

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 20, 2007**

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/11/20

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life which has been given to us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate ourselves anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

Ms Evans: Well, once again, Mr. Speaker, I rise this week to introduce a fabulous group of students, this time from Wes Hosford school, an exemplary elementary school where my grandchildren both attended. Now we have 64 students in three classes here, actually a total of 72 visitors. We have teachers and group leaders Kim Lerbekmo, Jane Dimitroff, Cathy Brosseau, Stephanie McGladdery, and we have Miss Shannon MacLeod as well as Mr. Tosczak. We have parent helpers Mrs. Jocelyn Bell and Mrs. Penny Reid. I would ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a class from Fultonvale elementary school, who have been brought here by their teacher, Mrs. Karin Bittner, every year that I've served in this Assembly. The class is also accompanied by teacher aides Mrs. Diane Gundersen and Ms Jennifer Harkness. Along with them are parent helpers Mrs. Chris Douglas, Mrs. Shelly White, Ms Marj Langkamp, Mrs. Carrie Brunet, Ms Shauna Schryver, Mrs. Ruth LaFleche, Mrs. Karen Hachey, and Mrs. Jennifer Diener. They are in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm applause of the 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 the members of the Assembly four members of the Alberta Graduate Council. David Hayes, chair of the Alberta Graduate Council. Mr. Hayes is a PhD candidate at the University of Alberta in neuroscience. He's serving his first term as AGC chair but his second term as part of the Alberta Graduate Council. David Coletto, vice-chair of the Alberta Graduate Council. Mr. Coletto is a PhD candidate at the University of Calgary in political science. He's also currently the president of the Graduate Students' Association at the University of Calgary. Locke Spencer, vice-chair of the Alberta Graduate Council. Mr. Spencer is a PhD candidate at the University of Lethbridge in physics. Adrienne Huxtable, financial officer of the Alberta Graduate Council. Ms Huxtable is a PhD candidate at the University of Alberta in physiology. She is a former vice-chair of the AGC and has been involved with the AGC for three terms. I'll be meeting with this group later and look forward to the valued contribution that they give to Alberta. They are seated in the public and members' galleries this afternoon. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Legislature.

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

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly representatives from both the public school board and the Catholic school board in my constituency of Fort McMurray. Joining us today we have Kath Rhyason, the superintendent of the Fort McMurray public school division, associate superintendent Amgad Rushdy as well as the chair, Jeff Thompson, and the vice-chair, Glenn Doonanco. Also joining them are trustees Glenn Cooper and Elizabeth Eenkooren from the Fort McMurray public schools and Maria Salvo-Vyboh and Laurelee Bouchard-Dutchyn from the Fort McMurray separate school board. They are here as part of the Alberta School Boards Association this week. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly here today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 10 special visitors all the way from Vulcan county. As you are aware, Vulcan county may be number two, but they were one of the oldest counties established in the province years ago when Grande Prairie and Vulcan first applied for county status. Today with us we have Mr. Ian Donovan, the reeve; Mr. Derrick Annable, Mr. Dave Schneider, Mr. Roy Lucas, Mr. Merle Wyatt, Mr. Rick Geschwendt, Mr. Doug McIntyre, Mr. Gordon Nelson, Mr. Rod Ruark, and their county administrator, Mr. Gary Buchanan. I would ask that they please rise in the members' gallery. I'm very pleased that they could come up as part of the AAMD and C delegation. Please give them your warm welcome.

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

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly some very special guests from the constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake, the municipal district of Bonnyville council. They are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask that they please stand as I call out their names: Reeve Ed Rondeau, Deputy Reeve Andy Wakaruk, councillors David Fox, Barry Kalinski, Mike Krywiak, Don Sinclair, and Delano Tolley. I'd ask all members to please join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly members of the steering committee for the first Exposure festival, which is Edmonton's Queer Arts and Culture Festival, which is starting on Friday, November 23, and running to December 1. Exposure will invite members of the queer community to develop, exhibit, and explore queer artistic expression and provide opportunities for Edmonton audiences to appreciate this art. A number of the members of the steering committee are with us today. I would ask them to please rise as I call their name. To begin with, Heather Zwicker, who's chair; Anthony Easton; Todd Janes, who's also a constituent and runs Latitude 53 gallery; Ted Kerr; and Christie Shultz. Is Adam there as well? Okay. So please join me in welcoming these wonderful members of our community bringing us another festival.

I have a second introduction, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce

to you Herta Ogertschnig. She is a constituent and a senior. She's been very active in working with my office on concerns about standards of living, particularly around the amount of money that seniors have to buy good, nutritious food. We did contact the minister about this and asked him to review the income level in seniors' benefits. I would ask Herta to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly for her advocacy.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Mr. Rod Olstad. Rod's family have been residents in Alberta since 1892. Currently, Rod is a volunteer steward of the Holmes Crossing sandhills ecological reserve, located northwest of Barrhead, and is also the volunteer chair of the Alberta NDP environment caucus. On behalf of my constituents and all Albertans I would like to thank Rod for his efforts and his advocacy on behalf of everyone. I would now ask him, please, to stand and that he receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Barrie and Richard Vickery

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to acknowledge the agricultural achievements of the Vickery family, who farm in Kneehill county. Recently Richard and Barrie Vickery, while accompanied by their wives, Judy and Sandra, as well as their parents, Richard Sr. and Betty, were named Agri-Trade farm family of the year for my constituency.

Through the years the Vickery family have witnessed many changes in agriculture, and they have continually succeeded by drawing upon their great work ethic and passion for farming. Today Richard and Barrie rely more and more on their innovation and resourcefulness to balance the demands of a modern agriculture industry as they farm a homestead that was founded by their grandparents in 1919.

1:10

The Vickery brothers are a great example of intergenerational farmers who have gained an immense appreciation for the independence and accomplishment of cultivating their own land. Each brother had once pursued other endeavours, only to be drawn back to their roots to live a life that has allowed so many Albertans to prosper. Their decision to return to the farm greatly benefited their rural community as both men are active residents. Richard served as county councillor in Kneehill county and Barrie as a director for Rural Crime Watch. The Vickerys acknowledge that their success is credited to the support they receive from their family. Each family member contributes to help farm 1,650 acres of wheat, barley, canola, and peas and 150 acres of hay, and they tend to a small herd of cattle as well.

Their recognition is well deserved, and I wish the Vickery family continued success.

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

National Child Day

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, November 20, is National Child Day. This day was first proclaimed by the government of Canada in 1993 to recognize the United Nations convention

on the rights of the child. Today we celebrate our commitment to ensuring that all children are treated with dignity and respect, given the opportunity to have their voices heard, protected from harm, provided with their basic needs, and given every opportunity to reach their full potential.

Children are Alberta's most precious resource. Supporting the growth and development of Alberta's children and providing them with the opportunity to pursue their goals will mean a bright future for all Albertans. We will continue to work together across government and with Alberta communities to improve the quality of life for all children and youth and provide families the support they need to lead safe and healthy lives. Mr. Speaker, today we will secure a bright future for our children.

Thank you.

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

Famous Five Maquette

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Among the statues on Parliament Hill in Ottawa are a few that are neither Prime Ministers nor queens and kings. One of them is of Baldwin and LaFontaine, the pair of MLAs in the province of Canada 160 years ago who led the movement for responsible government. Another, the most recent addition, is a sculpture of the five who 80 years ago led the movement to have women recognized as persons in the British empire. This sculpture and smaller representations of it throughout the country are the work of Edmontonian Barbara Paterson. The five who led this movement were social activists for whom women's rights were not an end in themselves but an important part of building a more human society. Henrietta Muir Edwards, Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney, Emily Murphy, and Irene Parlby were Canadians and Albertans. Three were MLAs who sat in this Chamber.

Leadership comes in many forms. Many who enrich the human journey are neither royalty, presidents, nor prime ministers. In our rotunda is one figure that falls outside these categories. That is the statue of Crowfoot, chief of the Blackfoot confederacy, whose wise leadership led to peaceful cohabitation of people of many origins – European, Canadian, and American – with his own people in their own territory. Crowfoot can be considered a father of this province.

It is time to add to the range of persons in our rotunda. To this end I propose the inclusion of a maquette of the sculpture of the Famous Five, who can be considered mothers of Alberta as a progressive and inclusive society. The spirit of the five cannot be contained by any one locale, yet it is time they be recognized here, where their work began. Their maquette in our rotunda will be a model of our possibilities.

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

Contributions to NASA Space Program

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to share a story of people and organizations whose limits are literally out of this world. I'll begin with a good friend, Scott Parazynski, who was an Olympic coach in the Calgary games. He is an extremely knowledgeable medical doctor, and he is also NASA's most experienced spacewalker.

Last month my wife, Jennifer, and I were invited to take a special tour of the Kennedy Space Center and witness Scott's shuttle team blast off into outer space, an event we'll never forget. I'm pleased to report that two weeks later, after performing the most dangerous

spacewalk ever in order to keep alive the hopes and dreams of those who are working on the International Space Station, Scott has returned safely to his family after his fifth and final mission.

When I reflect on the reception for family and friends on the night before the launch, I recall the most poignant statement from one of the astronauts who shared NASA's goal: to make life better for all people on Earth. Mr. Speaker, it would take the rest of this session to share even a partial list of the benefits that people around the world have gained from the space program, but it's worthy of note that many of the contributions originated right here with Albertans, including Dr. Bob Thirsk, who earned his BSc at the U of C, Professor Carlos Lange, Drs. Samson and Mann, senior scientist Ian Stirling, Shana Corporation, and in numbers too large to mention here, scores of Albertans involved with Canadarm and Canadarm2 projects.

These individuals, organizations, and events remind me of the incredible potential for good that human beings possess. I invite all members of the House to join me in saying thank you and congratulations to all associated with the space program for proving that, indeed, the sky is not the limit and for making our lives better every day in big and small ways.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Children's Rights

Mr. Eggen: Today marks the 18th anniversary of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. Today is also the day that UNICEF Canada released a study on child well-being. Canada failed in a number of priority areas for children, including child poverty, obesity, mental illness, and high rates of children in state care and detention centres.

Now, some of you may feel that you've heard this before, and it's likely that you have. Since Canada ratified the UN convention on the rights of the child in 1991, we have continued to fail our children in these areas of concern. The statistic that 1 in 6 children lives in poverty has remained constant for the last generation.

There is growing disparity between certain populations. Aboriginal infants are twice as likely to die than nonaboriginal infants. Those who have disabilities are still far less likely to participate fully in the education and employment sectors of our society. Aboriginal children are failed by the system in the greatest proportions. The UNICEF report highlights housing, water, and education as major shortfalls. This government might want to look to the reserves and federal policy as the root, but I'm here to say today that this is also an Alberta responsibility. Alberta's children are amongst these numbers, which means that we are failing them here too.

It's up to this government to provide for and to protect Alberta children to the best of its ability. This begins with ensuring that schools are supportive and encouraging places for all children, that health care is of the highest standard, and that children have quality, accessible, and affordable child care. It's time to make a difference and not excuses.

