the minister of infrastructure's meeting with Fort McMurray mayor Doug Faulkner on July 27, 1999.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason for requesting this information is the problems that Fort McMurray has been facing for years with lack of support for their infrastructure and which are compounded by the speedy approval of developments in the oil sands.

We would like to have this information. Mayor Blake had twice previously requested funding, \$1.2 billion, when she first came with a delegation in 2005. That amount was extended to \$2 billion in 2006. We're trying to get a handle on how many mayors' requests have been dealt with over this time period because it seems to be a rather sad underfunding circumstance.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have reviewed the Motion for a Return 7 from the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

The hon. member's request, including extensive documentation related to a meeting between the minister of infrastructure and the mayor of Fort McMurray in 1999, included a number of documents that are covered under FOIP, including draft documents. The list of remaining documents requires a manual search and will take several weeks to retrieve, and the request cannot be fulfilled within the time frame requested.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I recommend that the Assembly reject MR 7.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to close the debate.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. I would be pleased with whatever information the minister is prepared to release in the name

of the foundations of transparency and accountability, which his government states and will, hopefully, uphold.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 7 lost]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**2:40 Racing Entertainment Centre Project**

M8. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Dr. Swann that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents, including studies, reports, and environmental impact assessments, relating to the effects on water levels and water quality of withdrawing water from the Red Deer River to service a project in the municipal district of Rocky View that includes a major retail mall, a horse-racing track, a casino, an industrial park, and an equine centre from fiscal years 2003-2004 to 2005-2006 and for the period April 1, 2006, to April 10, 2007.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Environment assessment of impacts of diverting water from the Red Deer River to the Balzac development is what MR 8 is calling for. We were told that there are some 1,700 pages related to this request, but we received less than 500. This proposed amendment will not add further information to this question and is therefore not supported. It may add paper but not substance.

Of course, the amendment that has been circulated to all members, suggesting striking out “effects on,” striking out . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, I think we’re ahead of ourselves here. The chair doesn’t know that there’s an amendment, so just move the motion. We’ll see what happens.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much for the qualification. I so move, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given the enthusiasm that the member obviously has for the amendment, maybe we should just vote on the question as it stands. I won’t do that.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to propose an amendment. All members are in possession of the amendment, and I will read it into the record. The amendment reads:

- (a) by striking out “effects on”;
- (b) by striking out “of withdrawing water from the Red Deer River to service a project in the municipal district of Rocky View that includes a major retail mall, a horse-racing track, a casino, an industrial park, and an equine centre” and substituting “in the Red Deer River”.

The motion will then read:

That an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents, including studies, reports, and environmental impact assessments, relating to the water levels and water quality in the Red Deer River from fiscal years 2003-2004 to 2005-2006 and for the period of April 1, 2006, to April 10, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, as the member has indicated, what the opposition seek with this return is information regarding reports, studies, and corresponding reports of environmental impact resulting from the application in the Balzac area. I’ve indicated on a number of occasions that this particular application was received by Alberta Environment and was subject to the normal procedure for approving

documents. There were not specific reports, environmental impact assessments, and studies related to the effects on water levels and water quality of withdrawing water from the Red Deer River. There are, however, a number of reports and studies related to the overall issue of the Red Deer River. Leaving this motion as it exists would result in virtually no information being provided for the opposition member because there would be no reports thus identified. By amending the report, there will be a number of pieces of information made available to the opposition, and that’s why I suggest that we support this report.

I might also add, Mr. Speaker, that there was a FOIP request on this particular issue. All of the relevant information that was requested under that FOIP report has been provided to the applicant. So combined with what was received through the FOIP report and what would be made available through the amended motion here, there should be more than adequate information to serve the needs of the member.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, we’re now on the amendment. Go.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. It makes me think of *1984*: he who controls the past controls the future. We’ve just had a large eraser or whiteout taken to our original motion for information. The fact that there is no government information on environmental impact assessments despite the fact that millions of dollars of the Rocky View municipality have gone out, millions of dollars of the local contractor and the United Horsemen have all proceeded and been spent without the required environmental assessments is indeed surprising; however, I do appreciate the minister’s willingness to provide whatever enlightening information that will help us to see the justification of this project. Therefore, I accept the amended motion.

[Motion on amendment carried]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, if you wish to conclude the debate, fine. If not, I’ll call the question on the motion as amended.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for again giving me the opportunity to close. We have to get past just the words “accountability” and “transparency.” FOIP is preventing information from being received by taxpayers as well as members of the opposition and the independent members. You’ve got to not only talk, but you have to walk that talk. Hopefully, with the committee format, the field committees, this discussion will reach greater heights and true sharing will occur. I look forward to the field committees, but I am grateful for the crumbs that have been thrown my way.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 8 as amended carried]

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

**Bill 211  
Planning for the Future of Communities Act**

[Debate adjourned June 4: Ms DeLong speaking]

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, there remain 34 minutes of debate time. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise to discuss . . .

**The Speaker:** Sorry, leader. Did the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow choose to continue? Well, I'm sorry then. She still has eight minutes remaining. Please continue, and then we'll recognize the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for letting me continue with Bill 211, Planning for the Future of Communities Act.

Growth has taken competition over land use to new heights. These developmental plans can naturally coexist, but sometimes land uses are conflicting, and different groups want access to the same area. Sometimes there's a need to exercise caution when locating certain developments next to each other. For example, Alberta has seven major watersheds which need to be protected. The government has taken steps to prioritize these competing demands, and as a government we must provide a road map for the orderly development of homes, cottages, roads, cities, facilities, and industries and decide which areas are going to be reserved for recreational purposes and animal sanctuaries. Furthermore, the better we plan development, services can be delivered more efficiently and effectively.

Now, co-ordinating these demands is a large undertaking, but it can be done. In order to achieve harmony while growing, it's necessary to have a plan and vision in place. A land-use framework provides the approach needed to better manage public and private lands and resources to meet the long-term economic, social, and environmental goals of Alberta. Alberta has 164 million acres of space which needs to be managed, and if the government of Alberta has a comprehensive approach to deal with land demand, all Albertan land uses will be balanced. With a very organized layout everyone can make the most of our vast geography.

2:50

While Bill 211 has good intentions, I assure the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie that the government of Alberta is taking every step necessary to attain sustainable land use for all of Alberta's communities. In order to be well executed, the Department of Sustainable Resource Development has taken the time necessary for the preparation of a comprehensive land-use framework. Development of this framework has been in progress since 2005.

Now, in the spring of 2006 the Alberta government began land-use stakeholder consultations. The Department of Sustainable Resource Development gathered information on a development framework, land-use principles, and identified challenges that Alberta is facing. From the beginning of this process Sustainable Resource Development has been constructing a road map for development decisions supporting strong leadership, educating Albertans, and promoting responsible decisions. These principles are guiding the development of the land-use framework.

Because of the important nature of this issue, the hon. Premier placed this project at the top of the list of priorities this government would accomplish. The completion of the land-use framework is one of the key actions this government is taking to help manage growth pressures in Alberta. At the end of last year the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development was mandated to complete the land-use framework. This framework is of utmost importance to the department, and they're working diligently to complete it in a timely fashion. I believe this framework accomplishes what Bill 211 is calling for, and I thank the hon. members opposite for their support of these efforts in land-use planning.

When the land-use framework is complete, it will provide clear steps for development, and it will address conflicts over the competing use of land and provide a vision for an integrated, sustainable land-use approach. This vision will help ease development by adding clarity to the process. The land-use framework will alleviate concerns about growth because Albertans will be confident that there is a plan for growth. They'll know that projects are guided by a vision of Alberta, and they're not just constructed anywhere.

How Bill 211 differs from the land-use framework is that this framework was not formulated behind closed doors. All Albertans were invited to give their input on the future of land use in this province. Because Alberta's land belongs to all Albertans, their vision of land use is going to be represented in this framework. Input was gathered through 15 public sessions across Alberta and through a workbook questionnaire that all Albertans were encouraged to submit. Albertans were asked to provide input on guiding principles to indicate which land-use issues are of most concern to them, which direction they would like the framework to go in, and what kind of outcomes they want. The land-use framework will be Albertans' framework.

Mr. Speaker, knowing that public consultation would be more successful if Albertans had the proper tools and background information to address land use, the Department of Sustainable Resource Development published two resource guides to increase public awareness of land-use issues. Understanding Land Use in Alberta and the land-use workbook ensured that Albertans could provide knowledgeable input.

The department also held focus group sessions where sectors affected by land groups were also given a strong role in the development of a land-use policy. In order to get a precise picture of land-use needs, input was gathered from agriculture, transportation, recreational users, oil and gas, mining, conservation and environment groups, aboriginal communities, municipal representatives, and academics.

A draft of the land-use framework is expected to be completed by the end of this year, and the government is working towards its future implementation. It will provide the context, overall direction, and decision-making framework which will govern and manage land use in Alberta. Once the framework is released, it will apply to all private and public lands in the province except for federal lands. Therefore, municipal development and intermunicipal co-operation will fall under its scope.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, the land-use framework is a comprehensive and detailed approach to co-ordinating land use in Alberta. As far as I'm concerned, not only has the government met the goals of Bill 211, but it has also surpassed them. It's quite clear that this government is working diligently to meet Albertans' long-term social and economic goals based on good land-use management.

I thank the Member for Calgary-Currie for his work on Bill 211, but the government of Alberta and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development are currently working on a land-use framework that will enhance our planning and co-ordination requirements well into the future. The land-use framework will be another tool to support regional co-operation and municipal development. Therefore, due to the redundant nature of the Planning for the Future of Communities Act I urge the hon. members of the Assembly to vote against Bill 211.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition and hon. members, under Standing Order 29(3)(a) the hon. leader has a maximum of 20 minutes should he choose to use them.

The hon. leader.



**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, out of respect for everybody's opportunity to speak here and realizing that there are only about 20 minutes left, I'll keep my comments to, say, 10 minutes or so.

In our view Bill 211 is a very important bill. It confronts head-on some of the really challenging issues that this province is facing, and they're problems that are being faced across the province, from north to south and east to west. Those are the challenges our municipal governments face in working together and resolving issues in a constructive, timely, and co-operative manner.

Certainly, there are any number of successes. As I travel around the province, I meet with municipal councils, and they'll speak about how well they get along with their neighbours and how they're able to strike all kinds of different understandings on recreation and transportation and housing and whatever. But equally there are all kinds of communities where that kind of harmonious, neighbourly relations do not exist and are really strained. As a result, a lot of serious problems are piling up for the people of this province.

When I talk about areas where there are strains, I think about my travels; for example, Grande Prairie city and Grande Prairie county and some of the local municipalities there that have unfortunately got a long history now of friction and trying to resolve inter-municipal issues. Red Deer city and Red Deer county, I think, recently have made some headway, but frankly there's a lot of strain there and a number of development challenges that are taking years to address instead of months. Of course, we all know in this Assembly, as an example, the conflict between Calgary and Rocky View on water transfers relating to the Balzac project. Peace River. Lac La Biche. That doesn't even include the area of greatest concern, which is the capital region, in and around Edmonton, where there are 23 municipalities trying to cope with some of the most rapid growth in the history of the province and no mandatory structure with which to address that.

It at times feels like there are several chapters of *War & Peace* getting played out right here in our capital region, and it's an epic that I'd rather not see continue. I think we need to end the conflict that is arising and has become, frankly, systemic and sadly and in some ways most disturbing: it's become personal. As I go and I meet with different councils, these are all decent people. They're all public-spirited, well-intended, capable people, but when they get in these conflicts, it ends up becoming a very personal kind of conflict in which you hear people describing each other in ways that just don't make sense and don't reflect the real value of each of those publicly minded people. We need to replace the structures or the lack of structures that have created that conflict with structures that bring about a culture of co-operation.

That's what this bill is intended to do. The bill, I think, as everybody knows who has read it, will require mandatory inter-municipal planning in areas that are designated as high-growth areas and will put the provincial government in a position of real leadership, give the provincial government the legislative basis to bring the different players to the table, and require that common issues be addressed. And there are no shortage of common issues, Mr. Speaker.

**3:00**

Water, ironically, or perhaps as a great example, is actually a subject on which the Edmonton region works very well. The municipalities surrounding Edmonton by and large depend on EPCOR, an Edmonton city-owned utility for water, and they get the water. The structures are in place, and the contracts are there, and there are no particular conflicts around water. So that's an example of how things could work if they were required. Unfortunately, in

Calgary it's quite the opposite. Water is a source of huge conflict in Calgary. Water is one of those topics that needs to be addressed, and fire services, emergency services, police services.