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

National Addictions Awareness Week

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission I'm pleased to rise today and help AADAC-funded services and programs, staff, our community partners, and Albertans kick off National Addictions Awareness Week, starting November 18 to 24. This week features various events such as wellness walks, resource fairs, school presentations, family swims and skating activities as well as

announcing the winners of a youth video commercial contest.

National Addictions Awareness Week aims to create greater awareness of addiction issues and to reinforce the message that Change Is Possible, this year's theme. The week also encourages communities to take local action to reduce and prevent substance abuse. Providing addictions programs and services makes good economic sense. Research tells us that every dollar spent on addictions treatment saves \$7 in health care costs. Addictions treatment drives down demand for acute and long-term care and promotes more efficient use of the health care system.

In the area of prevention these figures are even higher. Every dollar spent on prevention translates into \$14 in savings. Prevention strategies like public awareness, education, and social marketing can shift attitudes and behaviours to help reduce the risk of substance abuse and problem gambling.

Albertans can receive support across Alberta through services in 51 communities and have free access to services, including assessment and outpatient counselling, day treatment, detoxification, short- and long-term residential treatment, and overnight shelter.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Albertans to contact their local AADAC office to find out more about the activities planned in their community and information regarding addictions programs and services.

Thank you.

head:

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to present a petition on behalf of the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace. Seventy-four of his constituents signed a petition to pass Bill 45 without diluting its contents.

Measure done. Thank you.

1:20

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition consisting of 67 signatures submitted to both the MLA for Foothills-Rocky View and to me as MLA for Calgary-Lougheed in support of the passed Bill 45, the smoke-free places act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to present a petition signed by a number of people across northern Alberta in support of the passage of Bill 45 "in order to address the enormous health, social and financial implications of tobacco use in Alberta."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition today to present to the Legislative Assembly. It reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation that will require schools to eliminate any fees that are charged parents or guardians for textbooks, locker rentals, field trips, physical fitness programs, music classes.

This is signed by constituents from Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by 120 individuals, mostly from Edmonton, who are asking that the government ensure that remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities is standardized, that they're fairly compensated, that wages remain competitive, that they have improved access to professional development opportunities and urging the government to introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level-of-care standards.

Thank you.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present this petition signed by 58 people to petition the Legislative Assembly to pass Bill 45, the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, and not dilute its contents so as to compromise the version approved at second reading, in order to address the enormous health, social and financial implications of tobacco use in Alberta.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 66 residents of Alberta which reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to immediately establish, in consultation with community leaders and interested citizens, the Keystone Wildlife Preserve in a designated area west of Edmonton, north of Highway 16 and east of highway 751, to ensure that wildlife habitat and surrounding environment are protected for generations to come.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise to present a petition from another 141 Albertans that ask the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to "discard the Royalty Review Report and eliminate restructuring of Oil and Gas Royalties."

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Fifty two more signatures on a petition which reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to:

1. Ensure that the remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities is standardized across the sector, regardless of whether these workers are employed by government or by community-based or private providers;
2. Ensure these employees are fairly compensated and that their wages remain competitive with other sectors to reflect the valuable and crucial service they provide;
3. Improve employees' access to professional development opportunities (training and upgrading); and
4. Introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level-of-care standards.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a petition.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative

Assembly to pass Bill 45, the Smoke-free Places (Tobacco Reduction) Amendment Act, and not dilute its contents so as to compromise the version approved at second reading in order to address the enormous health, social and financial implications of tobacco use in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Cheffins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition to this Legislature on behalf of 348 residents of Calgary urging the government to "enter into an agreement with the Tsuu T'ina First Nation to build a section of the Southwest Calgary ring road."

head: **Introduction of Bills**

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

Bill 49 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2007

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 49, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2007.

The bill will amend the Traffic Safety Act. Amendments are required as part of Alberta's traffic safety plan. Legislative amendments will define an intersection safety device which can be used to gather evidence dealing with red light and speeding infractions at intersections and the introduction of this evidence in court by affidavit – these changes will incorporate and mirror existing provisions for red-light cameras – and also allow photocopies of registrations for class 4 commercial trailers to be carried as an option to the original certificate.

The proposed legislation will affect evidence considered by the Alberta Transportation Safety Board respecting alcohol-related driving. It will also streamline the process of applying for a court review of board decisions and confirm the amount of deference the court gives to board decisions.

Finally, the legislation includes a liability cap for the vehicle leasing and sale industry and lenders who retain title to vehicles as collateral for loans where these businesses do not have possession of the vehicle.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 49 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 49 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have the AADAC annual report 2006-2007. As chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission it's my pleasure to table these. The commission continues to provide leadership in delivering services that assist Albertans in achieving freedom from the harmful effects of alcohol, other drugs, and gambling. This report summarizes the activities and achievements of the commission in 2006-2007.

Thank you.

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

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to table five copies of a petition of another 15 residents from Slave Lake and region regarding the need for extended care beds in Slave Lake. This is signed by concerned citizens of Slave Lake. Of course, we wish to have our aging family members remain in this community, with familiar friends and family. Having to leave the community does not allow for much time to be spent with loved ones. Travel to visit is also an issue with costs, work schedules and other barriers. They want us to consider . . .

The Speaker: Let's just move on with the tablings.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling correspondence from Eva Makowichuk. She's concerned about the treatment her relatives have been receiving in long-term care facilities and is asking for advocacy available for seniors.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. One is a pair of publications from the Edmonton Community Action Committee on Elder Abuse. One documents the intervention team's approach.

Another is the program for the 38th annual awards banquet for the Northeast Zone Sports Council. Their motto is Developing Youth through Sport. These were the awards for softball, baseball, soccer, and of course minor hockey.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of a petition to the Legislature urging the government to re-evaluate the proposed changes to daycare regulations.

Another tabling I have is from Shauna Grabinsky, wanting to express a few concerns about the proposed Child Care Licensing Act.

Another one from a constituent, Dean Whalen, writing to express concern about the problem of homelessness in our city and province.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Several tablings today. The first is a correspondence from Herta Ogertschnig, who is my constituent I introduced, expressing her concerns about the cost of living and Alberta seniors' benefit program; a second tabling from a constituent, Alyssa Fraser-Hopkins, asking that midwifery services be covered by health care – I heartily agree – and letters from Michael L. Smith and Eva Rose G. Angcoy*, who are pointing out their concerns about the labour laws, asking for first-contract arbitration, recognition of bargaining rights, one labour law for all unionized workers, automatic certification of workplaces, and outlawing the use of replacement workers. Again I heartily agree.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. They are from constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar

Dave Wilson, Deano Mitchelmore, and Theresa O'Connor. These three individuals from my constituency are writing indicating their strong belief that Alberta's labour laws require major changes to encourage fairness to all working people in Alberta.

Thank you.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

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

Child Hunger

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is the anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, a convention to which Alberta is a signatory. Article 24(2)(c) requires all parties to combat malnutrition and to support the provision of adequate and nutritious food, yet today and every school day in Alberta thousands of children go to school hungry through no fault of their own. My question is to the Premier. Does the Premier believe that the children of this province have a right to adequate food?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of our priorities of government is to improve the quality of life for all Albertans. In a province where the average per capita income is the highest compared to other jurisdictions, in a province where we have low tax rates, we have a lot of the general, very positive economic indicators, yet today we have children that are arriving at school without breakfast. We have a number of programs in place to support families that either through income or through some issues at home the children aren't given proper nutrition. The minister may outline all of the programs we have in place.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that Alberta schoolchildren by the thousands turn up hungry at school every day. The Alberta Liberal caucus sits here across the Assembly from a government that spends more per capita than any other province but often delivers less. Are Albertans getting full value for their money? I don't believe so. Does this government have its priorities straight? Again, I don't think so. This government continues to support subsidies to things like horse racing when just part of that subsidy could create a province-wide school nutrition program. Other provinces support hungry schoolchildren. This government supports horse racing. Can the Premier explain why his government has refused to directly support feeding hungry schoolchildren in Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, the leader is misinforming the House. The only revenues that go to horse racing in this province are those that are a share of the benefits of the VLT income. Those people that happen to use the VLTs, that income is shared towards horse racing.

However, with respect to children in this province, we have the best supplementary health program for children in the country of Canada. Close to 75,000 children are receiving benefits covering eyeglasses, prescription drugs, emergency ambulance service, dental care, and essential diabetic supplies. We have raised the maximum benefit of this program to give more Alberta children access, and there's more to come.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I introduced a motion in this Assembly for school nutrition programs a year ago. It's something, as members here will remember, I feel very passionate about. This government voted that motion down en masse. Supporting people in need, especially kids, is a fundamental commitment of the Alberta Liberals. When this government spends more per capita than any other province and can't stick to its budget, it can't call itself conservative, and when it refuses to support programs that feed hungry kids, it can't call itself progressive. To the Premier: when will this government recognize that systemic child hunger in Alberta exists and is unacceptable?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, over 1,600 children in Alberta receive support through the child and youth support program. We've also gone further than that, far beyond what the Liberals wanted to do, and that is that we've also expanded the program to pregnant women in low-income family situations, and we also offer child care subsidy for families that are in postsecondary education in the province of Alberta. It's an outstanding program and, once again, unmatched anywhere in the country of Canada.

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

Children's Services

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Article 3 of the convention on the rights of the child states that jurisdictions are responsible to take all administrative and legislative measures needed in order to support the rights and well-being of children in their care, yet the Auditor General himself has observed that more attention must be placed on follow-up care for children in the care of this province. To the Minister of Children's Services: when will the ministry have these additional measures in place to support vulnerable children throughout their childhood?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, the first thing I would like to say is that in this province we're really proud of the focus that this government has on children and families. For a province of 3 million people we spend close to a billion dollars on programs and services for the well-being of children and families.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The number of children being placed in hotels under the province's care is on the rise. How will the government work to bolster the number of foster families and provide them with the necessary supports to provide optimal care for the children that they look after?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that with our foster families, the member is aware, we are endeavoring to embark on a campaign. We are looking for more foster parents. We're also working very closely with the Alberta foster care association on both the campaign as well as supports for current foster parents as well as our future ones.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The new casework model proposed by Children's Services looks promising, yet it will mean more responsibilities for an already overworked staff. How does the

government plan on addressing this gap between needs and resources?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct that the casework practice model is a good model. Currently we are testing it in 13 sites across the province. We do know that it is using the best social work practices. In the test sites we know it's more labour intensive. We are funding for more staffing in the test sites. As we implement it across the province, we intend to increase that staffing as well.