Economic development. We have in the Capital region any number of different economic development agencies, and some of them co-operate, and some of them are pursuing different kinds of agendas. That's a real problem that has to be brought to an end. If our economic development agencies can't get their act together, then the businesses who look for structure, who need common rules, who need a consistent plan are going to take their business somewhere else, and frankly I can't blame them.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow spoke about the land-use planning requirements of this province. They are overwhelming, and they've been piling up for years and years. This government, I think, is on their third round of a land-use strategy. We're still waiting for any serious and substantial results from that. The Alberta Liberals put forward our own discussion paper on the need for a land-use strategy close to 18 months ago, and still we await. Land-use issues are immense and intense. Whether it's conflicts over industrial use of land, residential use of land, land that could be used for transportation and utility corridors, land that should be set aside for environmental protection and left in its natural state, land for agriculture, unfortunately, it's the same piece of land that's being burdened with all these conflicting demands, and we need a plan. We need a plan to address those, and this bill, Bill 211, would help address some of those land-use plans.

Similarly, on something as basic as taxi service, Mr. Speaker, there is a sharp, specific conflict in the Edmonton region over taxi service to the airport. When there are intermunicipal conflicts over taxi service, you know that things have broken down. You know that the system is out of control. Something as simple as taxi service is becoming a victim of a lack of planning and intermunicipal co-operation.

Housing and the need for affordable housing. In St. Albert, in Edmonton, and all over the province housing issues and social service issues are not getting appropriately addressed.

Of course, environmental issues where we have concerns with environmental contamination or pollution or all kinds of other environmental stresses being imposed on lands in some areas where other municipalities think there should be housing as in northeast Edmonton where there's outstanding microclimate for market gardening, yet the pressure is on nearby for heavy industrial development. There's a whole host of problems.

I've spoken briefly about the problems. We could fill hours just itemizing those. What we are looking for through Bill 211 are solutions. The Alberta Liberals in this bill are bringing forward a proposed solution. The intent of this bill is to have certain areas of the province designated as high-growth areas and then require all municipalities in those high-growth areas to work together to develop a growth plan: no more relying strictly on optional participation, no more opportunity for a municipality who doesn't want to co-operate to opt out and go its own way.

The provincial government needs to establish, through this bill, a requirement that all the municipal governments in a designated growth area co-operate and work together and produce a common plan for the common good of all the residents of that area. Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, there must be a mandatory structure. This is a time and this is a province where that mandatory structure is required.

I'd urge all of us in this Assembly to vote favourably for Bill 211 to get it through second reading and into committee where we can

discuss it at greater length; we can go through it section by section; we can bring forward amendments. We are open to amendments as we just demonstrated in a motion for return. We're open to improving this bill or to compromising on the bill so that it gets forward, but the fact of the matter is that this province needs action on this issue. It needs solutions on this issue. Bill 211 is the solution that we believe is needed.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 211, the Planning for the Future of Communities Act, is aimed at establishing growth plans, areas to support municipal development, and intermunicipal co-operation. The Alberta government is already supporting municipal development and intermunicipal co-operation with the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability and incentives that encourage collaboration and sustainability such as regional partnership initiatives. Through the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, AAMD and C, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, the AUMA, and the cities of Edmonton and Calgary are working with the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to come up with solutions for issues affecting Alberta municipalities.

All Alberta municipalities are represented on the minister's council, the urban municipalities through the AUMA, rural through the AAMD and C, and Edmonton and Calgary through their mayors. The urban and rural municipalities can contact their associations to provide concerns and other input to be discussed at the minister's council meetings and also to receive feedback on these issues once they have been discussed. The minister's council examines options for strengthening partnerships between the provincial government and Alberta's municipalities and for enhancing the long-term sustainability of municipal governments in the province. It is a provincial/municipal forum that was established to address municipal sustainability issues.

Four working groups within the council were formed to address important issues. The AUMA leads a working group to examine municipal roles and responsibilities. Calgary leads a working group to explore options for new municipal revenue sources. Edmonton leads a working group to explore intermunicipal relationships and other issues related to municipal growth challenges, including better co-ordination of land-use planning near municipal boundaries. The AAMD and C works with the AUMA to review how the proposals of other working groups would affect smaller urban and rural municipalities.

The role of the minister's council is to collaboratively work towards a consensus on how to deal with issues that affect all Alberta municipalities and what involvement they would like to see from the province. Once a consensus is reached, a report is provided to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who will then submit it to caucus for their input and consideration. The minister's council submitted a report to the government in early 2007. Following the submission of the minister's council report, Budget 2007 committed \$1.4 billion to municipalities by 2010-11 as part of a 10-year funding commitment to help municipalities move towards a more sustainable future. The government is considering all of the other recommendations in the council's report and will be providing a formal response.

Bill 211 seeks to support municipal development and intermunicipal co-operation. The Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability is already doing great work in this area, and because recommendations are from Alberta municipalities, partnerships are

collaborative instead of obligatory. The aim of the minister's council is to help municipalities address local needs over the long term. This includes reaching an agreement on how to address the provincial municipal fiscal envelope, clarifying roles and responsibilities, finding new revenue sources, and improving intermunicipal relations. Alberta municipalities want the freedom to work with each other as they know what the individual needs of the communities are and how they can work together to best fill those needs.

**3:10**

Previously, municipalities were subject to regional planning commissions. Municipalities within a region would co-ordinate development, but the commission was empowered to be responsible for the regional planning. The regional planning commissions were viewed as favourable towards urban areas and were using rural municipalities as land banks. This was part of the reason the regional planning commissions were eliminated.

In 1995 municipalities were given subdivision-approving authority under the new Municipal Government Act. As well, municipalities were given the option to co-ordinate planning through volunteer intermunicipal planning agencies to replace regional planning commissions. Municipalities are now able to conduct planning activities in-house or hire consultants. This can lead to cost savings for municipalities and sustain smaller municipalities as they can afford more cost-effective services. Municipalities know what their communities want and are able to negotiate agreements without feeling like their efforts are stifled by overarching legislation like the regional planning commissions or Bill 211.

The government of Alberta provides incentives for municipalities to work together on projects that are beneficial to many communities. The regional partnership initiative provides funding support for municipalities that wish to explore regional opportunities and for implementation of regional projects. These opportunities include shared service delivery, expanding cost-effective services, developing regional forums, strengthening municipalities, improving quality of life, and planning for growth. Collaborative approaches can create economies of scale and scope which provide the advantage of reduced per unit service delivery costs. Cost savings will in fact transfer to municipalities and their rate payers. Regional partnerships can be an effective way to leverage resources, support innovative ideas, expand service choices at lower costs, which will promote and improve quality of life in Alberta communities.

Alberta has many success stories regarding regional partnerships that have greatly enhanced the lives of the people who live in those municipalities. One example is the partnership between the county of Wetaskiwin, the city of Wetaskiwin, and the town of Millet. They produced a joint economic development initiative, JEDI, consisting of a cost- and revenue-sharing agreement that encourages industry to locate or expand in the region. It was selected from 36 submissions to receive an honourable mention in the minister's award for municipal excellence in the partnership category for their cost- and revenue-sharing master agreement in October of 2006. All three partners worked co-operatively for the benefit of all people in their communities.

Mr. Speaker, I do not support Bill 211 as the Alberta government is already accomplishing the desired outcome of growth plan areas by working with the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability and RPI funding. Encouraging municipalities to co-operate and collaborate on projects will allow them more flexibility in choosing what that co-operation looks like and how it will be the most beneficial to their individual communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank my colleague from Calgary-Currie for proposing and bringing forward this private member's bill, Bill 211, Planning for the Future of Communities Act. Bill 211, designating specific geographical areas in Alberta as growth plan areas and outlining the establishment of regional planning commissions, is exactly what we need to be able to cope with the growth pressures in this province.

This legislation, focusing on specific areas, proposes regional planning commissions with broad-based participation of the provincial government and municipal governments within the region, including shareholders and the public. So it's not something coerced; it is something that involves everybody. This bill is directed to the future. We can't afford not to focus on planning in respect of our regional economies.

We hear a lot today about globalization and international trade and continental trading blocs. This new reality means, in effect, that regional economies emerge as more and more significant. Attention is shifting from the national level of government to the local, so cities are the new units of global economic competition, and cities must be understood in terms of the region in which they are located. Only the region has the scale and diversity to compete globally. It is the region that comprises the totality of social and economic and environmental assets that make up a healthy community.

Bill 211 has this comprehensive view in mind. If we look at the list of items in section 4 of this bill, which refers to a growth plan that may contain policies, goals, and criteria in relation to – and there's a list of all kinds of items, including intensification and density, land supply, location of industry and commerce, nonrenewable resources, conservation of energy, transportation planning, municipal waste management planning, affordable housing. All of these items of course have to be considered in any kind of regional planning. Now, of course, there will be disagreements and conflicts between municipalities and regional districts about all of these items, but we can't afford any longer to have regional planning set aside, not if we're going to compete globally.

Now, the document Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2006, states – and this is the Premier's viewpoint: I'm not afraid to enter into the necessary debate about regional planning, provide true leadership, and sort out the disputes between neighbouring communities; without a regional plan we'll have a disjointed patchwork that will create additional problems in the future. Well, Mr. Speaker, this is exactly what Bill 211 tries to do: overcome that disjointed patchwork that's present now so that we can make sure that regional planning is going to take place. Bill 211 outlines the mechanism for promoting needed regional planning.

I've read the debate in *Hansard*, and frankly I don't understand the point of most of the criticisms that were expressed. This is not about forced amalgamation or imposing plans on municipalities, but it is about providing a mechanism that will enable those involved to move beyond their conflicts and sort out a compromise and articulate common goals for the future. That's what we need, especially in an area like Edmonton. The government has been arguing that a land-use strategy is important for regions. Well, this bill is outlining just such a strategy, enabling regions to decide where all the items should go, where industry should go, where affordable housing should go. If you are in favour of a land-use strategy, how can you vote against this bill?

Mr. Speaker, my feeling is: why do we have to wait until this whole land-use program, this consultation process is finished when we can just accept Bill 211 and move ahead? We need regional planning right now, especially if you look at Edmonton. The hon.

Leader of the Opposition mentioned the Edmonton region and how complex it is, how important it is in terms of competing globally, yet here we have an Edmonton region . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, I must unfortunately advise that the time allocated for this item on our agenda has reached the point where we must now vote. The hon. mover of the motion is the only one under Standing Order 25 permitted to close the debate, so the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has moved second reading of Bill 211, Planning for the Future of Communities Act.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:18 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Chase	Martin	Pastoor
Elsalhy	Miller, B.	Taft
Flaherty	Miller, R.	Tougas

3:30

Against the motion:

Amery	Groeneveld	Oberle
Backs	Herard	Ouellette
Calahasen	Horner	Pham
Cao	Johnson	Prins
Cardinal	Johnston	Rodney
Coutts	Knight	Rogers
DeLong	Liepert	Shariff
Doerksen	Lougheed	Snelgrove
Dunford	Lukaszuk	Strang
Evans	Marz	Tarchuk
Fritz	Melchin	VanderBurg
Griffiths	Mitzel	Zwozdesky

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 36
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[Motion for second reading of Bill 211 lost]

## Bill 212

### Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act

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

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to stand today and be the lead for Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act.

Bill 212 provides an additional tool to help combat crime in neighbourhoods by holding property owners accountable for threatening activities regularly occurring on their property. Bill 212 will relieve neighbourhoods from the adverse affects of activities such as purchasing or selling intoxicating substances, prostitution, or drugs by targeting the location where these activities are continually occurring. This is a proactive approach at stopping and preventing disturbing and dangerous activities in our neighbourhoods.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Bill 212 proposes to create a new safety agency fuelled by the observations of disruptive behaviour in communities and subsequent complaints by residents.

Bill 212, although new to Alberta, is actually in Manitoba and has been for some five years, in Saskatchewan for approximately three years, was implemented in Nova Scotia in January of 2007, and implementation in the Yukon in 2007.

Bill 212 seeks to address illegal activity identified within the communities. Individuals voice their concern through the director. This Bill 212 is civil legislation. With civil legislation the balance of probabilities is the test as opposed to criminal legislation, in which the test is beyond a reasonable doubt. When a complaint comes in, if it is found, the director can then choose to send an investigator or inspector to the property being misused and either start an investigation or advise otherwise. The options could be to require more information from a complainant, issue a warning letter, resolve the complaint, apply to a court for a community safety order, or other action.