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

Homelessness Initiatives

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, as the associate minister for affordable housing announced here in the House, a new emergency shelter partially opened in Calgary, and by evening it was full. All over Alberta this winter shelter space will be full to capacity, and people will be left out in the cold. To the Premier. Full shelters are not good news. Shelters are not homes. Will he acknowledge and take responsibility for the fact that this situation is the result of years of neglect by his government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we've had people move to this province from different provinces in Canada and from other countries to seek jobs and opportunity. We acknowledge the fact that the number of homeless has increased in the province because more people are here, but we also have numerous programs to address that. We fully support the Calgary homelessness committee that wants to eradicate homelessness in 10 years. We're putting resources towards that. Any further detail the minister responsible can provide.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, when the new Mustard Seed emergency facility in Calgary is fully open, it will have 341 beds. The last homeless census in Calgary counted more than 10 times that number of homeless people. Ten years ago this government got the first heads-up that the homelessness crisis was developing. Talking about a plan to end homelessness in 10 years now is 10 years too late. What actions will the Premier take immediately – immediately – to help thousands of homeless people in the city of Calgary and across the province of Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the associate minister will outline all of the programs available that we have, and those programs are supported in our budget.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm surprised by this question because I know that this member has been at meetings that I've been at, that he fully supports the 10-year plan to end homelessness. That's been with the students' union. It's been with the Homeless Foundation, you know. But having asked this question, there are a number of programs that are available. The immediacy of those we've been discussing in the House, like the eviction and prevention fund, like the rent supplement program that the minister has addressed . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province of Alberta needs a plan and a plan of action to move homeless people beyond the shelter. The Premier's affordable housing gambit is not working, as evidenced in Fort McMurray, as we talked about here yesterday; the increasing number of homeless on city streets; rents that are still skyrocketing. The recent announcement of a secretariat to end homelessness in 10 years was not a plan; it was a plan to make a plan. That won't help this winter or next. What actual action is the Premier or whoever he wants to pass this off to going to take to move Albertans beyond the shelter?

1:40

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, along with the support through the budget for affordable housing and homelessness we're also providing support programs to those that are homeless. We find that many have issues of their own, generally addictions to drugs or alcohol. We have to deal with those addictions as well. So we have to provide a continuum, not only provide a very secure shelter for the individual, but you also have to take care of the reason that that individual might have ended up in a homeless situation. That is the full extent of the program, dealing with a lot of the issues behind the scenes to make sure that that particular person doesn't end up in that same situation again.

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

Olymel Pork Processing Plant

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Olymel pork processing plant in Red Deer was banned from exporting pork to the United States after food safety infractions were found during a U.S. Department of Agriculture audit. But in the House last Wednesday the Agriculture minister told us that "Olymel can ship to the rest of their customers throughout Canada" and called the infractions minor. My question is to the Premier. If Olymel's meat is unfit for Americans to eat, why is fit for Albertans to eat?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, unsafe food is not allowed anywhere in the North American marketplaces. We have a joint investigation always done by the USDA and also by the CFIA. It's a Canadian jurisdiction because Olymel was shipping product outside of the province and outside of the country, so it automatically falls within federal regulators. Those regulators are working with the provincial government to ensure safety of the product and to see how we can win back the market south of the border.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Maybe the Premier would stand up and make sure that his federal cousins do the right thing and make sure that food is safe for all people regardless of what side of the border it's on.

The USDA report is disgusting. They found condensation dripping onto carcasses from the ceiling, contamination on carcasses, cigarette butts, and so on. I'd like to ask the Premier why he's allowing his agriculture minister to downplay the safety concerns about unsanitary operations instead of demanding that the federal government step in and clean up this facility.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, when I referred to the USDA, it's the United States Department of Agriculture, and the CFIA is the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Sometimes when you use these acronyms, people are wondering what I'm talking about. Both

federal agencies are involved in inspecting the plant and also ensuring that Olymel carries out any of the prescribed procedures that have been imposed either by the USDA or by the CFIA. We're awaiting those reports. We said that we'll support the two agencies in any way possible because the safety of food is of prime importance to the department of agriculture.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Premier talks a good line, but while he's doing that, his agriculture minister is trivializing the concerns about contamination and unsanitary conditions that were found at this plant. Will he stand up now and admit to the House that his agriculture minister was wrong in trying to minimize the impact of this USDA report?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister of agriculture didn't minimize any report. He's a big man, and he'll be able to stand up and defend himself in the House. So the minister of agriculture can respond.

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, under no circumstance in this world will the CFIA allow unsafe food into the Canadian marketplace. I have full faith in the CFIA. The only triviality sits across the way, as far as I'm concerned. If the hon. member would like to come with me to Olymel, I would gladly take him on a plant tour. Then you can see for yourself.

It's pretty sad when the newspapers write the third party's questions.

The Speaker: As interesting as it is, I have to move on to recognize the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Pension Plans

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The taxpayers continue to pay a very dear price for the failure of this government to honour past contracts and to keep commitments that they have made and to accept department recommendations on safety and efficiency. They failed to follow their own legislation and to pay off all debt with surplus dollars. Consequently, we have now had turned over to the taxpayers an additional \$2.2 billion over and above the \$4.4 billion that they recognize they owe the teachers and failed to do it. Why is this government burdening the taxpayers with more debt without receiving a mandate from the people to do this?

Mr. Stelmach: I'm not quite sure where the member is coming from, but if he's talking about the teachers' pension liability, it's about \$2.2 billion. It's a liability. It's not an operational debt. A liability, of course, is an obligation to future payments, and this \$2.2 billion would have grown to a mammoth amount of about \$45 billion had we not dealt with it today. Why would we want to just sit and watch this thing grow in liability and not do anything about it and have the next generation deal with it? Ultimately, they would have had to. So today, now, is the best time. We dealt with it, and the matter is now put to rest. The vote will be taken by the teachers over the next few days, and we will know the outcome.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, they didn't deal with it. They signed now; they're going to pay later. Had they followed their own legislation, they would have paid off the \$4.4 billion years ago, and we wouldn't have raised the level of animosity between the teachers

and the province by not paying that. My question is: if unfunded liabilities are recognized, why is this government recognizing the teachers' unfunded liabilities? What about Albertans for the Canada pension plan and the \$60 billion that's unfunded there? What is this Premier going to do about future Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member has alluded to paying off the teachers' pension plan, and I'm assuming that the question has gone towards the direction of whether or not our bond rating will actually change. Well, six months ago I actually asked the bond rating agencies in New York and Toronto exactly that question, and they said that that has already been taken into consideration with regard to our triple-A bond rating.

When it comes to the Canada pension plan, the Canada pension plan is a 25 per cent funded plan and is deemed to be a 25 per cent funded plan. It is expected to be 25 per cent funded in the year 2025 continuing on to the year 2075.

Mr. Hinman: Well, Mr. Speaker, like the other contracts that they've broken or they haven't honoured, this is costing the taxpayers, and because the oil companies can pay extra taxes and Albertans can pay extra taxes, it doesn't affect our bond rating. The question is: is this government going to do something about the Canada pension plan and realize that we need an Alberta pension plan to protect the prosperity of all Albertans in the future?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe that what the hon. member is referring to is an Alberta pension plan, something that could be supplementary to the Canada pension plan. It's some of the visioning that we are doing, looking at the future, how we secure the future of the next generation and the generation after that. Certainly, discussion around that point has tremendous merit. Let's put it that way.

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

Department of Energy Consultant

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past May a government agency was paying private eyes to spy on Albertans in Rimbey and in Redwater. At the same time Murray A. Nelson, a former senior executive at TransAlta and a former board member of the Alberta Electric System Operator, billed taxpayers \$500 an hour for a total of \$38,000 for 76 hours of work done in May of 2007. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. What did Mr. Nelson do for the taxpayers at a cost of \$500 per hour in May of this year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, it seems that the hon. member is calling into question value for Albertans. I certainly would have to say that I can explain the situation around Mr. Nelson's contract. However, I cannot explain the lack of value in the opposition with respect to what that's costing taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, the key deliverables that we've asked for from Mr. Nelson: an implementation plan to ensure that the new AUC is in place and functional by January 1, 2008. It will include but is not limited to terms of reference, a labour relations strategy, and identification of key supporting regulations to be developed by the department.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Electricity exports from Alberta will force the domestic electricity price in this province even higher than it already is. My question is: why did this government hire Murray A. Nelson at \$500 an hour to increase electricity exports in this province to the lower 48 states? Why is he doing that?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I guess it might be time for a little bit of discussion with the hon. member about which way electrons can travel because, as a matter of fact, if you beef up a transmission system and interties in the province of Alberta, electrons can also travel into the province at a time of need. [interjections]

Mr. MacDonald: Wow. You really should appoint one of these guys as Minister of Energy and let this one go.

Now, my question again is to the Minister of Energy. Who benefits from this \$500 per hour contract? Is it the electricity consumers, or is it the big shots that are promoting electricity deregulation? Which is it? Who benefits?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I will say again about this particular individual – you know, it's odd, and it continues and has done so for the years that I've been here. The members opposite, and particularly this one, take great pleasure – take great pleasure – in calling into question the character of Albertans that work very hard on behalf of this province and on behalf of Albertans. If that's the best constructive thing they can do, I guess they can just continue to be who they are.

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

Mental Health Services

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Health and Wellness said that the report of the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force provides the broader focus needed to address addictions to illicit drugs and substance abuse as well as the mental health issues, which are another key contributor to crime. The need for psychiatric treatment, especially for those who may be self-medicating with illegal drugs and committing crimes, is great, yet the wait times for psychiatric treatment in Alberta are longer than in most other provinces. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why isn't the government doing more to help people get the mental health treatment they need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a focus that came through on the crime and safe communities task force, and there is a commitment to do more in the area of mental health, certainly. But I think we should be very proud of the fact that the Alberta Mental Health Board has a comprehensive strategy for mental health in the province, and they're working towards it, particularly focused on children's mental health. Now with the federal government establishing the Canadian Mental Health Commission, with its head office in Calgary, also with a focus on children's mental health, I think we're really poised to make

progress in this area and make sure our children in particular have access to the mental health services that they need.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, by the time someone enters a treatment program, he or she has already suffered greatly from the devastating effects of mental illness, and when this happens, the greater society suffers as well. Surely, treatment is only one part of a larger strategy to address mental health needs. Can the Minister of Health and Wellness tell us what is being done in the critical area of prevention?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a lot that's happening. In fact, I'm going to be at a conference this Friday in Banff with the mental health showcase talking about all the programs that are available and the co-operation and collaboration that's going on in this area. The Norlien Foundation sponsored a conference in May that brought together a number of the thinkers and collaborators across the province in this area. So there's lots of good work happening. We brought in with the support of the Canadian Mental Health Commission three people from the Bluewater school board in Ontario, which might, Senator Kirby believes, have the best school-based mental health program in the country, to meet with a group of people in the Capital region about programming that they can do. In other words, there's a lot of collaboration happening and good work being done.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Ambulance Services

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The mess this government created is flowing downhill and landing at the front doors of our cities. City hospitals are so backed up that paramedics are forced to wait up to eight hours in emergency rooms, which also means that those ambulances are not available to respond to calls. My first question is to the minister of health. There were 24 red alerts in Edmonton just last month, and that is only expected to get worse. Why didn't the minister do anything over the past year to prevent this predictable situation?