If an owner or tenant chooses not to comply with the request of the investigators, the agency will present the investigation to the Court of Queen's Bench for a community safety order. The person charged also can apply to the Court of Queen's Bench for an appeal. The serious crimes such as meth labs, huge grow ops, and other criminal activity are still dealt with by the police. This, again, is civil legislation, and this still only will deal with issues that can be dealt with in the community.

If an order is granted, tenants would have the right to appeal.

**The Acting Speaker:** Hon. member, I think you're leaving papers on top of the microphone. That's why we're receiving all that echo.

**Mr. Johnston:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The community safety order holds property owners accountable. The owner speaks to the tenant to curtail activity. If the property owner is aware of ongoing criminal activity at a property, they must work with the director or designate to eliminate the problem or face forfeiture.

Bill 212 would help redirect misguided individuals such as youth from entering into drug activity or related criminal activity. I saw an example of the safe communities and neighbourhoods at work in the Winnipeg area when I visited there in the fall of 2006. There was a 14-year-old in a home that was selling drugs when the single mom was away at work. The safe community and neighbourhoods director was called, a complaint was laid, and this was dealt with by way of a warning. So there were no charges laid, no court attendance, and the problem was dealt with in that way. This also helps alleviate pressure on police so they can deal with other matters.

Bill 212 also addresses excessive fortification such as bulletproof material designed to be resistant to explosives, protective metal plating on the interior of buildings, or armoured doors. After an investigation an inspector can designate a fortified building as a threat to public safety if it impairs emergency workers' access to the building, impairs the ability of people inside the building to escape in an emergency, or has fortifications that are unreasonable given the purpose of the building. If a building is found to be excessively fortified and a threat to public safety, the director can issue a removal order. If the fortifications are not removed, the director could issue an order closing the building for up to 90 days. This, of course, can be appealed through the Court of Queen's Bench.

As mentioned, this legislation has been very successful in other jurisdictions such as Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia and the Yukon this year. Bill 212 has the ability to be effective at getting disruptive activities out of the communities in a very quick manner.

As a retired police officer I'm very supportive of this piece of legislation. I think it will empower communities at a time when our

population is growing, and it will assist police services, addressing time constraints and the lack of manpower. I look forward to hearing the debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and respond to the hon. mover of Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. First, I would like to thank the hon. member for sponsoring this bill and commend him on his initiative and his effort in bringing it to the floor of the Assembly for discussion. It's an area where he's not going to be met with any opposition from this side of the House because we agree with him that any initiative we take, any support we offer to citizens and to neighbourhoods and communities to bring them into that fight against crime is a commendable and advisable direction, and we agree with him that empowering citizens to take that active role in helping curb or reduce crime in their immediate neighbourhoods is a good direction we should all be supporting.

I'm also a little envious of him because he actually beat us to the punch. We were actually planning the very same idea as part of the Official Opposition's slate of bills for this legislative session. Initially we were hoping to introduce it as Bill 218, but because he drew Bill 212 in that random draw back in the fall, he beat us to it. I know that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie was hoping to sponsor a very similar idea. That's why we are supportive on this side of the House: it's an idea we agree with.

If you remember, Mr. Speaker, when we were debating the Police Amendment Act this year, 2007, I put in my remarks that in my opinion every citizen is a police officer, and all police officers are lay people. They're citizens as well. It's a partnership between the community at large and the law enforcement community to try to curb or reduce crime. We all agree that there has been an escalation in crime. Be it the magnitude or the size or the damages actually caused, the financial damage that it actually leads to, and crime and the criminals getting more sophisticated and more resourceful, if I can use that word, we need to actually rely on everybody – we're all in this together – to try to stem this systemic problem and to try to mitigate the adverse effects that communities suffer as a result of crime.

3:40

It's another tool in the arsenal in our fight against crime. People need to be allowed to take that initiative, and we need to empower them and tell them that once you make that decision to report an activity or to report an individual or a group that looks suspicious, then there's a place for them to go. There is an agency that would listen to them. This bill does just that. It basically creates an entity under the Department of the Solicitor General. People who have reason to believe something untoward is happening or unsavoury elements are moving into their communities or are doing things that should not be done in their communities now have a place to go. They have an agency that would listen to them and then would take some action based on the seriousness and the significance of the claim or the report.

Why don't we go to the police immediately or all the time? Well, the police have the resources to handle some of the workload, but unfortunately, be it for funding or be it from a human resource standpoint, they cannot really handle all the calls and all the reports coming from citizens as well as from their own intelligence as well as from other law enforcement agencies or services, and so on and

so forth. So maybe this parallel mechanism is a good thing to have now under the Solicitor General, where people can report unsavoury property activities to that agency. We are keeping the police for more serious stuff. The police might actually be engaged at a latter stage if that agency now deems it appropriate that there should be some police intervention.

Examples. People say, you know, okay, give me an example or two about a situation where a citizen or a resident in a community can pick up the phone and talk to someone at the Solicitor General's department and report an activity that he or she doesn't think should be taking place. Well, we've all heard of crystal meth. It's a drug that people can make in their own homes. I saw a bulletin from my power company. They actually sent me a little brochure that says: look for the following if you suspect that your neighbour's house is actually being used for producing crystal meth. I found that bulletin very informative and very useful. So if I have reason to believe that my next door neighbour is doing something like this, then I have an agency to go to, and I can actually report it to them.

Drug trafficking. Child abuse. We've heard about situations where children are lured into a house, trusting the person who took them there, only to find out that they're being photographed or videotaped, and that stuff ends up on the Internet. We've heard those stories before.

Illegal liquor sales and other criminal offences. You know, we have a few examples, and we've all heard about them. At one point we've probably even suspected that some of the houses in the neighbourhood look suspicious or should be investigated or should be checked out, and we didn't know who to turn to because sometimes it's intimidating to phone the police. What if my information is not accurate? What if what I'm telling them is not correct?

I think this is a very sound approach to have this mechanism in place to allow people to really tell us, tell the government and tell the law enforcement community, that this place needs to be checked out, that this place needs to be monitored. Again, it's taking an active role in our own safety and security and in the safety and security of our neighbourhoods and communities.

This bill also allows us to put more pressure on the criminal. Any deterrents we can think of, any mechanism we can bring in to tell people: "You know what? You are not going to go unnoticed. And you know what? Everybody's watching. I'm watching you. My neighbours are watching you. The person down the street is watching you." It's the same philosophy as Neighbourhood Watch but now with a mechanism at the end where there is a result. There is a product. There is an outcome, Mr. Speaker.

The reason I'm supporting it and I'm urging other members of this House to support it as well is that it has been tried in other jurisdictions. Different governments from different sides of the political spectrum have tried it, Mr. Speaker, and they've all had success with its implementation. There hasn't been any criticism of this model where citizens are empowered to partner with the law enforcement community. I know that this particular bill is drafted very similarly, almost word for word, to the same legislation that is in Saskatchewan. We've asked a few stakeholders what they thought about it, and again we have not received any negative remarks with respect to this bill and its implementation and the results which ensue. It's really a good bill, and it's worthy of support in this House, and I would urge all hon. members from both sides to afford it that support, that I think it deserves.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I think this should not be the end of our initiative to make our communities safer and to make our people safer and more secure. This should be one mechanism in that bigger approach to reduce violence, to reduce violent crime, and to actually deter those criminals from moving into our communities.

I know that in the cities it's going to be very useful and very effective. I am hoping to see it also be as effective in the rural communities, where distances between neighbours are slightly bigger. We should really adapt this model to the rural communities because we all know that some of the gangs, some of the illicit drug organizations are moving into rural Alberta because they see it as being less monitored by police agencies.

So I support it, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by Cypress-Medicine Hat.

**Mr. Martin:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would give credit to the member for bringing this forward. I'm always interested when the Liberals take credit for things. I was going to do it in Bill 218, but I guess we can say, if we really want to get partisan, that it was the NDP government that brought it in first. I know that the Liberals will take credit for that.

I want to say that this is an important tool. It is only one of a number of tools that we need, but it's an important one. I think the fact that we have some experience with it in Manitoba – the member talked about it. He mentioned, I think, that Saskatchewan and the Yukon now have it and that Nova Scotia is just in the process. So I think it's timely because it has become a serious problem in Alberta. I think we're all aware of that.

The history. As I understand it, in Manitoba the act was first established in February of 2002. Under the provisions of the act a unit of six investigators was introduced. The unit has grown to eight officers, has received roughly 1,470 complaints, and about 1,330 involved alleged drug offences to date. The unit has shut down 214 operations and 190 of those for drug offences. As mentioned, other places like Saskatchewan and Yukon are following.

I think we can't underestimate what happens in a community. I've had experiences, complaints in my own constituency when a drug house is set up, the havoc that that absolutely creates in the neighbourhood. People feel very powerless. What do they do? They can't necessarily prove it. The police don't have the time to deal with it because there are a number of other ones. So people feel very frustrated and very helpless in their community, and they know what's going on around it. So I think it's important because if we can deal in another way with what we call drug houses, we certainly would make our communities much safer and much better. I think it's another important tool that we need because we can't have enough police to do all that work. They just can't keep up to it.

I want to say, though, that the complaint that you hear in other places when these bills are brought in – many people said that the act criminalizes poverty, and they also said that alternative housing for people with addictions was a necessity. Absolutely. I mean, the fact is that they can move drug houses around. They still have the same ability to move into another community, and we still have to deal with that. I think the important point here is that we're making an important step to deal with the supply, but we're also going to have to try to deal with the demand.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, when I was talking to Edmonton's police chief, he said that if the police force could begin to deal with the addictions – 60 to 70 per cent of the things that we deal with, our crime, are directly having to do with addictions. So, I mean, this is certainly a step in the right direction, but I think we have to start dealing with young people at an earlier age. It's probably not a quick fix here, but that's what startled me, those figures, when he said that addictions are what is creating the problems. With the booming economy,

of course, and more people moving in, those problems become more immense.

While this is a useful step – certainly, as I say, I compliment the member for bringing it forward; it certainly will have our support – I think that in the broader perspective of dealing with crime, Mr. Speaker, we're going to have to deal with all sorts of other issues that tie into it. If the police chief in Edmonton – and I expect it's true in Calgary and other places around the province – says that 60 to 70 per cent of the things that they do are directly related to addictions, then we have to look, as I said, at the demand side of it too, and in the long run that's probably going to be more effective.

I also want to say that this works well when we have community policing. I think that's the key thing. It's police working with the community because it's the community that generally knows what's happening, and if they have the police working there, now they have another tool, not necessarily the policeman's or policewoman's time, but another unit can begin to do something. This becomes an extremely effective way of policing, I believe, and a bang for the buck rather than just driving around. I think we can begin to deal with those.

But I would say, just in conclusion, that with our growing economy, it's like everything else. You know, we talk about housing. We talk about health care, education. I think our policing needs a bump up, too, with the amount of people that we see coming, especially to our two major cities but other places in Alberta too. I think that for police to be effective, they can't be so over-worked that they can't begin to deal with some of these problems. As long as we have this overheated economy, the police are always going to be playing catch-up.

Again, I stress that this is a very good tool. I think it helps the police. We need more police. I think that community policing is the correct model, but I say that in the long run, if we're really going to deal in a significant way with crime in Edmonton or Calgary, we're going to have to try to get a handle on the addictions problem. We're going to have to try to get a handle on the younger people and their society. That's just the reality. We're always going to be playing catch-up.

I would hope that we could move ahead with Bill 212. Again, I know that the member has had experience in dealing with this, so he's coming at it with the experience of what he thinks would work, and he's checked into it. Certainly, he has our support on this side of the House to bring forward Bill 212.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Calgary-Varsity.

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in the House to speak in favour of Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays. This is an excellent piece of legislation which emulates highly successful measures already enacted in several other provinces. I commend the member for proposing a proactive measure which furthers this government's ongoing efforts to ensure that all Albertans live in safe and secure communities.

Our communities are the most important places in Alberta. They're where we live, sleep, raise our children, grow old, and enjoy our province's prosperity and high quality of life. The vast majority of Albertans contribute positively to their communities, living in a responsible and law-abiding manner. Some people, however, choose not to contribute to Alberta's prosperity and legitimate ways. They come into our communities to conduct unsafe and illegal activities, tainting our way of life.

As legislators it's essential that we do everything in our power to safeguard our communities from these people. Mr. Speaker, Bill

212 would empower citizens to confidentially report unsafe and illegal activities which continually occur on properties in their communities. If the complaints are merited, reported properties may be investigated by the director of law enforcement. If a balance of probabilities indicated that illegal activities were in fact occurring, the director could warn property owners. Failing that, the director would be able to place restrictions on properties with the consent of the Court of Queen's Bench. These restrictions could go as far as banning people from occupying the property.

A member of the community may easily see that something wrong is taking place on a property. However, it may not be easy for authorities to use existing legislation to close it down. While the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act could conceivably be used to deal with the toxic waste that drug houses produce, the fact that drug producers operate illegally makes it difficult to apply environmental regulations to them. Moreover, environmental protection orders apply only to people, not to locations, and as such they cannot be used to close properties or evict tenants. Similarly, the Public Health Act is typically used to evacuate properties where grow ops have been found and closed down by the police. Municipal zoning bylaws mandated under the Municipal Government Act principally apply to concerns with the aesthetics of buildings.

Bill 212 provides a way to address the issue more directly. It will also be effective in situations where the Public Health Act or the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act do not apply. For instance, if a property is being used only to sell drugs and not to manufacture them, it could be sanctioned under the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. The point of this bill is to prevent criminal activity from occurring, shut it down quickly when it does occur, and prevent it from reoccurring. It is imperative to have the proper tools available to authorities to shut down properties that threaten public safety. While everyone relies on walls to protect themselves from the elements and to establish private space, walls also enable criminal activity by sheltering it from public view. This bill balances everyone's right to privacy with the need to halt criminal activity.

Bill 212 is commendable because it proposes an entirely community-based answer to crime. Citizens in our community are suitably placed to know when illegal activity is taking place. They know when something is out of the ordinary, and they have a personal stake in ensuring that crime does not happen in their neighbourhoods. Some examples that already exist are Neighbourhood Watch, crime watch, and Citizens on Patrol. Mr. Speaker, as a society we should use every resource available to combat crime, and our citizens are some of the best resources.

The prevention and interception of crime is everyone's responsibility. Adding more police officers is not and cannot be the only answer to this problem. We've recognized this in Alberta already and are using innovative programs to produce results. For instance, training sheriffs to patrol our highways has freed police officers to handle other more serious crimes. In a similar way, this bill would enable the closing of locations where crimes are probably taking place without requiring the use of police resources. The police would then be left available to deal with emergency lights-and-sirens calls and other more complicated investigations. Police officers are a valuable resource which should be focused on crime-fighting efforts that have the most effect.

Inspectors working under this act would be an effective way to address crime. We can look at the example of Manitoba, which has a law quite similar to what this bill proposes. In the five years since the Manitoba law was enacted, four investigators shut down 200 drug dens and prostitution houses. These same four investigators also uncovered and addressed 60 cases of children being sexually

exploited. The reason for the great success in Manitoba is, as I've said, that citizens in the community are law enforcement's best resource. Drug cultivation/activity can be spotted easily by neighbours, whether it's covered windows, odd smells, little outdoor maintenance, or unusually loud electrical humming noises. The sooner drug sites are shut down the better. Preventing illegal drugs from being produced is one way we can help remove them from our communities.

4:00

Drug production sites themselves are also dangerous. Methamphetamine labs are potentially highly explosive. Mould growth and the structural deficiencies caused by grow ops present health hazards to people in and around these sites. A study of grow ops in British Columbia found that fire was 24 times more likely to happen in grow houses because of the unsafe, substandard wiring. Furthermore, the chemically induced paranoia of those running illicit drug operations can cause them to deploy booby traps or other antipersonnel devices in and around the operations. No one wants any of these activities in our communities, and Albertans certainly don't want it in the house next door.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is also about addressing the root of criminal activity. Most of our current efforts to fight crime are targeted at individuals who are breaking the law. Comparatively little effort is targeted at locations where the law is broken. Illegal activities have to take place somewhere. Drug and gang activity don't cease when a person is prosecuted and subsequently removed temporarily from the community. After serving a sentence, a person convicted of a crime may return to where they broke the law and continue the criminal activity. In this way Bill 212 is complementary to current police antigang efforts. By closing down meeting points that are perceived by gang members as secure, the bill helps the police end gang activity.

Another provision of this bill helps keep our emergency responders safe. There's no need anywhere in Alberta for people to fortify or barricade their homes to military-type specifications. Bulletproof, reinforced, and armoured materials are all completely unnecessary. These materials prevent police from gaining access to buildings to serve warrants where probable cause exists to suggest that the occupants are armed and dangerous or likely to engage in the destruction of evidence. Criminals cannot be permitted to sit in fortified homes and houses and be immune to the law.

Fortifications prevent other rescue workers from accessing or leaving buildings in an emergency. If they so need, firefighters should be able to easily gain access to buildings without having to grapple with absurd obstructions. Fortifications also slow the egress of occupants from a building in the event of an emergency.

Community organizations like the Victoria Park community association in Calgary are trying to cleanse their neighbourhoods of prostitution and drugs. One big problem that these associations have to deal with is absentee landlords who do not care what condition their property is in or what takes place there. Mr. Speaker, property owners must be held accountable for the activities that take place on their properties. This bill provides a mechanism for accountability which recognizes that property owners may not be engaged in criminal activity even while their tenants are, but property owners have an obligation to ensure that the tenants are not breaking the law. This bill draws illegal activity to property owners' attention and gives them a chance to end it. If there is crime repeatedly taking place in the building, that building should be shut down.

Bill 212 offers a way for our citizens to take ownership of their communities and to say to criminals: you're not welcome in my

backyard. I ask that all members of this Assembly join me in voting in favour of this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by Lesser Slave Lake.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. I, too, support Bill 212 and thank the Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing it forward. I would like to speak briefly on the role of youth in creating and maintaining safer communities and neighbourhoods. Of course, I'm going back to my past 34 years as a teacher, school and community coach. I'm very aware of the importance of involving students, engaging and empowering children.

One of the key first contacts beyond the teachers is the role of the school resource officer. Unfortunately, with the number of additional duties that are put upon police, the number of school resource officers has dramatically been reduced. For students to see police authority individuals in a positive light as their friend and their supporter is extremely important, not only for children who have the luxury of being born and living in Alberta, but it's especially important for immigrant children, who do not necessarily have that climate of respect based on their refugee status from countries where police officers were not viewed in a positive light. So having a school resource officer, not just at the high school level but at least on a visiting weekly basis to both elementary and junior high schools, is extremely important. That role model of a friend and protector is extremely important.

Being proactive and preventative is, to me, considerably more effective than simply having stiffer sentences. I would rather invest in youth than just simply punish them. I don't believe the way that south of the border is headed in terms of building more jails and larger jails than schools is the way to go. What we need to do in terms of connecting with kids is involve them in the schools and in recreational activities. We need to keep kids connected and positively involved.

Children are the eyes and ears of the community. Whether they have the good fortune of having someone at home and they can go home for lunch in the traditional role or whether they're in that latchkey necessity due to the economic drivers within this province and the need to maintain a household, kids are out and about to a greater extent. That can be either positive or negative. But kids certainly are probably the first ones to know what's going on in their community, and if they can communicate their knowledge, then that's of tremendous benefit.

In my 34 years as a teacher I've been involved in a number of youth leadership programs, such as school council adviser within teams, within clubs. I've also been involved with peer leadership programs, where you recruit not only your most positive leaders, but you recruit the kids who are perceived as the negative leaders, and you enlist their abilities to involve students in a positive manner. We need to counsel kids on their strengths, but we also need to recognize their limitations. When I was an adviser for a peer leadership program at Sir John A. Macdonald junior high school, in the northwest, we provided students with supports and counselling, but we also indicated to them what their limitations were. We would never ask them to or expect them to put themselves in a position of risk, whether it be approaching a particular drug house or trying to go beyond their capabilities in terms of counselling before turning it over to an adult professional.

I'm also very aware in a limited number of cases of the possibility of negative leadership. I've personally experienced working with a parent whose daughter was very much mesmerized by a young man

who advertised his drug dealings and some soft porn on a nexopia.com website. It's very hard for the police and school officials to deal with a student when they've reached that state of negativity. Therefore, by involving them in the positives, whether it be on the wrestling team, whether it be in community soccer, whether through the police officer, this keeps kids on the straight and narrow. As I say, we should never underestimate the power and importance of children and recognize that they have the tools and the capabilities if we support them in making a positive difference in maintaining and creating safer communities and neighbourhoods.

We need to counteract negative peer pressure, obviously, and we need to reward positive peer pressure, moving towards doing the right thing, being involved in your community. In the leadership programs I've run, students were required as part of their mark to volunteer 30 hours within a year, or 10 hours per term. The students weren't told what activities to engage in. It could be as simple as keeping their garage clean, walking the dog. But I had report after report after report from members of the community on how much their activities were appreciated.

So my message within Bill 212 and in Motion 510, that I'll be bringing in later this afternoon, is to recognize the positive potential of students and to encourage it. Thank you.

4:10

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

**Ms Calahasen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a whole decade or more since I did stand before you and share my thoughts on any bill as a private member. I am really pleased to do so on Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act.

To the Member for Calgary-Hays: thank you for presenting this legislation before the Assembly, and I want to say thank you for a number of reasons. One, it is a priority of the government of Alberta to provide safe and secure communities. Our efforts to reduce crime and the degradation of our neighbourhoods are essential to providing a great quality of life for Albertans. Second, Albertans have always valued the family-oriented atmosphere that is present throughout this province. This government aims to continue this strong tradition by ensuring that Albertans feel safe on their streets and in their homes. Third, my constituents have articulated many times the need for more to be done to rid communities of illegal activity, especially known illegal houses.

The government of Alberta, through its various departments and agencies, places emphasis on crime prevention and protecting our communities from illegal activities because our objective is to ensure that Albertans are living in an environment which is conducive to a healthy lifestyle.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 212 offers a new alternative to approaching the criminal problems that are affecting communities throughout this province. The act aims to improve the safety of our neighbourhoods, which is commendable and will complement or enhance our current crime reduction efforts. The alternatives proposed in Bill 212 would assist and expand the current mechanisms that are in place to help protect our communities. We have well-trained and resourceful police services. There are also several active community-based crime prevention organizations within our province. As well, the Department of Justice is legally capable of enforcing laws that pertain to criminal activity, and municipal governments are within their authority to implement bylaws regarding unsafe or hazardous properties. However, I have a few communities which are having some difficulty even though we have these great programs.

Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize that Bill 212 will build upon the current government framework and existing associations, supporting

their concentrated efforts to address the problems of criminally active houses in Alberta. I believe that we are currently doing an admirable job; however, as with most issues there is always potential for improvement. I would encourage the present departments and organizations that are relevant to crime prevention to continue to work together. I believe that if they use their resources efficiently and effectively, they will continue to produce successful results.

Alberta's police services are working tenaciously to improve on these results. Several accredited municipal police services exist throughout Alberta and are continuously engaged in the effort to provide safe and secure communities. The provisions under Bill 212 would serve as a tool to assist municipal police services and, hopefully, community organizations. Building on our strong foundation of municipal law enforcement is the RCMP. Although these policing branches may be separate in theory, practically they both share similar goals, which are focused on community-based crime prevention via intelligence-led and integrated policing.

Mr. Speaker, it should also be noted that all over Alberta we have a great number of organizations that concentrate on ensuring the prosperity and well-being of their respective communities by advocating against criminal activities. These organizations would greatly benefit from the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act.

Bill 212 fully supports and engages citizens who demonstrate a passion to better their respective town or city by establishing crime awareness and prevention organizations. It is important that I acknowledge a few of these valuable associations which are presently making significant contributions to mitigating crime in Alberta. Organizations such as the Alberta Community Crime Prevention Association, the Alberta Provincial Rural Crime Watch Association, and the national strategy on community safety are just a few of the groups that help Albertans create safer communities by increasing communication and enhancing citizens' knowledge about crime prevention and making a difference in their communities.

The Alberta Citizens on Patrol Association is an organization that works to provide safer communities across Alberta by involving its citizens. Members of ACOPA are volunteers who serve as the eyes and ears of their community. They take an active role in the safety of their communities by patrolling and liaising with local police agencies, performing surveillance, conducting research, executing checkstops and traffic safety programs. The association, in fact, recently received a special honour during this year's Crime Prevention Week. ACOPA had the distinction of receiving a Solicitor General crime prevention banner in High Prairie.

At this time I would like to acknowledge the efforts of ACOPA's president, Brian Holmberg, and the strides that he has made. This High Prairie man should be proud because this banner is usually given to bigger centres, but because High Prairie is so involved with crime prevention, the Solicitor General chose this community as a place to hang the banner. So to ACOPA: keep up the great work, and continue to do the things that I believe are going to make communities safer.