Mr. Hancock: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, the minister of health did quite a lot in this area. I met with both the Calgary regional health authority and the Capital health authority to talk about what they might do in terms of the emergency areas, how we can expand the capacity of the emergency areas, putting in place the full capacity protocol, as an example, which has been implemented in both places with some degree of modification for the circumstances. We're doing a lot of work in terms of how we can move patients through so that there's more capacity at the front end of the emergency. The fact of the matter is that there is increased activity at emergencies notwithstanding initiatives such as the Capital Health Link, which was created a number of years ago and took a lot of pressure off the demand for emergency. That's been expanded across the province. There's lots of good work happening.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister. Ground ambulance funding has remained static since 2005. How does the

minister expect municipalities to respond quickly to emergencies when provincial funding is not keeping up with inflation or population increase?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Prior to 2005, of course, ambulances were run by municipalities and funded by municipalities. In 2005 the government made a decision to move to supporting ambulance services as a part of the health system, but that was put on hold. As a result of that, there was a hole in the municipalities' budgets because they hadn't planned in that year, and the government stepped forward and filled that hole with \$55 million. That doesn't stop municipalities from increasing their funding for ambulance services, as they used to do in the past. However, we are working on an ambulance policy, which I hope to be able to bring forward very shortly, to deal with the completion of that transition program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Well, this government backed out of the deal and left the municipalities on the hook.

To the same minister. In April, when there was still snow on the ground, the minister indicated that he would soon be deciding whether to transfer ambulance service delivery from the municipalities to the health regions. There is snow on the ground again. Has the minister made this decision, or are municipalities going to have to wait in limbo for another two years?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. One thing I've learned on this job is that issues aren't always as simple as they seem to be on the surface. With ambulance services that seems to be the case. There are a lot of interests across the province with respect to ambulance services. There have been at least five reports on the area. Over the course of the year I've met with a number of stakeholders and interested people with respect to the area. I've reviewed the pilot projects, I've reviewed the reports, and we're moving forward with a policy, which will come in the fullness of time.

Drug Abuse Treatment and Prevention

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, low-life, scumbag criminals are continuing to peddle drugs to young Albertans, hooking them on these harmful drugs and causing endless grief to Alberta families. Recently there have been reports that some Alberta families have had to send their children to clinics in the United States at great expense or to other provinces for drug addiction treatment. My question is for the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. Why can't young Albertans get treatment here in Alberta, where they're close to their families?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, this again was an issue that was addressed in the crime and safe communities task force, and that supplemented the work that was done on the crystal meth task force, which clearly identified a need for more treatment programs. Having said that, we're committed to providing those treatment beds right here in Alberta, but we do have services through AADAC: outpatient counselling in more than 50 communities, mobile services, intensive day-treatment programs in Edmonton and

Calgary, detoxification services and residential services in Edmonton and Calgary and Lethbridge. In instances where young people are using substances that endanger themselves or others, parents can access mandatory treatment through PCHAD, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act.

Dr. Brown: My first supplemental is to the same minister. One of the most important recommendations of the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force was that the government provide mandatory, early, and ongoing education for children and youth to build their skills and reduce the risks of them getting involved in gangs, drugs, violence, and other crime. What is the government doing to ensure that Alberta students are properly educated on the dangers of drug use and addiction?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is one area where AADAC has very, very good materials. I've actually discussed this with educators, and they've told me that the materials that AADAC puts together are very valuable, very useful tools for the classroom. AADAC counsellors are available to do that resource work in our educational institutions.

It is very important that we deal with drugs on a preventative basis rather than having to always deal with it on a treatment basis. A prevention strategy will include social marketing as well, continuing the types of ads that people may have seen with respect to crystal meth. In fact, there's just a phenomenal one on YouTube that is now going around from Facebook to Facebook, which is an important way to get the message out to young people. We also, as I mentioned, though, have brought in people from a school-based program in Ontario to help us with collaborative processes here in our schools.

Dr. Brown: My final supplemental is to the Solicitor General. What is his department doing to step up detection and apprehension of these low-life scumbags that are dealing drugs to young people in Alberta?

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

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier said during the release of the safe communities task force report, "We're going to lower the boom on crime." The Premier also spoke about drug dealers who are sentencing our youth to a lifetime of addiction. We will ensure that these criminals are brought to justice. We are moving forward to implement the recommendations of the task force. This year alone we're spending \$18 million to fight organized crime. This includes funding for integrated policing units to target and dismantle organized crime networks and gangs who rely on the drug trade to make money.

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

Aboriginal Children's Services

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to UNICEF aboriginal children are one of the most vulnerable populations in Canada, facing enormous challenges. Overall the poverty rate for aboriginal children is close to three times that of any other Canadian

citizen or child. On-reserve aboriginal children who enter the children's services system in Alberta face care that is comparatively substandard to care for off-reserve children. The Auditor General himself remarked that there were observable declines in standard of care on reserves. To the Minister of Children's Services: why is this gap between provincially administered children's programs so wide?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member has raised a very serious issue. We know that aboriginal children make up 8 per cent of the child population in this province, yet they're 58 per cent of children in care. That is one of the reasons why our historic agreement with the First Nations and INAC was so important and so critical. It is intended to get money onto the reserves, modelled after the Alberta response model, and start supporting families before they reach a crisis on reserves.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over 50 per cent of children in care are aboriginal children, yet they make up only 15 per cent of the population. This is a huge problem in this community, and it has now yet again caught the attention of the international community, causing just embarrassment for Alberta. Why are there not more programs available that are specifically designed to bridge the gap between provincially administered programs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again she's raising a very good point. We obviously have some jurisdictional issues, but that is not to say that we as a province will ever walk away from trying to provide services. Aboriginal children are Albertans after all, and that is why we're working so hard with First Nations and INAC on the historic agreement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. In a system that should work to keep children with their families and use apprehension only as a last resort, Alberta's number of children in protective custody is nearly 10,500. The increasing number of permanent guardianship orders and adoption staff involvement in child apprehensions signal a move toward provincial wardship. To the minister: when will the ministry focus on strengthening supports to these families where appropriate in order to support reunification with their children rather than simply removing them?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what we do. We will always try to have children remain with their families. But at the end of the day we will always do what is best for the child, and sometimes that does require us to intervene.

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

Emergency Housing

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's okay to talk about a 10-year homeless plan and secretariats and all the rest of it, but we have a crisis right now. The weather has changed, and there's a growing

homeless problem. More and more people are vulnerable out there today. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Rather than talk about grandiose plans, what is this government prepared to do immediately, as the weather has changed, to add capacity to our shelters so that nobody freezes out there?

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

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for the question because I want to say that this government is addressing the issues of homelessness, addressing the issues of housing. In fact, this year \$285 million was added into the budget, including the housing rent supplement, also to the eviction prevention and homeless fund. We are working at helping individuals that need help.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, that's cold comfort to the thousands of homeless people out there. You can talk about all the programs that aren't working, but the reality is that we have a crisis right now. The weather has changed. What is your message to the homeless today? Is it, you know, "Be happy; get your cardboard box insulated"? Is that what we're saying? Don't give us numbers. What are you prepared to do now?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is that we have added more funding to the emergency shelters fund, and that addresses some of the concerns that are taking place in Calgary and in Edmonton and in Fort McMurray and in the rest of the locations where there is need for emergency shelters.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, that's absolutely not the case. With the amount of money we're putting in, there's still growing homelessness. There are 500 more in Capital health requiring subsidized housing than there were in the spring. It's worse now. What's it going to take? Is it going to take some stories about people freezing again before the government adds the capacity for shelters to get through this winter?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that winter has not caught this government by surprise. In fact, we have been working since summer, preparing if this situation should arise. Seven point five million dollars for winter emergency funding for Alberta communities: Calgary, \$4.3 million for up to 450 spaces; Edmonton, \$2.2 million for an additional 350 spaces; Red Deer, \$240,000 for 50 spaces; Grande Prairie, \$140,000 for 25 spaces.

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

Addictions and Mental Health Treatment

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's crime reduction and safe communities response includes the expansion of treatment beds by adding facility-based and residential treatment beds to address addictions and mental health problems, both of which are identified as key contributors to crime. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How does the minister propose to increase the number of treatment beds available for addictions and mental health problems when there's funding already in place for 400 treatment beds in the province's hospitals that cannot be utilized because of staff shortages?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member raises

a very good question related to the delivery of health care in the province. The reality is that there is a challenge to recruit the appropriate number of health care workers in Alberta's market today, and it's not limited to health care. We have a health workforce strategy that has been put together to try and increase both the way we value the employees that are in the market today and keep them and make them more productive, how we recruit more from abroad, and how we train more Albertans to fill those places. Also, Mr. Speaker, we've recently added money to the AADAC budget, for example, so that we could increase the wages for contracted staff to make them more competitive so that we can provide the workforce that we need. Under the crime and safe communities strategy . . .

2:10

The Speaker: We have to go to the other hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental is to the same minister. While treatment may be a solution for those already known to be afflicted with mental health issues and/or addictions, both of these problems are clearly on the rise in our fine province. My question is: how much impact can realistically be expected from these beds over the short and long term? Doesn't this need to be part of a larger plan to be truly effective?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, indeed, treatment beds are the last-resort piece. Treating after the problem is already resolved, and of course, as I've been talking about over the course of the last year, the real future is in prevention. That's in working through the school portal to children in schools, providing the wraparound services that are necessary to make sure that they get the help where they need it, that we work early to avoid children getting involved with drugs. And, yes, as the Solicitor General indicated in an answer to a previous question, getting hard on those that are peddling drugs to our children. That's where the real action has to take place, and that's the strategy that's outlined in the crime and safe communities task force.

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

Cultural Diversity in Seniors' Care

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to Statistics Canada 1 in 4 Canadians are foreign born. That ratio will increase to 1 in 3 by the year 2010, and more often people from different racial and ethnic groups are moving into long-term care centre facilities. To the minister of health. Seniors from different ethnic backgrounds face challenges in long-term care centres like limited activities, communication, and discrimination. What is this government doing to increase the ability of long-term care staff to overcome these barriers?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very interesting question and not one that I've had raised before, but I think it is important for us to work with long-term care to make sure that, first of all, they're very sensitive to the ethnocultural needs of residents. For example, the Chinese senior citizens' centre in downtown Edmonton does a very good job of making sure that there's a full range of services for elderly Chinese people within a culturally sensitive location and supports them in that way. There needs also to be that kind of

sensitivity in other locations where it's not devoted to one particular group, to make sure that those services are available, both language services and food services, in a culturally sensitive way.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think, Minister, that was in the task force recommendation, and I was expecting the government to implement those things.

Anyway, my second question to the same minister. For many people entering long-term care centres, cultural integration and communication are the highest, biggest challenges. Will this minister consider a mandate re cultural diversity and sensitivity training for all long-term care providers?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, it may be a bit of overkill to mandate it for all long-term care providers, but I think that any long-term care provider, whether it's being done in the private sector or by a not-for-profit organization or, in fact, by a regional health authority, needs to be sensitive to the needs of their customers, their patients. They should make sure that their staff have access to the cultural sensitivity training that they need to make sure that the Albertans that are in their care get the best service possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: will this minister commit to building a long-term care facility on the south side, south of Edmonton, that accommodates culture specific needs related to food, language, tradition, and religion? Thank you.