Albertans will continue to receive support from the currently established authorities when they suspect that there are illegal actions taking place in their neighbourhood. Mr. Speaker, I encourage citizens to access and use the many programs and mechanisms that are currently available to them. Although strong communities require individuals who will actively clean up their neighbourhoods, like my ACOPA, Bill 212 would not support citizens that may not comprehend the restrictions of their participation and in certain cases exceed the limits of their authority. But we welcome the work that they do and continue to do. The bill would not promote excessive citizen vigilance that could possibly interfere



with the proceedings of important police investigations or conflict with the privacy rights of other individuals.

Alberta Justice will have the capacity to deal with derelict housing, drug houses, and fortified houses. Currently there are several statutes that enable the appropriate authorities to deal with unsafe properties. We have empowered our municipalities via the Municipal Government Act to establish bylaws that pertain to properties. For example, the Safety Codes Act allows accredited municipalities to investigate unsafe houses and take action accordingly. There are also sections in the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act and the Public Health Act that provide detailed guidelines for dealing with unsafe and hazardous buildings when it is applicable.

Alberta's police services can work within the legislative framework to address unsafe property concerns. It is important not to create silos between the various police departments, community organizations, and Justice branches. I suggest that we continue on a course that further co-ordinates the efforts of all the respective parties. I believe that we should reduce obstacles that impede the sharing of information. It has been very beneficial to continue to use effective communication and exchange criminal intelligence. The knowledge of criminals and where criminal activity is taking place should be conveyed to the appropriate authorities.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make sure that communities recognize that the government of Alberta will continue to support an aggressive offensive to negate illegal activity. The safety and security of Alberta's communities are of utmost importance. The appropriate authorities need to be persistent and utilize all their capabilities to address the issues that arise from hazardous houses. As a province we must diligently focus on crime prevention because it is integral to ensuring a healthy and vibrant quality of life for all Albertans.

It is without question that criminal properties are affecting neighbourhoods throughout Alberta, in my area as well, creating feelings of fear and insecurity, something that I believe all Albertans don't want to have to feel. We must do everything we can to mitigate these feelings and improve the well-being of our neighbourhoods.

Mr. Speaker, not only do people come to Alberta for economic opportunities; they also come here because Alberta offers a great lifestyle for all people of different backgrounds, creeds, religions, and ethnicity. Our communities are a reflection of peace, cooperation, and respect. We must continue to advance this reality. If criminal properties are adversely affecting our neighbourhoods and decreasing Albertans' quality of life, they must be dealt with and dealt with swiftly. I wholeheartedly support the initiatives that concentrate on the government of Alberta's priority to provide safe and secure communities.

I believe that we can continue to deter criminally active homes by supporting community crime prevention organizations, using our extremely competent police departments, and prosecuting criminals through Alberta Justice branches as well as ensuring that the bylaws are followed by the municipal communities. Bill 212 will expand our capacity to do that job, and that is why I am offering my support. To the member: thank you for making sure that all communities do feel safe and that we have communities that can continue to thrive.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

4:20

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to speak in support of Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act.

I must commend the Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing this forward – it's a very important and timely bill – and for, you know, putting his extensive knowledge and experience into this bill. It's obviously very thoroughly thought through. It obviously goes through in detail many of the bases that would be necessary to make this a bill that could be passed by this Legislature this year. I think the timing allows for anybody in the public, in the break until the fall sitting that's scheduled, to come forward and bring forward any concerns on this bill. I think that my neighbourhoods in Edmonton-Manning would very much appreciate it if Bill 212 could become law by the time the year is over.

It is a comprehensive bill. For example, it respects the confidentiality of whistle-blowers. Remember that in some neighbourhoods where we have these types of activity established – you know, where there are gangs, where there are drug dealers, where there are some of these problems in a comprehensive manner, or where we have some new immigrant communities that might be a little bit more susceptible to pressures – this allows for whistle-blowers in the neighbourhood to let it be known that there are drug dealers, to let it be known that there are gang leaders operating out of houses, and to let it be known that they can do so in a way that's confidential and in a way that would not bring harm to them in a way that these drug dealers or gang leaders or whatever might choose to do if they knew.

In the way that the bill is written, you know, it speaks to specified uses. It looks at "the manufacturing, import, purchase, sale, transport, giving, possession, storage, consumption . . . of liquor." That's in 2(e)(i). Clause (ii) basically speaks to bootlegging, and (iii) speaks of a controlled substance under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act of Canada. It speaks in (iv) of "child sexual abuse or activities related to child sexual abuse." This is an area that needs tremendous surveillance and an ability to find out the activities of these criminals. "Prostitution or activities related to prostitution" is (v), and (vi) is "the commission or promotion of a criminal organization offence." Clause (vii) is "the accommodation, aid . . . or support of any nature of a gang or criminal organization." It does leave openings for others that may develop in (viii).

But the fact that it specifies these areas – and these have been areas in a lot of communities in our province. Certainly drug houses, certainly crack houses, certainly some of these fortified houses, which are spoken to specifically in the bill as well, have been a matter of great difficulty for our police in trying to control. Now, the use of surveillance as one part of that is important, and it has been getting much greater and widespread use by law enforcement authorities in the whole world.

I'll speak a little bit about the description of it from, actually, the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, some information they put out.

The use of video surveillance to detect, deter and prosecute crime has increased significantly over the last few years – in Canada and abroad. Police and law enforcement authorities increasingly view it as a legitimate tool to combat crime and ward off criminal activity – including terrorism. Recent events have heightened the interest of public authorities in deploying video-surveillance in public places. It is widespread in the United Kingdom and increasingly used by law enforcement and anti-terrorism authorities in the U.S. and Canada, particularly since September 2001.

Here at home, police and public and security agencies monitor public parks and streets. Some cities have put in place video surveillance systems for specific festival periods. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) use cameras to monitor high-security areas such as Parliament Hill. Cameras are used to survey Canada-US border crossings. They are very extensively used in airports, and port authorities are becoming increasingly interested in using video cameras to monitor [activities].

We don't want to have a Big Brother society, certainly, but in looking at these specific criminal activities, to begin to use video

surveillance on some of these properties I think would be an important tool as this whole act is an important tool for our law enforcement agencies.

There are other types of technologies that can come into play, and many of them are new and developing and could develop over the next four years. You know, the importance of heat-detecting equipment: a couple of years ago, I think, the Supreme Court ruled on the allowability of the use of heat-detecting equipment to peer through homeowners' walls without violating the constitutional right to privacy. This type of activity by our police does not look to violate any constitutional rights, and I think that is clear. Some comments from the court: "Safety, security and the suppression of crime are legitimate countervailing concerns." That was from Justice Ian Binnie. "Patterns of heat distribution on the external surfaces of a house are not a type of information [which could give rise to] a reasonable expectation of privacy."

You know, the court was careful. "The nature of the intrusiveness is subtle but almost Orwellian in its theoretical capacity," the court wrote in a decision that ordered police to obtain search warrants for such surveys. It was the lower court that said that, but the Supreme Court disagreed, disputing the lower court's evaluation of the extent of the privacy breach. That shows that this type of technology is important and can be used.

There are many new technologies that may develop. I think it's important that we have a tool, a bill, a power that's given by this Legislature to our law enforcement agencies and officers to go forward and to deal with this very important area of making our communities safer and secure. Many of the other provinces are looking at it. Certainly, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and the Yukon Territory have already passed legislation and have had great success with this type of law. It would behoove, be important, and good for the government of Alberta to move forward on this type of approach.

I agree with the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview that the demand problem in drugs is very much a difficulty and a problem that has to be looked at too. I believe that this does, in some senses, look to the demand problem as well because it could restrict the gang leaders, the drug dealers in trying to bring people into addiction, in trying to influence them into the use of drugs by being in their communities, by being in their neighbourhoods, and by having a readily available distribution potential.

This bill is very important, Mr. Speaker. I do support it. I hope it does go forward as soon as is reasonably possible or that a new government bill would come forward which would incorporate its ideas.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by Edmonton-Glenora.

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to join in the debate on Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for introducing this very thought-provoking piece of legislation. I support the intent of Bill 212 because it presents members with the opportunity to empower Albertans in procuring the safety of our communities. I cannot stress enough the importance of safe and secure environments for our families. Not only is this a priority for this government and this Assembly; it is a priority for all Albertans. Unfortunately, no single piece of legislation can deliver wholesale changes to the safety and security of our neighbourhoods. The fact is that there is no quick fix for dealing with crime. However, Bill 212 is a tool in terms of providing communities with what they need to address crime prevention in their neighbourhoods.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, by supporting a concept that strengthens community safety, this House is enabling individuals to protect their communities in a proactive manner. Albertans place a very high level of importance on family values and compassionate communities. With Bill 212 it is hoped that we will foster this ethos as Alberta leads the country as a bastion of safe environments to live, work, and raise our families in. While Albertans already have a profound sense of ownership and pride for their communities, this act reflects the sense of pride that so many individuals have as second nature. I'm pleased that this piece of legislation intends to address potential criminal activity through an avenue other than immediate criminal legislation. It represents the fact that Albertans are willing to work through the process of civil law to resolve matters of importance in their communities if it means expediency.

There is no shortage of questionable activities that threaten the safety and well-being of our communities. Mr. Speaker, residential crystal meth production, gang activity, and theft of personal property are challenges that all levels of government and law enforcement are continually dealing with. Bill 212 will provide a new community-based avenue to address these harmful behaviours.

These sorts of socially unhealthy activities are exacerbated as Alberta's population grows at an unprecedented rate. Between 2006 and 2011 Alberta's population is expected to grow 1.7 per cent annually, increasing the total population to nearly 4 million residents in 2011. With population growth so strong this Assembly owes it to Albertans to be open to the idea of new and innovative measures in strengthening our communities. With increasing development in commercial and residential areas it is no secret that these sorts of properties can serve as protection for criminals and gangs as a means of sheltering their activity from plain view.

Although Bill 212 is a proactive measure in dealing with these sorts of concerns, it is still important for this Assembly to give credence to the structural framework that we already have in place, a framework that is doing a fine job and one that has the capacity to continue to improve upon its mandate.

Mr. Speaker, in response to concerns from the community level this province funds a variety of grant initiatives that support and empower communities in addressing their respective crime issues and concerns. The Alberta community crime prevention, or ACCP, grant program is available as a part of Alberta's crime prevention strategy, founded on recommendations arising from the 1999 Alberta Summit on Justice. This grant, along with others, focuses on addressing the social and economic factors that may place individuals at risk to commit crime or be victimized, issues that threaten the safety of our communities. Situational crime prevention approaches like this are designed to deter criminal behaviour or make criminal acts more difficult to commit. This approach focuses on reducing the opportunity for crime to occur, increasing the risk of detection and reducing the rewards resulting from criminal acts. These sorts of organizations go to the root of the problems that often lead to instability in our communities.

Mr. Speaker, the government also supports a variety of other community networks that serve as the first point of contact in helping us understand some of the safety concerns that are emanating from communities. For instance, the Alberta Provincial Rural Crime Watch Association maintains a detailed network of partnerships that promotes an ever-vigilant, watchful eye on our rural communities. I'm in favour of supporting these entities through every appropriate measure. These groups do an excellent job in providing community awareness and set an example for public awareness. They deserve to be supported in whatever capacity necessary. When action must be taken against threats to community

safety, it is in our best interest to work with these sorts of valuable mechanisms.

All three levels of government are granted a variety of enforcement mechanisms to protect our communities from social disruption and criminal activity. Mr. Speaker, I am confident that our municipal and national police forces are endowed with the legal powers to investigate and provide the first level of safety management. I'm also confident that our hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security will agree that we are always working with our partners in law enforcement to address concerns of community safety that are expressed by all Albertans.

While the fight against organized crime, Mr. Speaker, is addressed in this bill, budget 2007 included \$1.5 million allocated to the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force. Funding initiatives such as this project support a dynamic framework designed to deal with drugs and gangs, among other social ills. In addition to last year's 4.8 per cent increase to municipal policing, budget 2007 included another 7.6 per cent, or \$11.5 million, for provincial policing.

Engaging your neighbours in dialogue and keeping a studious eye on activities, commonplace or questionable, are important parts of being a contributing member of one's community. Although this bill is ambitious and would require more consultation, it is important that we move forward and engage in meaningful discussion. Albertans currently have several channels to report suspicious activity. The provisions offered by Bill 212, if adopted, would provide another implement in the safety tool kit. Given our new government's resolve to provide safe and secure communities, I am pleased to see legislation of this nature. I support and encourage individuals to demonstrate concern for the safety of their communities.