Mr. Hancock: Well, I guess that begs the question, Mr. Speaker, as to which language, culture, food, and religion. The hon. member didn't say. But the hon. member knows, because we've had discussions, that I'm very supportive of the idea that where there is a large enough group of people to sustain it, make sure that there are care facilities of a long-term care nature or continuing-care nature that are sensitive to the needs of the population. It's very, very important to have. It's important that Albertans, as they grow older, are treated with respect and dignity regardless of their culture, their background, or their needs.

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

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An AISH recipient receiving \$1,050 per month can't make ends meet no matter how they stretch them. This \$1,050 a month is spent in the following manner: 80 per cent on housing, 20 per cent on food, zero per cent left for utilities, zero per cent left for transportation, zero per cent left for clothing, and zero per cent left for quality of life and any other needs. My questions are to the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Could the minister inform the House and the 36,000 Albertans on AISH as to what services or supports are available to them under these very difficult circumstances?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak a little bit about the AISH program, that is much more than just the financial assistance of \$1,050. It does also encompass very extensive health

benefits that average about \$322 per person. That would be a waiver of the health care premiums. It would expand to all of their family coverage, spouse and dependent children. It would also give them prescription drugs, eye care, dental care. It would go on to emergency ambulance services, essential diabetic supplies, waivers of Alberta Aids to Daily Living copayments. All of those things ensure that they would also have the supports of whatever health needs would come along with it. But that isn't even all that would be . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Everyone from bankers to financial institutions to housing experts agree that only 30 per cent of your income is the most that you should pay for a safe and healthy place to live. Could the minister advise the 36,000 Albertans on AISH, especially those living in large urban centres, if help is on the way?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to those on AISH I would also like to mention that about one-quarter of those on AISH are also under the programs for persons with developmental disabilities. There are very expanded programs that cover one full quarter of all of those on AISH that are well in addition to these financial supports. That averages almost \$60,000 per individual for that program alone.

We could also go to the things that we're trying to do with their living. There are about 1,100 clients on AISH who, unfortunately, because of the disabilities and the health issues, have to live in modified AISH, which provides them long-term care assistance for their housing and their needs. Others have PDD support . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. It's understood that AISH support is paid to individuals based on the disability of that particular individual. My question is: why is this individual being penalized and his income clawed back because the spouse is working and earning money?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, nearly half of those who are on AISH do earn some form of income through supports other than AISH. It is income tested. What we've tried to do and have achieved is to ensure that there is a greater allowance for earnings of income that won't be clawed back from benefits. If you're a single individual, you can receive up to \$400, as a family \$975. Then even the next thousand dollars each would only have 50 per cent of that taken back off the benefits. We've had a major initiative that has been going for unemployment: how do we see that those people with AISH have an ability to also be involved in productive work and included in our society?

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

All-terrain Vehicle Safety

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's children continue to die in ATV accidents. This past weekend a 12-year-old boy died in a quad crash in Nampa. He was not wearing a helmet at the time, unfortunately. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: will this government take measures to mandate helmet use by children on off-highway vehicles in this province?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, again, in tragic accidents like that my

heart really goes out to those families that that happens to. But we are looking at the Traffic Safety Act right now. We are going to consult with Albertans on helmet laws. We have legislation in place right now under the traffic act that it is illegal on public land for anyone under the age of 14 years old to operate an all-terrain vehicle without adult supervision, and we do plan on consulting with Albertans on that.

2:20

Mr. Bonko: Well, it's also against the law to not buckle up, but people still do it.

Mr. Speaker, Quebec is one example where helmet use by children on an ATV is mandatory. While it may be difficult to enforce such a law universally, taking concrete action will at least save some lives here. To the minister: why is this province lagging behind in protecting children from serious ATV injuries and accidents?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I don't think we're lagging behind at all. As I have just told the hon. member, we do have legislation in place. We do have education programs in place, and we plan on consulting with Albertans – I want to say it again – on mandatory-type laws.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While human costs of these accidents must be our primary concern, the health care costs must also be factored in. ATV injuries result in disabilities, brain injuries, blindness, and other lifelong conditions that are costly to treat. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: is the minister committed enough to a sustainable health care system to support a mandatory helmet law for youth?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wearing helmets any time you're engaged in dangerous activity is good advice, and it's one that parents really should instruct their children to do when they're engaged in that type of activity. I'm always at the forefront of promoting the idea that, first of all, we should educate, and then, if necessary, we should legislate to make sure that safe practices are carried out.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 86 questions and answers today.

We will now return to our Routine.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**
(continued)

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings. They come from Joanna Gottlob, Sarah Hillmer, Derek Wynnyk, Katie Russell, and Mark Sheppard, and they're all on the theme of homelessness and the lack of affordable housing units. They indicate that we're missing in Edmonton alone over 5,000 units.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Then, hon. members, today I'd like to table the appropriate copies of the following Members' Services orders as a result of recent

meetings of the Members' Services Committee. First of all, Members' Services Order 2/07, which will come into force on April 1, 2008; MSC 3/07, which came into force on November 13, 2007; Members' Services Committee Order 4/07, which will come into force April 1, 2008; Members' Services Committee Order 5/07, which came into force on November 13, 2007; and Members' Services Committee Order 6/07, which will come into force on April 1, 2008. I'm tabling this, and members will receive copies of this shortly.

head:

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Reappointment of Information and Privacy Commissioner

34. Mr. Renner moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the November 15, 2007, report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices and recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that Franklin J. Work be reappointed Information and Privacy Commissioner for a four-year term.

The Speaker: This is a debatable motion, if members would like to participate. If not, shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 34 carried]

head:

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 46

Alberta Utilities Commission Act

[Adjourned debate November 15: Mr. VanderBurg]

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There is a stench that pervades this province, and that stench is Bill 46. The stench comes from something that should have been buried like an animal's dead carcass but has only been covered over. That is the stench that rural residents find when they smell their well after a fracking that has occurred in the area. It's the smell of coal-bed methane that has penetrated into their well without baseline testing preceding it. It is the smell of sour gas that is in the air that the family experienced from Bearspaw Petroleum's failure to adequately control their wellhead. It's the smell that residents in the Pincher Creek area woke up to the other day. It's the smell that came across from Fort Saskatchewan. After 40 minutes it was finally brought to an end when the fire was brought into control. Bill 46 stinks.

Two weeks ago when we were out to Lacombe – that is, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and myself – as we approached the town, we saw a large sign erected by the residents that said: kill Bill 46. The reason they wanted that bill killed was that it eliminated the need for spies because spies aren't necessary. If you can't get to the hearing, there's nobody to spy on at the hearing. People were incensed. Over 350 rural Albertans showed up at that meeting at Lacombe, and I want to give credit to the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka for having had the bravery to stand up as a member of the panel and represent his constituents.

Those constituents, however, reminded me of something from a

Frankenstein movie minus the pitchforks and the torches. They were concerned that their interests were not being reflected. Thanks to the expertise of individuals like Joe Anglin from the Lavesta group and a respected Alberta journalist, Andrew Nikiforuk, they went through every section of Bill 46 and pointed out the shortcomings, one of the shortcomings being the back-to-the-future clause, which would simply erase everything that has happened since now and 2003. The sins of the government would just very conveniently be covered up.

They also acknowledged the idea that an individual could only put forward a concern in a hearing if they were materially affected. Now, the definition of materially affected is an awfully broad definition. For example, I wouldn't have been able to be the last intervenor at the Compton hearing on the sour gas well in southeast Calgary. That hearing had the effect of causing the evacuation of 350,000 Calgarians living in southeast Calgary. Why that well ever got to the point of having a hearing rather than just simply being denied, I will never know. That is the problem associated with Bill 46. I and members who couldn't necessarily demonstrate that they were materially affected would not have been able to intervene.

This Bill 46 takes away individuals' rights. The arrogance associated with Bill 46 is the arrogance that is equivalent to what the member from Compton Petroleum stated, that the chances of a blowout were the square root of zero. Well, as I say, tell that to the people down in Pincher Creek in the spring of 2005 when twice the Shell Canada plant failed to ignite and sour gas permeated the region. Tell it to the people of Bearspaw, the family who was affected and had to go into hospital, whose livestock, whose special horses were affected. Tell it to the people in Fort Saskatchewan. Tell it to the people in Whitecourt who are concerned about the possibility of a nuclear reactor. If anything goes wrong with a nuclear facility, it will not be the appeal process that led to the concerns of a nuclear facility. The effect will be devastating, and it will be felt far beyond the simple borders of the county.

2:30

In terms of hearings that have currently taken place and have been ignored, look at what happened when Mayor Melissa Blake pointed out the concerns over the rapid development in the tar sands area and how it was directly impacting on the infrastructure of the municipality of Wood Buffalo and specifically the city of Fort McMurray. The EUB, like Pontius Pilate, just simply wiped their hands of the situation and said it wasn't in their mandate. They did not have the power to provide Melissa Blake and the citizens of Fort McMurray and surrounding areas that she represents with any assurance that there would be any slowing down of the rate of the development of the tar sands.

Of course, our Premier has said that he refuses to put the brakes on that development. Unfortunately, the Premier also seems to be unwilling to grab the steering wheel and stand up for Albertans who are very concerned about Bill 46 and the secrecy associated with it. Bill 46 limits the representation a person can have when coming before a hearing.

I mentioned the 350 that showed up at Lacombe. There was a smaller turnout but a significant concern from members of Camrose who came out this past Wednesday, when the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, my colleague from Calgary-Elbow, and I went out to talk to the individuals. In the crowd was, again, Mr. Joe Anglin of the Lavesta group, who has had his rights tromped, who has been spied upon but refuses to give up. As I noted in my member's statement, Joe Anglin states: democracy isn't something you have; it's something you do. With Bill 46 something is being

done to the democratic process that limits people's ability to attend hearings and to appeal the process.

We've already seen, before this Bill 46 came in, what happened to individuals in the Longview area who are concerned about the fracking that would take place along the eastern range, that area whose underground springs and aquifers provide the water for the town of Nanton and all the farms and ranches in the surrounding areas. Twice I've attended meetings at the MD headquarters at Chain Lakes, where members from the Pekisko Group, members from the town of Nanton, and surrounding landowners have expressed great concern about the possible damage from fracking that could occur hundreds of miles away from the source. However, because the exploration was not taking place on their specific land, they didn't have the right to appeal that decision.

Bill 46 makes it impossible for anyone upon whose land a drilling or a tower is put to have a fair hearing. It makes it impossible for literally millions of Albertans to have a voice. For example – and I'll not go into detail – the city of Calgary: over a million residents but they can't have a voice as a committee member on the proposed new utilities group. They were denied the opportunity to participate in the hearings on the transmission lines that were going to go from Lake Wabamun down to Calgary. One million people who cannot be a part of that group. They may get a partial representation through the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, but they have no direct input. One million people whose concerns are not being addressed.

Talk about appointments versus elected representation. That's what this splitting of the board is all about: government appointees representing government interests at the expense of individual landowners. Currently the EUB is funded 60 per cent by the industry, 40 per cent by the government. They're appointed by the government. Where in that formula are people represented?