Albertans should not rely on a false sense of security when dealing with the safety and security of their families and communities, but they should also not be spurned into feeling unsafe. This Assembly owes it to Albertans to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of legislation that will have a significant impact on the channels by which neighbourhoods deal with questionable activity in their neighbourhoods.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to support this bill and the positive role it will play in Alberta's communities. Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to again add my voice to the discussion on Bill 212, Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, brought by the Member for Calgary-Hays. It is interesting that reports in the various papers today about people's perception of crime in their community find that the gap between perception and reality is increasing because people generally think that crime is on the increase. That has been the prevalent attitude of most people across Canada. The reality is that much of the crime statistics are actually declining, especially in areas of crimes like robbery and so on. But the gap between perception and reality is increasing. It's also important to note that there is a great deal of confidence expressed by the general public in our local police and the RCMP, which I find quite gratifying.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, what this bill deals with is not the general perception of crime but actually something very concrete; namely, the perceptions that people have about crime in their local communities. Of course, it's people in local communities that can best monitor and detect what is happening in their own communities.

I had a personal experience with this in my riding of Edmonton-Glenora. When in one particular community there were reports of

suspicious cars and strangers coming from outside the neighbourhood and entering into a particular house, a committee was formed of citizens within the community. This committee then contacted the police and also the MLA and also a member of city council, and we all met to discuss what we might do. Now, Mr. Speaker, I wish that we would have had this kind of legislation in place because this would have provided another tool for people in the community to be able to deal with situations which they see are really suspicious.

4:40

In general, I'm supportive of this kind of response. It is refreshing, actually. The usual response to crime these days, especially on the part of Conservative governments, is to focus on tougher sentencing and ignore crime prevention. Now, this isn't exactly crime prevention in the sense that it's dealing with programs that deal with young children to prevent crime, being able to anticipate crime in the future, and emphasizing programs that deal with education, and so on, but still it is in the area of raising the community awareness to try to detect where crime is taking place. It's another tool that people can use.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's very empowering. Many members have already mentioned that. It's a question of empowering citizens in their own war on crime in the local community. Anything that empowers citizens to be more aware and to take back control of their own neighbourhoods by reporting problems that they see is really important.

This bill outlines a whole process in which a person can engage in making a complaint when residents see something that concerns them. There is a process of making a complaint to the director, and the director initiates an investigation. Now, it really would be important that that complaint be confidential. I don't know whether the Member for Calgary-Hays would like to respond to this issue. I searched in the bill for some assurance that such a complaint would be confidential. I mean, it would have to be held in strict confidence because of the possibility of recrimination on the part of people engaged in crime. So the complaint would have to be kept strictly confidential.

Then, once the complaint is received, the director launches an investigation. I suppose it's using some sort of team. In Saskatchewan it's the safer communities neighbourhoods investigation unit. I suppose what is in mind here is a similar kind of investigative team. After the investigation is made, the director has several options, including issuing a warning letter to the property owner, resolving the problem out of court, or applying for a community safety order through the courts.

The director. The definition of "director" in the bill is that this is the "Director of Law Enforcement appointed under the Police Act." I assume that that's the same director who has the oversight of all peace officers and sheriffs in the province. So it seems to me that the role of this director, the powers of the director, are increasing. I noticed also that in this act, in part 3, there's a reference to the use of peace officers. My question, I guess, to the Member for Calgary-Hays is that again peace officers and their role seems to be extended, broadened here.

It seems to me that peace officers were mainly going to be used for traffic control on the highways of Alberta. They weren't going to be used in an investigative way. I mean, it's the RCMP, it's our municipal police that are trained to do investigations. So I have a real question around the investigative power of the director and who the director is going to use in the way of investigators. Is he going to use retired police officers? Is he going to use civilian investigators? Is he going to use peace officers, who may not have very much training at all? How does the investigation happen in relationship to

the local police? They are obviously the ones that have the training to do these kinds of investigations. Are we going to have peace officers getting in the way of the local police? I think these are important questions in terms of putting this kind of bill into practice. Those are the questions I have right now.

I certainly approve of the intention of this bill. It's really important that we have safe communities in Alberta and that people be empowered to raise the awareness and to help each other locate where crime is taking place and to be able to have a mechanism to report and get some action. I compliment the member for bringing this to us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by Lethbridge-East.

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to speak to Bill 212, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing such an excellent bill forward for debate.

The bill lives up to the expectations of nearly every Albertan, and that is, quite simply, to live in safe communities and safe neighbourhoods. I don't think any bill could capture its objectives any simpler. Bill 212 allows citizens to confidentially report activities that would threaten the safety of neighbourhoods and communities in Alberta. This bill aims to hold property owners and tenants accountable for unsafe activities that occur on their properties.

In examining this piece of legislation, it appears to me a very proactive tool which allows communities to take matters of safety into their own hands. This bill is not intended to place fear in the hearts of communities, and I do not think that Bill 212 is intended to feed paranoia between neighbours. We should perceive Bill 212 as a positive move to eliminate threatening and unwelcome activities such as drug houses, gang hangouts, or brothels from our communities.

I think all Albertans would appreciate that this Assembly is considering the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act. Albertans value the ability to live in communities free of obscene activities. They want to raise families in a safe and loving environment. If activities that impede these desires from becoming reality are occurring in their neighbourhoods, it is incumbent upon us as legislators to protect individuals and their families. Bill 212 sends a clear message to criminals that their activities will not be tolerated in our communities.

There is no doubt that if criminal activities such as the manufacturing of crystal methamphetamine are occurring, these acts would be handled through the criminal process. Bill 212 answers the deeper concern of what occurs to the property where the illicit activities were taking place. Too often homes where gang activity or prostitution occur turn into incubators for ongoing criminal or illegal activities. There is a need to deal with this problem, to clean up or place restrictions on such properties, to put an end to what can quite simply be constituted as acts of depravity. Some may think that placing restrictions on a property owner as a result of another party's actions is unfair. Although there may be merit to that, it ultimately falls to the property owner to take the necessary precautions when renting out properties. If there appear to be suspicious activities being undertaken by a tenant, the landlord must be vigilant and not allow those individuals to occupy their property.

Landlords have a role in ensuring that communities are safe even if they do not live in the neighbourhoods where they own property. Mr. Speaker, placing the burden of responsibility on the property owner for undesirable situations is quite acceptable. Just as it falls

to members of a community to take leadership in the success and vitality of the community, it should fall to those who degrade the quality of community life to remedy its pitfalls.

The quality of community life is critical in maintaining a high quality of life for our entire province. If people feel that they are struggling with the scourge of illicit activities in their communities, how can they be expected to contribute fully to the life of their province? How can they feel that their children will grow up in safe and healthy communities? How can they go to bed at night knowing that drug dens or prostitution are taking root in their neighbourhoods? Mr. Speaker, no Albertan should have to put up with answering such questions. That is why it is critical that we empower Albertans through Bill 212 to take action in their communities.

4:50

Crystal methamphetamine is one example of what we are trying to counter. Last year a task force on crystal meth, led by our government, concluded that broad and co-operative community action was required to counter the impact that crystal meth is having on certain Albertans. Among its recommendations the task force asked government to get tough when it comes to the enforcing of the law as it pertains to crystal meth. They recommended that additional resources be put in place to get crystal meth labs and pushers out of the communities to end the impact it is having on children. Bill 212 lives up to that goal quite effectively by putting in place measures to remove drug labs and the great harm they cause from the community.

Mr. Speaker, I think Bill 212 would also find support from municipalities across Alberta. For example, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association requested that the Alberta government create more initiatives to further address the manufacturing of illicit drugs as well as their distribution. Although this example deals specifically with illegal drugs, municipalities have to bear the brunt of unrest in communities as they offer policing and other types of community support services. There is no doubt that municipal leaders care deeply about the quality of their communities and the ability of their residents to live in a safe environment. I am certain that they would be appreciative of what this act will accomplish.

Bill 212 also allows for the removal of fortifications such as bullet-proof materials or materials designed to be resistant to explosives from a door or window should they exceed acceptable security requirements. It seems self-evident that for those committing illicit acts, there should be no such thing as an acceptable security standard. This provision of the bill is critical in ensuring not only the safety of individuals but of law enforcement officials as well. I shudder to think about how drug dens or gang hangouts could be fortified to such an extent that it would be beyond the normal capacity of law enforcement officials to access the occupants of the property if illicit and criminal activities were occurring inside.

How could we as a society possibly tolerate the establishment of criminal fortresses in the midst of neighbourhoods and communities? I certainly cannot. Mr. Speaker, I doubt that many of the hon. members present at the moment would either. It is critical that homes or other types of properties are secure, and there are reasonable features available to permit people to be secure. But there is no room for security features that open the door to the types of fortifications that would put an individual beyond and above the law. If there is nothing else we can support in this bill, certainly there would be merit in ensuring that these provisions go forward.

Certainly, in looking at Bill 212, we may consider some of the reasons why certain forms of illicit activity are more prevalent at this time. I've addressed the rise of and the scourge of crystal meth. We are also aware of an increase in gang activity in different corners of

the province, which has led to an increase in the availability of different types of drugs as well as a rise in theft and vandalism. It's unfortunate that some of the increase in illicit activity is the result of the good economic times we are experiencing. It is sad but, regrettably, true. That is why Bill 212 presents part of the answer to combat crime.

There are other responses needed to make our communities and province a safer place to live. I for one am proud that I serve with a government that wants to provide safe and secure communities for all Albertans. Our Premier has emphasized the importance of safe communities, and he wants to find practical ways of reducing crime across the province. For a safer and crime-free Alberta to materialize, we have to keep in mind that the most effective way to bring this about is through local community measures. That's why I believe that the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act will bring about results for Albertans by allowing them to hold property owners accountable for illicit activities occurring on their properties.

Bill 212 quite effectively recognizes the need not only to punish criminal activity but also to ensure that secondary impacts resulting from the crime are addressed as well. Bill 212 closes off the cycle of crime by ensuring that properties housing illicit activities in one instance do not end up housing illicit activities again. The result of these two principles will be better and stronger communities.

Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting Bill 212, and I hope that my hon. colleagues will join me in doing the same. Thank you very much.

**The Acting Speaker:** I hesitate to interrupt, but the time allocated for consideration of this item has now elapsed. Thank you.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

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

#### Minimum Age of Electors

510. Mr. Chase moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce amendments to the Election Act to lower the minimum age of electors in provincial elections from 18 years to 16 years.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You might find my sources of inspiration somewhat surprising, but one of my motivating forces is actually the policy of the Alberta provincial Conservative Party, who saw, in their wisdom, the capabilities of youth and allowed 16-year-olds to not only purchase party memberships but to make the ultimate leadership decision in voting for our Premier. I'm hoping that the same sort of enthusiasm and appreciation of the capabilities of 16-year-olds will allow them your support to vote for their Member of the Legislative Assembly as well as the leader of the government.

The core principle of citizenship is enfranchisement, having the right to vote. Other aspects of citizenship include public service of some kind – working in public office, serving in the military, the police, et cetera – but for most Albertans voting is often the only aspect of citizenship that they experience.

The current participation rates in elections are low. Voter turnout in the 2004 election was 44.7 per cent, the lowest in over 30 years. It is, therefore, impossible for a political party in this province to claim a strong mandate from the electorate because the majority hasn't even voted. Increasing the proportion of the public that votes should therefore be a priority.

One way of doing so is encouraging that engagement early in citizens' lives. If one starts voting when young, then one tends to

carry on voting all throughout one's life. One would hope that the enthusiasm of engaged youth would be contagious, and perhaps family members who may have lost interest or never formed it in the first place may be more motivated to explore issues and candidate positions and cast an informed vote. Youth are capable, ready to be engaged in the political process but need the system to be accessible to be relevant to them. Some may try to argue that youth are not interested in politics, are not mature enough, or don't have an adequate knowledge base to make informed decisions. However, one could accurately say that of many adults. We don't have an intelligence test or a means test that prevents adults from participating.

My first-hand experience with youth as a public school teacher of 34 years has permitted me to witness the energy, the enthusiasm, and the desire to explore current affairs, the solid grasp of issues and political process. Students have a thirst to participate, a thirst to be heard.

One example of the incongruity of the situation in which those below the legal voting age find themselves is demonstrated by the disparity between voting rights and financial contribution rights. The provincial Conservative Association is happy to take your money for a youth membership if you are 14. For \$5 you could vote last winter for the next leader of the PC Party and the next Premier, but come the next election you couldn't vote for your MLA. So a 16-year-old young PC in Vegreville could have paid for Ed Stelmach to become Premier, he could pay for his next election campaign, but he couldn't go and mark an X next to his name.

**The Acting Speaker:** Hon. member, before somebody rises on a point of order, I hope you have realized that we do not use names in this House.

**Mr. Chase:** Yes. I apologize for the use of the Premier's name. It was not out of lack of respect; it was getting caught up with the information. I apologize.

5:00

Of course, it isn't just the Progressive Conservative Party who allow memberships and attendant financial contributions younger than the voting age. The Alberta Young Liberals membership also starts at 14 as does the federal Conservative Party and the federal Liberals. Sixteen-year-olds can join the reserve forces and can get a driving licence. They can work too. In fact, the Alberta government briefly proposed but then swiftly aborted a move to allow children as young as 12 to work in bars and restaurant kitchens.

The province has some of the most liberal work regulations with regard to age in the country. In response to the uproar over this move, the Premier stated in the Legislature that

with respect to young people working in restaurants, sooner or later in this province, Mr. Speaker, younger people have to learn the value of hard work, work for their parents or maybe their relatives in a safe environment under good supervision. There is nothing wrong about people learning the ethics of work.

That comes from *Hansard*, March 20, 2007. Page 225 is the reference.

If there is nothing wrong with younger people learning the ethics and value of hard work, then surely the same logic should apply to the act of voting: the ethics and value of citizenship itself.

In 2005 Liberal MP Mark Holland, from Ajax-Pickering, introduced private member's Bill C-261 in the House of Commons. It was a nonpartisan, cross-party initiative that proposed to lower the federal age to 16. The fact that it was a Liberal who proposed it is only a historical reference. The bill was supported by both the NDP and the Bloc because they, like I, believe that anything that gets

more people interested in elections and interested early in voting is an important addition, in this case to Alberta's democracy.

Young people are often derided as cynical and uninterested in politics. Cutting them out of the political system doesn't help with that perception. Furthermore, lowering the voting age to 16 would allow schools to engage their students much more constructively over issues of voting and elections. All of a sudden these classes would become more real than they would be otherwise. The way to get young people involved in politics is to treat them with respect. The mark of respect in a democracy is the right to vote, and those over 16 should have that right. The Premier believes that young people should learn the value of hard work. We believe that young people should be respected as full citizens.

In preparing this motion, I had the opportunity to talk with young people. Through newsletters and direct send-outs to high schools I asked for student feedback, and I was pleased that I received a considerable amount of feedback. When I attended a social studies class at Sir Winston Churchill, one of the students asked: did I think that by allowing students aged 16 to vote, any party would be more likely to receive the benefit from student participation? I said that that, I believed, was highly unlikely. The worth of the candidate, the importance of the party's policies should trump any particular popularity.

I sincerely hope that my colleagues, regardless of their political affiliation, will support the intent of Motion 510, which recognizes youth's commitment, willingness, eagerness, maturity, and intellectual capacity to participate in the democratic process. For 34 years of my life I've witnessed first-hand the quality of students and their abilities to make important decisions whether they were in life or in classroom circumstances. I hope you support my enthusiasm and will support the motion to lower the voting age to 16.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to address Motion 510 regarding the proposed reduction of the provincial voting age from 18 to 16 years of age. I appreciate the hon. member's intention to involve more young Albertans in the governance process, but several steps have already been taken by the Alberta government which accomplish that goal.

In a democratic system voting is one of the most important civic responsibilities we have. All governments benefit from the guidance provided by the voting process. It is a reflection of the wants and needs of our constituents and tells governments how they should act in order to properly represent the will of their constituents.

As a province we benefit from an involved electorate. When Albertans are aware of the issues, we can all make more responsible decisions to address them. Because of the importance of civic involvement we instill democratic values in our children at a very early age. For example, we teach them history and about current events to better equip them with the knowledge necessary for the responsibilities which await them when they turn 18 years old.

In another attempt to involve Alberta's youth in our parliamentary system, Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta announced the formation of the Youth Secretariat in the spring of 1999. The secretariat was established to involve and further represent young Albertans. Some of the responsibilities and duties of this body are to identify key issues which affect youth and build on existing initiatives and partnerships to provide a mechanism through which issues impacting youth at risk can be identified and addressed.

Mr. Speaker, in June of 2000 a Youth Advisory Panel was established to provide an ongoing youth perspective on the work

done by the secretariat. The Youth Advisory Panel, or YAP as it's affectionately known, plays a critical role in providing the Youth Secretariat with a youth perspective and helps the secretariat identify important issues facing youth in Alberta. The panel provides the chair – and that is myself – and staff of the Youth Secretariat feedback and advice on proposed strategies, recommendations, and findings. The youth are available to comment on current initiatives and have an opportunity to propose improvements or new ideas to improve the quality of services for youth.

The Youth Advisory Panel is comprised of 16 to 18 youth from across Alberta ranging in age from 15 to 22 years old. Each panel member serves a one-year term. Panel members represent a variety of backgrounds and experiences, including members who are aboriginal as well as members who have received intervention services. The group also represents both rural and urban perspectives. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the Youth Advisory Panel may be invited to provide advice on other youth-related initiatives within the Ministry of Children's Services or other ministries.

With the creation of this panel Alberta is the only province to provide youth with the unique opportunity and privilege to be involved in government advisement. These are two of many initiatives which involve Alberta youth in the governance process.

Mr. Speaker, this government takes many steps like the Youth Secretariat and the Youth Advisory Panel to involve youth in the democratic process. I urge the hon. members of this Assembly to vote against Motion 510 because Alberta youth already have various avenues by which to get involved within the government process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm standing in support of Motion 510. Although I have great regard for the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, I couldn't disagree more with his position on the formal structures of government as being a way to introduce young people to be attracted to, to get involved in politics, and also to want to vote. So I'm going to take a different approach and look at this from why I think it's so important that young people get the right to vote at 16.

I had the experience in my constituency of door-knocking last summer, and I happened to meet some new people from Yugoslavia who had come into my constituency and lived in the community. One of their daughters was just starting, I think it was, her second year of political science. She now works in my office – she has just graduated in political science – and is a wonderful example of getting someone involved in politics at a very young age and the right to vote being very, very important.

5:10

Also – and maybe it's because of my age and needing lots of assistance – I've noted in my work with student councils and in my constituency office that there's a fair amount of interest from the young people in St. Albert. I hate to say this, Mr. Speaker: most of them are young ladies. In fact, we had eight of them out at our constituency breakfast the other morning, all talking about postsecondary education around a table. I wish the hon. minister of advanced education was there to solve some of these problems that they were raising.

**Mr. Horner:** You didn't call me. Why didn't you invite me, Jack?

**Mr. Flaherty:** Well, you were busy. I checked your schedule.

Anyway, the one thing that they wanted to ask the minister was

about the 70 per cent of the dollar that comes from the government to go to universities. They want to know what's happening to that.

The point I'm trying to make, Mr. Speaker, is that it's essential, I believe, to contact these people through informal kinds of situations. Again, I'll talk about Java with Jack, which we've had every year right after the session, in June. It's a wonderful way of contacting people and hearing about their concerns about government. One of the things we talked about this year was the whole question of getting involved and doing something about some of the conditions that students are faced with at university and school, doing something about that. The point is: at 16 why shouldn't they be able to vote and be involved?

I think, for example, some of the things I'm seeing at graduations this year – the number of women that are planning to go into medicine and law is just great. I think that one way to capture more people is to get them at a younger age and get them involved.

One of the things that I learned from my father – my father was a railroad conductor. I was very proud of my father. He was chairman of the railroad conductors. In fact, he got very involved with John Diefenbaker during the Canoe River train wreck, and he found Mr. Diefenbaker a very inspiring person. I think, again, that's another way of getting to know people, through travel, where you get to meet people and experience contacts and see them in action, see the different people. My father used to tell me how many people he would meet on the railroad that were in politics from across Canada and the impression that they made on him. I think that overly structuring things and not getting to see these people at a different level sometimes clouds a mystique about them.

Lois Hole to me is another perfect example of a very grassroots politician. As a trustee, as a member of the St. Albert community, as Lieutenant Governor what an impact she had on us. I can remember – and I probably shouldn't say this, Mr. Speaker – when she was meeting about 95 of us retired teachers in a room; I was chairing it, and she said: are there any press here today? I said: no. We sort of barred the doors, and she gave us a fairly Lois Hole insight into what the problems were in Alberta Education at that time, which we found very enlightening.

My approach to this and why I support it is that I think young people should be able to vote at 16. Sometimes the way we have to get to know young people is through getting them involved very early and letting them experience contact with the many of members of this House who are wonderful people. I think we should open the doors, where they can meet people and find out what they do and allow them to take part in their ability to vote in elections at the age of 16.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, I just would like to make a few comments on this motion because I think it is a good one to debate in this House. It may surprise the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, but I happen to support this motion. I think that the Progressive Conservative party of Alberta showed tremendous foresight a number of years ago when it opened up voting for our leadership to 16-year-olds. We just went through a tremendously exciting leadership race where 16-year-olds were allowed to vote for our Premier. I think that the 16-year-olds brought a refreshing viewpoint to that leadership process. One of our problems in this province and, frankly, throughout Canada is that we simply don't have enough eligible voters who participate in the process. So my view is that if those of us who are over 18 are not going to exercise what I think is the responsibility of all of us, then maybe we should consider lowering the voting age to 16, and we might be surprised at how many of those 16- to 18-year-olds actually do value the fact that they have that incredible honour.

We have two by-elections tomorrow in this province. I'm not familiar with the by-election in Drumheller-Stettler, but I'm somewhat familiar with the by-election in Calgary-Elbow, and I would be very surprised if we had a very good turnout in that particular by-election. It wouldn't surprise me if the turnout was somewhere in the range of 20 or 30 per cent. We will have municipal and school board elections this fall, and again traditionally the turnout is very, very low.

I would suggest that if we can try 16-year-olds in adult court, we should let them have the right to vote, and if we can allow 16-year-olds to work in a workplace, I would suggest that giving them the right to vote is something that this Legislature should consider.

Mr. Speaker, I would support this motion.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Motion 510, proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity. The motion caused me to look at the debate that ensued following the attempts on the part of two young girls in Edmonton, high school students, teens, who were grade 10 and grade 11 students at the time, in 2001. Any time we can draw the attention of the electorate, the citizens of this province, to the whole question of the electoral process, the importance of elections, the importance of our right as citizens to vote is a good thing, and this motion I think serves that purpose. I should say at the very outset that I certainly am in support of this motion, as I was in support of the attempt in 2001 by these two high school students to seek the right to vote as a youth turned 16.

Mr. Speaker, just a reference to the history of the right to vote. The extension of the right to vote to more and more people in regard to the so-called universal suffrage was replete with resistance to the idea of expanding the right to vote because it was seen as a threat to the integrity of the electoral system. We in this House last week were paying tribute to a woman, an Albertan, who in 1917 took actions which then led women in Canada to have full citizenship rights, and the election of women to this Legislature resulted from her efforts. We need to keep this in mind. There's always this kind of resistance. We need to pay attention to that. We shouldn't put unnecessary roadblocks in the way of expanding the right to vote. We had similar laws prior to that, you know, which disenfranchised people based on whether they owned property or not or had educational levels that met the standards of the time or if they belonged to a particular ethnic or racial group. All of those matters have to be kept in mind when debating a matter as serious as this one, which constitutes consideration to extend the right to vote to young people at 16.

Having said that and having expressed my support for the motion, I want to just again caution ourselves with respect to our expectations that simply lowering the age would necessarily increase participation. More will have to be done. This is not a sufficient step; it's a necessary step towards reforming our electoral system. In one of the recent federal elections the participation rate for voters between 18 and 20 years was one of the lowest: 20 per cent. So the assumption that simply entitling a new group of citizens in our province to vote would necessarily lead to an increase in participation in voting either of that group or of all of us in general is something that we should take a hard look at.

5:20

We need to do a lot more. We need to improve the integrity of the legislative process altogether. We need to make this House a lot more significant in the lives of Albertans than it has been over the

last dozen years at least or more. We need to encourage a much greater role for the Legislative Assembly in the process of governance in the province. What we have seen over the years is a decline in the relative importance of the role of the Legislature vis-à-vis the executive, that is. We need to strike a new balance between the powers of the executive and the powers of the Legislature.

We are beginning to take some steps in that direction, but we need to go a lot farther. I think we need to also make sure that every vote that's cast counts and counts equally, and some sort of proportional system of voter representation would be a sure way of achieving that goal. If you take a variety of steps in tandem, I think we will likely achieve the result of both, making our whole system more democratic, more open, more participatory, and also one that people pay attention to. As people pay more attention to a system and find its activities meaningful to their day-to-day lives, they tend to become participants. So increasing participation in elections will require expanding the universe of those who can vote, surely, but in addition to that, other steps. Call a citizens' assembly. Put this matter as one of the items that should be debated at that one. So this motion, in fact, allows us, then, to open up the opportunities for all of us to engage each other in debate to improve upon the electoral system that we have.