Now, take Bill 46. Another clause in Bill 46 suggests that rather than having your own representation, the government will appoint an advocate to represent you, providing you qualify for that representation. They basically get you coming and going. First off, the fox in the henhouse is going to be representing the hens if those hens qualify because they can demonstrate that they will be materially affected. Well, as I stated earlier, whether it's nuclear, whether it's coal-bed methane, whether it's sour gas, people have a right to express their concerns at a hearing. It isn't just the person upon whose land the interference is caused. Every Albertan who has a concern, whether they're a member of an environmental group such as the Bragg Creek coalition, the Pekisko Group, whether they're a member of the Sierra Club, whether they are a member of the ND Party or the Green Party or the Alberta Alliance – if they have concerns, especially as elected representatives, they should be able to appear at a hearing.

At the hearing at Rimbey I understand that a member was denied access to the process. These concerns of lack of democratic representation, as I've mentioned before, cause a stench to be felt, to be smelt across the province.

Last week members opposite objected to my quoting of Sir Walter Scott's reference . . .

Some Hon. Members: Careful. Be careful.

Mr. Chase: Careful about quoting? I will be careful because I added "he." Yes.

Sir Walter Scott indicated that, oh, what a wicked web we weave when first we practise to deceive. Bill 46 is about deception. It's about suppression. It's about manipulation. I also brought forward

the quote from 1984, George Orwell: “Who controls the past controls the future.” Bill 46 controls the past. In fact, it goes all the way back in the past to 2003 to cover up the government’s mishandling between 2003 and 2007.

In terms of stench another literary example. This example comes from a play about government corruption, where a brother killed his own brother and assumed the throne. He then married his brother’s wife, and in the process of the time of the play people die. At the end of the play it is noted that there’s something rotten in the state of Denmark.

The Speaker: Unfortunately, hon. members, this portion has now left us, but we do have opportunity under Standing Order 29(2)(a) if an hon. member would have a question and for an answer. The hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Boutilier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have numerous questions to the hon. member. He’s made reference to the municipality of Wood Buffalo – it’s not the municipality; it’s actually the regional municipality – and made comments relative to our mayor but really, really, I think, missed the entire mark of what was said at the EUB. I might add, because I had the pleasure of being an intervenor at that EUB, and specifically it was dealing with the issue of the Suncor Horizon project, this government has always taken the approach that we can grow the pie, and we can grow the pie at the same time . . .

2:40

Mr. Martin: How do you grow a pie?

Mr. Boutilier: You can grow the economic pie that keeps people in jobs. I want to remind the member that it’s called oil sands sweet blend, not tar sands. It seems to be another Jack Layton comment that comes out. Actually, that’s more from the other comments.

My question is simply this. At the time when we were there, we talked about a government dealing with high-growth strategies. The mayor was there, and the mayor was very supportive of the approach our government was taking. When they said the Radke report that came out in dealing with high growth, which has offered an oil sands secretariat, which is headed up by the President of Treasury Board – I have a letter that I will table in this House where the mayor thanks the government for its vision and its leadership. So to imply that the mayor was intimating as if she didn’t like our approach is simply not true.

I’m asking the member to come up and actually respond and withdraw the comment because the bottom line is that our oil sands secretariat – the Premier came to the discovery centre, announced over \$500 million, announced infrastructure programs of over \$200 million for housing. He announced \$105 million for a new water treatment plant. No other city has got that support, but a hundred per cent of the support is from the province. Then they proceed at the oil sands secretariat to offer \$1,040 for a living-out allowance for teachers, for support staff, for nurses. If you support the project, the reality of it is that we are taking quick action.

I ask the member: will you withdraw your comments? They are not reflective of the current reality.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Simple Simon met a pie man stretching his pie. Now we also have a stretch coming from across the way. When

the member opposite appeared at the Alberta EUB hearing, the member wasn’t sure what hat he was wearing. Was he wearing the MLA hat for the . . .

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

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. He wasn’t sure whether he was wearing his hat as the MLA for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo or whether he was wearing his environmental hat. When members of the media asked him which hat he was wearing, I believe his answer was: I’m capable of wearing both hats at the same time. Well, this double-speak double-hat double-talk that’s associated with Bill 46 is unfortunately prevalent in this House today.

Mayor Melissa Blake appealed to this government in 2005 along with a delegation of 30 individuals representing First Nations, Métis, health boards, education. She asked this esteemed group, with a very strong PowerPoint presentation, for \$1.2 billion worth of support in the way of infrastructure funding because she was aware that the town was not keeping up with the pace of approvals in the oil sands.

Rev. Abbott: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Chase: Therefore, she appealed to the government. What they got was an interest-free loan as opposed to an absolute grant that approached anywhere near \$1.2 billion. In 2006 Mayor Melissa Blake came back, and she indicated that because she hadn’t received the \$1.2 billion, due to cost of inflation, the fact of not tackling a series of infrastructural concerns in Wood Buffalo, the price tag had risen to \$2 billion.

The Speaker: Hon. member, the time provision of five minutes under the Standing Order has now left us as well. However, we do seem to have two points of order. First of all, the hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Boutilier: Yeah. Thanks. Mr. Speaker, I ask the member to withdraw his comments. Simply, I’m very aware of what hat I wear. What he was suggesting was basically intimating that I didn’t know. That was not true. He made quotes that were inaccurate and incorrect. In actual fact, he should withdraw it because, simply, what he said is not true.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader on this point of order? Okay. Please proceed.

Ms Blakeman: I think the member was responding to an incident that was quite well documented in the media in which there were a number of different titles that were offered and accepted by the member. Rather than saying that this is inaccurate, I think it’s widely available that the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo was trying to insist that he was there as an MLA and, in fact, was at that time the sitting Minister of Environment, and that caused the series of questions from the media. So the Member for Calgary-Varsity was entirely accurate.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, on this particular point. The hon. member couldn’t be more inaccurate in terms of what he has said.

In fact, I also will suggest that his quote was wrong, inaccurate. It is widely published. I will table it here so the member can consider it. Even more than that, his comments relative to what was said by this member at an EUB hearing are inaccurate, untrue, and he should withdraw his comments.

The Speaker: Well, hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations, you jumped up before I had a chance to recognize you. In politeness and courtesy from the chair I let you continue, but it really was a no-no.

The hon. member is both MLA and minister. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity alluded to that. We're going to move on unless we have another point of order.

Hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, you have a point of order?

Rev. Abbott: Yes, I do.

The Speaker: Well, then, we'll hear your point of order, sir.

Point of Order

Question and Comment Period

Rev. Abbott: Mr. Speaker, I have a point of order. It's actually our Standing Order 29(2)(a), which talks about: "a period not exceeding 5 minutes shall be made available, if required, to allow Members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech and to allow responses to each Member's questions." There were a number of MLAs that were indicating that they would like to ask questions of the member. The tradition in this House is to allow 30 seconds for a question and 30 seconds for an answer when we're on the five-minute question-and-answer period. I would hope that we could hold to that. I know that the Member for Calgary-Varsity went on and on and on with his answer. I believe it was a diversion tactic so that other members could not get up and challenge him on the inaccuracies of his speech because his speech was completely inaccurate and completely out to lunch. It was totally off the topic of the bill, and members couldn't get up and say that. [interjections]

The Speaker: No. It's okay. I think I'm going to rule on this. Okay?

Number one, there is no tradition of 30 seconds. Number two, this is question and comment period, and the chair was actually really moving in the chair for quite a period of time because the hon. gentleman that the chair recognized first to raise a question actually made a comment for three minutes of the five. The opportunity then afforded to the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity was less than two minutes of the five minutes. So who does the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar want me to draft and quarter? If it's a point of order against the hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations . . . [interjections] Okay. We've tested the five-minute thing today. We'll now move on.

Debate Continued

The Speaker: I did have a speakers list some time ago. These are the following six speakers: the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, then Drumheller-Stettler, then Cardston-Taber-Warner, then Calgary-Elbow, then Bonnyville-Cold Lake. The names will be identified as the next speaker comes up. If the member, unfortunately, is away at their office for a few minutes, we'll just keep going and substituting an alternate member back and forth.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to have an opportunity to join the debate on Bill 46, the Alberta Utilities Commission Act. I want to commend the hon. Minister of Energy for bringing this piece of legislation forward. I believe it is important to emphasize that Bill 46 will further our government's commitment to ensuring that Alberta's energy resource and utility concerns are dealt with in an efficient and expedient manner while protecting the rights of landowners and consumers. This legislation was designed to benefit all Albertans in this time of tremendous growth, which is one of the key reasons for introducing it in the spring sitting of this Legislature. The Alberta government realized the complexity of Bill 46 and wanted to allow Albertans and stakeholders the opportunity to thoroughly assess all the sections within this legislation.

2:50

I am pleased to acknowledge that while the Legislature was adjourned throughout the summer months, the Department of Energy conducted successful consultations with stakeholders regarding Bill 46. Understanding all aspects of the legislation was essential, and our government established a stakeholder advisory committee that has and will continue to meet with representative groups to develop a comprehensive implementation strategy. These discussions engage the public on the provisions of Bill 46 and provide opportunities for our government and Albertans to critically analyze what is being proposed.

As an MLA and as an Albertan it was a privilege for me to be a participant in a public discussion on Bill 46 in Lacombe on November 7. At this meeting in Lacombe some important issues were brought up that need to be clarified. It was indicated to me that the beneficial intention of a few sections of this legislation can be improved through amendments. Due to the importance of this legislation, I will be supporting appropriate amendments that will provide valuable clarification to these sections of Bill 46. I am confident that our government through the diligent efforts of the Department of Energy will continue to give critical attention to many issues regarding Bill 46 that are of concern to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 46 is a pragmatic approach to the huge amount of applications that the EUB currently oversees, as has been mentioned. This past year the board received over 60,000 applications compared to the almost 19,000 it processed in 1995-96, a mere decade ago. Our government has acknowledged that as the pace of our energy development continues to excel, Albertans will need a better mechanism for handling their concerns. To address these increasing workloads, Bill 46 will implement two separate boards with clear and distinct mandates that will improve the effectiveness of the board's proceedings. The mandate of the Energy Resources Conservation Board, the ERCB, will solely focus on the responsible development of Alberta's resources, including oil, natural gas, oil sands, coal-bed methane, and other mineral resources. Bill 46 will also establish the Alberta utilities commission, which will supervise the distribution and sale of electricity and natural gas to Alberta consumers.

Mr. Speaker, the intent of both of these boards is to ensure that our government is taking the appropriate measures to allow Alberta's regulatory system to address more issues, not less. I am pleased to reassure all Albertans that Bill 46 was drafted with their concerns at the forefront of our agenda. Our government sought ways to improve the ability of Albertans to voice their concerns. The Alberta government through the AUC will continue to ensure that intervenor funding is maintained for directly affected landowners. It is important to emphasize that small consumers will continue to

receive representation through the UCA, or the Utilities Consumer Advocate.

The boards will still preside over landowner and consumer concerns with the thoroughness and diligence that is expected for all legal matters. Openness and transparency are an essential aspect of this legislation. Each board will continue to ensure that full public notification is given when any application is made. To strengthen public participation, a public hearing will be held – and I'll repeat it: will be held – even if only one person will be directly or adversely affected by any application.

In the circumstance that no person requests a hearing and if no one is adversely affected, a hearing will not be held. But, again, I repeat: if only one affected person asks for a hearing, that hearing will be held. The legislation is designed to ensure that the public has the means and ability to exercise all their contentions and their concerns. As with any matter that has serious legal implications, there needs to be an avenue for appeal. Bill 46 will retain the present course for appeal that allows questions related to law or jurisdiction on regulatory decisions to be appealed to the Court of Appeal. In this area there is no change from present legislation. If new evidence and information are presented that would strengthen a past decision, the two boards will uphold the ability to vary a decision.

Mr. Speaker, our government has demonstrated leadership in establishing an appropriate regulatory regime for Alberta's energy resources and utilities. Bill 46 is an opportunity for this government to enable two boards to deal with energy applications in a proficient way that upholds the rights of all Albertans. We comprehend the implications that these decisions have for landowners and consumers of this province. That is why our government has taken every action within our capacity to ensure that Bill 46 does not favour the interests of any particular group or stakeholder. It will implement independent and nonpartisan boards that will function in the best interests of all Albertans, including landowners and consumers. I look forward to further discussion and the introduction of amendments at the appropriate time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have Standing Order 29(2)(a) available. Because of the interest by a number of members in the last few minutes, when we exercised this, we'll try and abide with 45 seconds, 45 seconds, which is the same approach we've taken, and that would allow within a maximum of five minutes about six responses.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. The clock starts now.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the member who just spoke, what is happening here is that the government is concentrating on this phrase: affected landowner. Does the member not understand how aggrieved the other parties feel that it's only the directly affected person that can trigger most of what's now included in this bill? If you have a house across the road from the landowner who is legitimately recognized under this act, you have no say in this. You cannot call a public hearing. You can't trigger any of the other mechanisms that are available in this bill, and that's why people are feeling so aggrieved. They can be in the shadow of a development. They can be literally across the street from it. They can be at an invisible line . . .

The Speaker: Could we move on now?

Hon. member, do you want to respond?

Mr. Prins: I believe all interested Albertans can write in, in writing.

They may not have intervenor status, but they can write to these things. All their considerations will be taken into account.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question at this time to the hon. member is this: if the effective representation of Albertans under this proposed bill becomes law and we have only intervenor status being provided by the Utilities Consumer Advocate, how is this system going to advance the interests of Alberta consumers of electricity?

The Speaker: The hon. member, if you wish to respond.

Mr. Prins: No. Thanks.

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

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the previous speaker from the other side. Considering the industrial development that we've seen here in the province over these past 10 years and then into the ensuing 10 years, say, with the Industrial Heartland, how is this Bill 46 going to accommodate for the necessity to do cumulative impact assessments, which precludes your idea that you are in fact are going to have only people directly affected? This line that you're trying to draw here completely ignores the fact that it's cumulative impact assessments that we require.

The Speaker: Hon. member, do you want to respond?

Mr. Prins: Well, I believe that the Department of Environment is dealing with that in another way.

Thanks.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Gold Bar, do you have another question?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, I do, for the hon. member. In section 9(4) of Bill 46 it states: "the commission is not required . . . to afford an opportunity to a person . . . to be represented by counsel." Can the hon. member please explain that line for us for the record?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member, if you wish.

Mr. Prins: I believe that members that are not directly affected can represent themselves, but they will not have paid intervenors.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm again looking at another problematic area. Section 9(3) says that the commission does not have to hold hearings if the proposal applicant has met the rules affecting landowners. I mean, how is that going to make it a more open process when, in fact, you can make a ruling that excludes people from the beginning by using a set of circumstances? It doesn't seem to make sense to me.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Others? Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you. Again to the hon. member

regarding section 9(4) of Bill 46, which states: “the commission is not required . . . to afford an opportunity to a person . . . to be represented by counsel.” Does the hon. member consider that to be unconstitutional?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

3:00

Mr. Prins: No comment.

The Speaker: Others? Okay.

Mr. MacDonald: I have another question.

The Speaker: We still have a few seconds left, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. This is very interesting.

Now, the city of Calgary was denied standing in the AltaLink application to build an export line because the board ruled that the city was not directly or adversely affected. To the hon. member: will Bill 46 correct that deficiency?

Mr. Prins: No comment.

The Speaker: Others? No more? Okay. Then we'll move forward.

The following is the speakers' list: Edmonton-Calder, followed by Drumheller-Stettler, then Cardston-Taber-Warner, Calgary-Elbow, Bonnyville-Cold Lake, Edmonton-Mill Woods, and Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm speaking with great interest, and we're certainly going to explore this Bill 46 in great detail. At the most basic level Bill 46, in the minds of our caucus, runs contrary to the mandate of open and accountable governance set by the standards of this Legislature but also by the Premier since he's taken office. This seems to be crafted as a very broad bill and a very blunt sort of tool that is designed to shut down dissent and, in fact, will contribute to the EUB losing its credibility more so than it even had during this past summer with the spy scandal in central Alberta. It is, in our view, a very undemocratic bill, and we believe that it will stifle legitimate concerns of citizens over decisions being made, effectively, by unelected bodies such as the proposed commission in one section of this Bill 46.

While different people have been commenting and focusing on different words or clauses here, we would like to make some global statements in second reading, first of all that we believe that Bill 46 limits participation when it is necessary to have participation. Believe me, we saw from the circumstances in Red Deer and Rimbey this past spring and summer that if you don't follow an open procedure, you in fact will slow down the process and end up with unintended results. We also believe globally that Bill 46 narrows who can participate in hearings. It also seems to limit how individuals and groups might be able to participate, and finally we believe that it runs contrary to the commission's larger mandate, which is to serve the public interest. The sum of all of these effects, I believe, Mr. Speaker, is to make Bill 46 very restrictive and an undemocratic piece of legislation that we would hope would not see the light of day.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Specifically, in regard to limiting participation section 9(2) states the participatory rights that can be granted when individuals have

been affected directly and adversely by the proposal on the table. This is far too narrow, in our minds, when considering that utilities- and energy-related issues, in fact, affect a much broader swath of people than what could be deemed immediately affected. Energy-related issues affect all Albertans, and as I mentioned previously, the cumulative impact of building so many new industrial projects around the province has its own effect, this added-together effect, which I believe this legislation would seek to exclude.

I mentioned this previously, but section 9(3) states that, you know, the hearings may not be held if a person is not affected in a material way. This notion of being affected in a material way is at best legally vague, Mr. Speaker, and does not exist in any existing legislation in regard to the EUB function. So I would call that into serious question and into doubt as well.

Section 9(3)(c) states that the commission does not even have to hold hearings at all if the proposal applicant has met rules affecting landowners. This, Mr. Speaker, I think has at least three specific problems. First of all, such provisions do not exist in any current legislation, so it seems rather arbitrary and heavy handed. Second of all, the impact cannot be known, given that the rules affecting landowners haven't even been outlined yet. How could you make such a presumption without outlining the parameters under which you would make that claim? Third of all, we believe that it can be used as an opt-out. This is an opt-out clause. Even if people are directly and adversely affected, we believe that this is very poorly constructed language that could seek to exclude open participation.

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, Bill 46 imposes limitations on who could participate in hearings, and we believe that by linking the directly and adversely affected test to the hearings, the bill somehow skews the participatory rights to those within a fairly narrow group of people. It makes the stakeholders who have broader concerns suddenly excluded. Once again, there's a whole universe of reasons why we should not exclude people from hearings affecting energy and other issues in this province. Coming to the table with this sort of legislation now just seems at best counterproductive.

Talking about intervenor costs. Again, this is a huge issue that we just saw being played out in the summer in Red Deer and in Rimbey. This new legislation that's brought forward here now is talking about covering local intervenor costs. This is a crucial component, we believe, in ensuring participatory rights and democracy. The hearings are difficult, and you need legal and issue-specific expertise, we believe, and this is absolutely crucial for intervenors. Yet section 21 and section 22 allow for the payment of intervenor costs but narrowly define the intervenors as being only people directly and adversely affected. This is particularly restrictive, Mr. Speaker, since groups may have a legitimate interest in hearings in a broader sense and require that funding to make their claims known.

Mr. Speaker, at this time I certainly have a whole universe of interesting things to say about this, but I believe that at this juncture I would like to pass forward a notice of an amendment that I'm doing on behalf of Mr. Mason, to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, be amended by striking out all the words after “that” and substituting the following: “Bill 46, Alberta Utilities Commission Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment.”

The Deputy Speaker: Do you have copies of the amendment?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. I'm passing it now.

The Deputy Speaker: We will refer to this amendment as amendment A1. We will allow for a moment to have them circulated.

I believe you may proceed, hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, if you want to speak to the amendment.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Thank you. Bill 46, Mr. Speaker, comes in the aftermath of one of the most dark times of the Conservative government and of the EUB, which was the Rimbey spy scandal. This spy scandal showed the willingness of an unelected body appointed by the Conservative government to treat the citizens of Alberta, quite frankly, like criminals for wanting to express their concerns over decisions that would have an impact on their lives in a very direct way. The problem was with the actions of the EUB rather than the actions of ordinary Albertans.

3:10

Given the catastrophic failure of the EUB and the firestorm of this controversy that ensued, it is natural to bring in changes to this system. However, any changes that are to be proposed should be proposed with full public discourse and insight into the processes that will be brought forward. This government, in introducing this bill in the manner that it has, has shown that it has not learned from the past mistakes.

Openness and accountability lie at the crux of this current debate. The government fails these basic values in a twofold manner. First, it introduces a bill that restricts the openness and accountability of the system and the people's ability to contribute to it. Second of all, it introduces a bill in a manner that avoids any kind of public input into the content of the bill. The government treats the people of Alberta as a problem that should be avoided for the next time, and then tries to cut them out of the process. If the government wishes to be truly open and accountable, then it will send this bill to committee, where all the parties can come together and lay out a proper framework for the commission in a co-operative manner. It can be done with the input of the stakeholders and concerned Albertans, who have so far been betrayed by this system and by the government.

There is no decision, in our minds, that trumps the need for participatory and co-operative politics and decision-making in correcting the mistakes of the past and in laying out a path that's more amenable to the future for everyone. So I say, Mr. Speaker, that we send this bill to committee, live up to the mandate of being an accountable government, and use the democratic processes that we've started here in the Legislature and outside to work through this problem of the EUB in a reasonable manner and in an open and accountable manner.

The mechanism by which Bill 46 was brought forward, I believe, is indicative of the problem that this government has with discussing important issues in a broad-based manner. Bill 46 is not a democratic piece of legislation, nor were people consulted to make the process by which they're presenting at an EUB hearing more amenable and more meaningful and somehow a democratic process that makes sense to them. Using Bill 46, I would say, as a microcosm of a larger problem, bringing this bill and the problem of a broken EUB back to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment, we believe, would be in the best interests of all people in this province at this time.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is an interesting amendment, A1, at this time on Bill 46. Certainly, I support the amendment, but at the same time I'm very disappointed that it's going to restrict and limit debate at second reading on this bill. Many of the landowners in central Alberta who have been

directly affected by the distasteful behaviour of a government agency would appreciate a full public debate at second reading. For the hon. member who is proposing this amendment to limit and restrict debate at this time in second reading, I must say on behalf of the landowners that I'm very, very disappointed. However, in light of the major changes that this legislation will provide, one would have to support it and explain to those landowners that the third party is very anxious to see changes to this bill, but their excitement may significantly reduce and limit debate on this bill.