Funding for elections, funding for political parties, funding for our leadership campaigns of political parties: all of these matters are vital to the goal of strengthening and broadening our electoral system and democratic system so that more and more citizens feel engaged and want to involve themselves in its workings. So, Mr. Speaker, I support this motion and certainly urge other members to do the same.

When those teenagers took their matter to the court to seek entitlement to vote, it really did open up some new opportunities for people to think about. I remember that in 2001 and 2004 I visited many high schools in the province. I remember my visit to Aberhart high school in Calgary, a very good school, and I was amazed how these high school students were most interested in what was happening here, their questions to me. They interrogated me and rightly so as a politician, and when they were engaging me in debate, that showed to me that they are in fact, indeed, honestly interested in being participants in the system in a meaningful way.

We have high school social studies curricula which focus on citizenship, rights and responsibilities, and opportunities to change the things that we don't like, to improve things from the way they have been. Young people usually have a lot more enthusiasm for these things and a lot more energy as well. But we need to acknowledge that they have the capacities. We need to make sure that they have the rights in order to be able to exercise those capacities and invest in those capacities in improving our democratic system. Similarly, I visited several schools in Edmonton and the same thing.

The interest of students at the high school level is stimulated by this court action taken by the students at the time. So what we need to do is to find ways of stimulating interest among young people and mature citizens as well in the question of how to make our democracy stronger, how to make it more representative, how to make it more responsive, how to make it more effective, and how to use this engagement to improve the democratic governance to which we are all committed.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll close my remarks. I do support this motion for the reasons given.

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

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Member for Calgary-Varsity for presenting this motion to lower the voting age

to 16, and I appreciate the remarks of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. He has a great background in education.

I have the same experience in dealing with high school students, and I just want to give one example. During the last election I had the opportunity of participating in a forum at Ross Sheppard high school, which is located in Edmonton-Glenora. At first I thought: well, this is not going to be that important because there are not too many voters in the crowd, a few 18-year-olds and 19-year-olds who are still making their way through high school. So at first I wasn't sure how seriously to take it.

When I went to the forum – it was held in the gymnasium – there were between 2,000 to 3,000 students gathered there. The whole experience was just simply electrifying. All the candidates were up on the stage. At first we were grilled by the students, who had just extremely intelligent, interesting questions which really pressed us to answer and respond to the issues. It was like a leadership convention. There were students with signs for the various candidates up in the bleachers on both sides of the gym. It was just a most exciting time.

They also had a vote amongst the students in the high school – they didn't reveal their vote until after the general election – and the results of the vote were exactly the same as the general election in our riding, fortunately for me, which shows that there's the same level of intelligence and deliberation about the candidates as there was amongst the adult population.

So, you know, it's wrong for us to think that among the young people there are people who are too cynical, not interested, and not mature enough. I mean, frankly, Mr. Speaker, that's paternalism. There are just as many people who are too cynical and not interested and not mature enough among the adult population. Probably the percentage is about the same.

In fact, among students, especially at the high school age, you have some highly informed students who know about the political process. One example of this highly informed component of high school students is the TUXIS Parliament. The TUXIS Parliament is a long tradition in Alberta of having students come from various high schools throughout the province to spend time, usually here in Edmonton, to form a parliament and to become acquainted with parliamentary democracy. They really prepare hard. They understand the party process and the British parliamentary system. They form the government; they form the opposition. Somebody is the Premier; somebody is the Leader of the Opposition. They have debates on the same kinds of issues that we debate here in the House. It's quite amazing to watch them in action.

It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that in terms of principles our youth are the future of our province. They are the foundation upon which our province will be built in the future. It's important for us to involve them in the political process as soon as possible. I'm just very impressed by the work of our social studies teachers in high schools that engage the students in becoming more knowledgeable about politics.

5:30

It's true, Mr. Speaker, that generally 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds may not know a lot about party politics. Most adults don't know a lot about party politics. But ask young people about such issues as globalization, climate change, the war in Iraq, or AIDS in Africa, and they have clear opinions, and they'll debate those issues quite eloquently, referring to all kinds of evidence and so on. So I think it's a mistake for us not to engage them in the political process and enable 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds to vote.

I think there's considerable literature on psychological and moral development. I think of the famous psychiatrist Erik Erickson, who



illustrated the stages of growth. Young people who are at the age of 16 and 17 are in a stage of psychological and moral growth where they begin to discuss the big issues of our time, the universal issues, not just personal ethical issues but ethical issues that involve the whole of humanity. So that's why they're quick to engage in discussions of things like climate change.

Mr. Speaker, I really support this motion to extend the voting age down to 16. I think it would be great. I hope that in the future I will face a similar crowd at Ross Sheppard high school, and I'll know that among the 3,000 students there half of them will be voting in the general election. That'll make a huge difference in terms of the way we approach politics, getting our youth involved.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased to rise to voice my support and my gratitude for my hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity, who introduced this motion lowering the voting age for Albertans from 18 to 16, Motion 510.

I'm going to start by putting two arguments on the record. One argument, which has been briefly touched on, is the participation rate, the voter turnout rate that we have seen in this province and which we have seen drop in this province over the last 30 years. Take 2004, for example, Mr. Speaker. The voter turnout was at an all-time low of 44.7 per cent, the lowest in over 30 years. You know, whether people stayed home or whether people actually intentionally chose not to vote in 2004 is beside the fact. The fact is that more people did not vote than who did. It is, therefore, impossible for any political party in this province to claim a strong mandate from the electorate because the majority did not vote. They chose not to.

Increasing the proportion of the public that votes should therefore be a priority, and it should be a priority for everyone involved in this House. One way of doing so is by encouraging the engagement early on of Albertans, people in their late teens, you know, 16, 17, and 18. If one starts voting when they're young, then the trend is likely going to continue, and they're probably going to exercise that franchise every time the opportunity arises.

Young people are often derided as being cynical or uninterested. We've heard examples from different sides of the House that, indeed, they are interested and they are connected. They're trying to learn, and they're trying to ask questions. They're trying to be active participants, not just bystanders or observers. Sometimes they do this with more energy and more interest than their parents, for example. So cutting them out of the political system doesn't help that perception. I think we should do the opposite. We should really say: "Okay. If you are really this much into it and you're really that interested, here is a tool for you. Here is our way of empowering you to make your voice heard, to participate." It's all about participation, Mr. Speaker.

Lowering the voting age to 16 would also allow schools, as mentioned by my hon. colleagues from Edmonton-Strathcona and Edmonton-Glenora, to engage their students more and more constructively over issues of voting and elections. All of a sudden, Mr. Speaker, you're going to have classes where these students are talking about something that is real, something that they can actually feel and take ownership of, something they can participate in instead of something that is just theoretical or something they hear about second-hand.

Now, one of the other reasons why I'm approaching this is the angle of democratic renewal. Voting and elections and people registering their voice is one component of democratic renewal, but

there are many more pieces to this puzzle. Democratic renewal is an area which I care about, and it's an area that I'm really interested in.

We've heard some remarks from hon. members, in particular the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, who listed some of the initiatives and some of the agencies or directorates or secretariats that are there in the government to engage youth, and that's all wonderful. My argument is that it shouldn't really stop there. If we engage youth in government operations and government decisions, that's one way to do it. The other way is to give them that franchise which I spoke about.

I can also give an example of the Youth Environment Summit, which was actually held in Kananaskis last year. It was sponsored by the then Minister of Environment, and all MLAs in this House were invited to nominate or delegate young people to go and discuss issues surrounding the environment. I was really pleased and quite impressed that I had many applications from people that wanted to go, and instead of just sending one, I actually sent three to that youth summit. The condition which I imposed on them, Mr. Speaker, was that they come back and report to me what they learned. I said: "There has to be an outcome; there has to be a result. You guys go, learn as much as you can, interact, talk to other delegates, and then come back and tell me what you learned." I was really impressed with the report that they gave me, and in fact I actually ended up putting it in my newsletter, saying: here are the three young ladies which I sent, and here's what they learned, and here's what they're sharing with their community. It was amazing, and I think we should do more of that.

Take my own campaign, Mr. Speaker. The youngest person on my campaign in 2004 was 12 years old, and then we had everybody between 12 and 83. The oldest was 83. They were equally energetic. These guys were equally effective and instrumental in getting me elected to this House. I had many people who were under the age of 16 who were door-knocking, and they were on fire. They were amazing in their style and in their effectiveness in reaching out to people. I was so impressed with their work during my campaign. Unfortunately, they could not vote themselves. They couldn't wait for that opportunity when they turned 18, so I know I'm speaking for them.

I also had an election promise, Mr. Speaker, where I said: elect me, and I'm going to engage young people; I'm going to talk to young people. I started an initiative called Young McClung, which basically meets once a month. We try to meet once a month. The only two times a year when we don't is basically during July and August because people go away, so we have a hiatus. Like my hon. colleague from St. Albert, who calls it Java with Jack, I call it Mocha with Mo. We actually meet nine or 10 times a year, and in September it's going to be my fourth season. Something I promised; something I kept.

Now, what do I gain from meeting with the young people? We actually gain a lot. The young people chair the meetings. The young people attend the meetings. They do the talking. They do the hosting. I just sit there and take notes, and I answer the odd question. It is tremendous. These people invite guest speakers. They actually look after reservations with the local coffee places in my constituency. They even held two all-candidate forums in the federal election in 2006, and they invited all the parties to be represented. They actually did that, and it was tremendous. We had some of the parents commenting: "You know what? No one else is doing this." None of the parties were interested. It's good that a nonpartisan youth group did that on their behalf, and they were particularly appreciative.

They also volunteer in the constituency. They do outreach. They do fundraising for charity and a whole gamut of initiatives that they

come up with and they chair. All I require of them is to come back and report to me, and they put a little article in my newsletter talking about youth outreach and what they do and what they learn. Actually, it's quite contagious, too, because every youth brings their friends and their siblings, and it keeps growing, Mr. Speaker. It is really heartwarming and gratifying that we have this dedicated block of citizens that are so far untapped. I think we should really allow them to exercise that franchise which I mentioned.

5:40

The other thing that they did on my behalf is that they added me to a new online tool now called Facebook. I'm not sure if you know about it, Mr. Speaker, but I really urge you to go on Facebook and see how many friends you make in your constituency and across Alberta and even across Canada and the world. You would be surprised, and you would be surprised at the quality of these young people and what they know and what they hope to learn.

Take this Assembly, Mr. Speaker. It is no secret that the youngest member in this House is the Member for Battle River-Wainwright, who is 34 – he's really young – and then myself being the second youngest. I'm 36. I think we should really have a 20-year-old in this House. We should have an 18-year-old. You know, there is nothing to prevent them from seeking public office. I think one way to encourage them to jump into that fray, to take that first step is to allow them to vote. If we argue that cynicism sets in between the ages of 18 and 24, I think we should bypass that troubled time and start at 16. If they start early, they're likely to continue.

Seniors vote. I think the second block after that would be young people who are really likely to vote. I think we should grant them that opportunity and not deny them that opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to take my seat because I'm interested in hearing other speakers and, you know, listening to where they stand on this issue. I thank you for this opportunity.

**The Acting Speaker:** Any others?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to close debate.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to acknowledge and thank the Minister of Education and the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for their support and recognition of the capabilities of young people. I'd also like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for using as an example the students of William Aberhart high school, which just happens to be in Calgary-Varsity. There are several wonderful teachers there, but a teacher by the name of Martin Poirier teaches history and also is a debate coach. A number of his students have gone on to be very successful. Of course, I would like to thank my Liberal colleagues from St. Albert, Edmonton-Glenora, and Edmonton-McClung for their support.

In my career as a teacher one of the subjects that I taught was social studies. I required my students in my social studies class each Friday to present a current event. I didn't say what their source had to be. It had to be some form of media source. Some students, because they got to choose their own topic and a topic of interest, would choose entertainment. Other students would talk about hockey. But the majority of students – and these were grades 8 and 9 students – chose to talk about political events. It didn't change their mark. There were no extra benefits for choosing political concerns. That was their own natural choice.

I believe that Alberta's future and most important resource is our youth. I believe that by engaging youth at an early age, engagement will continue into later life, and that is why I proposed the lowering of the voting age to 16 from its current 18.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 510 lost]

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, given the hour I would move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 5:45 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1 p.m.]