Certainly, we all know that Bill 46 is going to restrict and limit public participation and further public hearings on energy matters, just as this amendment is going to restrict and limit public debate at second reading on this legislation. Hopefully all hon. members will participate in the debate on this amendment, and hopefully all hon. members will support this amendment at this time.

Now, since we spoke at second reading last week on this legislation, there have been more groups come forward, Mr. Speaker, with articulate reasons why this bill should not become law. Certainly this amendment would give those individuals a chance to have a consultation with this government. We only have to look at the letter that was written last week and circulated to members of this Assembly. It was tabled earlier this week in the Assembly as well. In this letter the mayor of Calgary, which is the home of one-third of all electricity consumers in Alberta, would like to see as a result of the growing public opposition to Bill 46 that the government of Alberta suspend Bill 46 pending full public consultation. With this in mind I can certainly support the amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

We look at the city of Edmonton. They, too, have concerns regarding Bill 46. We look at the Alberta Beef Producers. They have significant concerns and issues with Bill 46. Some of the industrial power consumers have concerns and issues around this. Consumer groups have issues around this. The Green Party has issues around this bill.

Now, the hon. Minister of Service Alberta is very anxious, Mr. Speaker, to participate in debate, but what he is stating at this time is not audible. I'm looking forward to his active participation in the debate this afternoon. Maybe the hon. minister is so worried about the Alberta Alliance in his constituency that that's one of the reasons why he wanted to restrict and limit their ability to participate in public discussions here yesterday afternoon. Not only is this bill restricting and limiting democratic rights, but that hon. member is doing that as well. There are many sections of this bill that are offensive to the various groups that have articulated their opposition. Whether the hon. member across the way wants to hear it or not, that's too bad.

There is a reason, Mr. Speaker, why we all should support this amendment. There are many reasons, but this bill will allow the public utilities commission to approve new transmission lines without considering present and future public convenience and need. This will give the Alberta utilities commission the power to make orders and to issue decisions without giving public notice or holding public hearings. This proposed law, if we allow it to proceed, will give the Alberta utilities commission the power to prevent landowners and consumers from making verbal representations in some cases to the commission. Again, we're going to limit the time period in which Albertans can appeal an order by this Alberta utilities commission, and that time period is 30 days. I know that 30-day period is in current legislation, but certainly that has to be changed.

3:20

Now, on Thursday we had a discussion on the role of regulations. As I understand it, the regulations for this legislation are already circulating, certainly not in the opposition benches but in the

government benches. This is another reason why we should be supporting the hon. member's amendment because those regulations have to be public. They could be part of the public consultation process, and the authors of those regulations could explain why they are necessary and why it is necessary in this bill.

Maybe the hon. Minister of Service Alberta could make a presentation to the public hearings and explain why in his view it is democratic for a regulation, in this case part 10, to override the statute. Maybe the hon. minister can explain that. Maybe we could have a public hearing in Vermilion or Lloydminster. Individuals there who've been paying very high power bills as a result of his policy on deregulation could try to explain to him – and hopefully he'd listen to them, Mr. Speaker, more than he's listening to me – just how directly they've been affected by electricity deregulation, negatively affected by electricity deregulation. Those are some of the points as to why we should support this amendment.

When you consider exactly what this government is up to: the Minister of Energy admitted yesterday that they've hired a \$500-an-hour consultant to implement this bill, both commissions on this. This is a consultant who in the past has worked for the Alberta Electric System Operator, has had a very distinguished career with TransAlta, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps this consultant could come arm in arm with the Department of Energy's minister, the current minister. I don't know who the minister would be if we were to have public hearings because I'm certain there are going to be changes in that department. Maybe they could come together to this hearing that is being proposed as a result of this amendment. They could explain the details of this bill, and we could ask, for instance, some of the questions that could be and should be asked at this series of hearings. Now, I'm just going to find those questions. Who suggested that intervenor costs for outside legal experts should not be paid for? Who wants that?

Mr. Snelgrove: Me.

Mr. MacDonald: The Minister of Service Alberta wants that. This is from a government minister who at the same time is willing to give an expert five hundred bucks an hour to meet behind closed doors and advise the government.

Now, the nine-member commission that's to be appointed by cabinet will determine who gets paid to intervene in hearings and who does not. Again, we're restricting and limiting landowners' ability to hire outside legal advisers. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie certainly will have a lot to say about how the city of Calgary is going to be directly and adversely affected in more than a material way by this draconian legislation, but I'm going to leave that for the hon. member.

The commission, this government-appointed commission, can make any order or decision it is authorized to make without giving notice and without holding a hearing. This is in the bill. You cannot deny that, yet you're trying to deny that. Maybe if we had a series of public hearings, you could try to justify it and see if your constituents will buy into it. See if they will after how you have treated the public who wanted to stand up and speak out in Rimbey against the 500 kV line. What was your solution? Let's hire some spies and have a look at them: that was your solution, and you got caught. You got caught hiring spies.

Mr. Agnihotri: They're still laughing.

Mr. MacDonald: I know, hon. member, that they're still laughing, and they should be ashamed of themselves, yeah.

We had the Premier initially try to defend this measure. I'm sorry; it was a disgusting chapter in the history of this province. This

government in its own internal speaking notes on Bill 46 admitted that the reason why they want this legislation is because of what happened in Rimbey. That was admitted in your own – yes, and I'll provide the hon. House leader with a copy of that if he hasn't already seen it because he's going to have a lot of work to do in providing a defence to those hon. members of this Assembly who sent letters out to their constituents, who did not exactly abide by what was in that Q and A and in those speaking notes. The letters that have been sent to the constituents by the hon. members are different than what the Q and A has suggested.

Mr. Speaker, the commission orders without notice allow 10 days for individuals to become aware of the order to challenge the decision. Again, that has to be changed. If we follow the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder's suggestion with this amendment A1, then perhaps people could make some suggestions. How much longer than 10 days should that be?

The commission is going to determine who a local intervenor is, and that is very interesting. Maybe people in Rimbey would have a good idea and make some good suggestions as to who a local intervenor should be.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this bill through this government-appointed commission controls landowners and farmers and consumers who want to intervene on a hydro development, a power plant, a transmission line, or even a gas transmission line. But there's no control over the people who are going to develop the power plant or the people who are interested in developing the transmission line. It's a one-way street. It's complete control over the consumers, who are footing the bill, for instance, for an expanded or an upgraded transmission line, but there is no control over the promoters. [interjection] The hon. Minister of Service Alberta is talking about a confession. Well, perhaps he could stand up and tell us why this government gave AltaLink the right to build a 500 kV line without any sort of open competition. Perhaps he could tell us that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), questions or comments, the hon. leader of the third-party opposition.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to tell the House what the position of his caucus and party is on the need for the 500 kV line.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. That's a very interesting question. If the hon. member would check our documents, he would certainly see that we have suggested, and it's not the first time we've suggested to this government, that if Calgary, which certainly is in need of more electricity – I would say to the hon. member that we have a surplus of electricity around Lake Wabamun at our coal-fired baseload generation depot there. There's a surplus of electricity there. Calgary is short of electricity because of the failures of deregulation. We suggested three and four years ago, hon. member, that we build some baseload generation capacity around Calgary. Therefore, there wouldn't be the need for the 500 kV line or the expanded 500 kV line from Wabamun Lake down to Langdon.

3:30

I would also at this time, Mr. Speaker, like to mention that I was surprised to hear the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka tell the over 350 people that were gathered at the memorial hall there that we are going to have major brownouts; there's not enough electricity to go around. So that even encourages us to build more baseload generation capacity and . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we've been allowing 45 seconds for new questions each time to get more in.

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

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. My question is in the same vein as the New Democratic leader's. What is the position of the Liberal Party relative to this idea of electricity? You can't suck and blow in terms of the idea that, well, we want Calgarians to have electricity, but at the same time we're not going to infringe. I have to ask you this question. What is your position? I have to ask you what your position is of the party you represent because, you know, I heard the theory: the lights are on, but nobody is home. Well, I've also heard the theory: maybe the lights aren't on under a Liberal government, and I know no one's home.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, that's quite interesting, Mr. Speaker. When he spoke, I couldn't see if his feet were moving or not to see if he was doing the jitterbug.

In regard to his question I'll say it again – and I'll say it slowly so he can maybe understand – there is a surplus of electricity generation capacity around Lake Wabamun. There is a surplus, and there is a bottleneck there that has been brought on by your own government's dismal failures as a result of electricity deregulation. It's your failure, not ours, as a result of that bottleneck instead of building the baseload generation capacity at Lake Wabamun. I would remind the hon. member that the 800 megawatts of power that are proposed for Keepphills cannot be built because there's no way of wheeling that power through to Calgary. So why don't we take . . .

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

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see once again that the Liberals are dodging very clear questions. I can still remember the very first time that the former member for Edmonton-Ellerslie received her very first question ever in the House under Standing Order 29(2)(a) – I think it was myself who asked the question – and she stood up and dodged it. The very thing that they accuse us of doing all the time they're doing right now.

Mr. Speaker, a question has been very clearly put forward to this Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Does he believe that we need a 500 kV line or not, and what is his party's plan to deal with this surplus of power and to make sure that the lights do stay on down in Calgary? It's a clear question.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have provided a clear answer to two hon. members of that gentleman's caucus. That's perhaps the reason why he didn't receive his own nomination in Drayton Valley-Calmar, because he doesn't listen to them just like he's not listening to me.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Rev. Abbott: Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). Mr. Speaker, I want those comments withdrawn immediately. This has absolutely nothing to do with the topic at hand. That was a direct insult to myself, and I will not stand for that in this House.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't think there's a point of order here at all.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I have Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Mr. Speaker, sorry. This was not on the point of order. Did you want to proceed with the point of order? On the point of order. Okay.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

On the point of order, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be quite brief here. There's no point of order here. I was clearly pointing out to this hon. member that he didn't listen to the response that I provided to two previous members of his caucus, and he persisted in the same line of questioning. I was just demonstrating that, clearly, he doesn't have the ability to listen to my answer. There's no point of order here.

The Deputy Speaker: On the point of order, the hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: You know, I certainly think that both sides do have a bit of a point here. I think the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar certainly is correct in that he didn't get an answer, nor did the rest of us, from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. On the other hand, I don't think that it satisfies the conditions for creating disorder in the House to talk about some of these. So I don't think that there is a point of order, Mr. Speaker, although, you know, I certainly see where the hon. member from Drayton Valley is coming from.

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

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think there's something that needs to be said in this House and, first of all, that is that I do listen to my constituents. I do represent them very, very . . . [interjection] I beg your pardon? I could check *Hansard* to show that you said that. I do listen to my constituents, and I do represent them very well, thank you very much. If you want to start talking about nominations, we can have a debate on that, but I don't believe that's what we're talking about today.

Mr. Speaker, once again, I believe that this member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has sunk to an all-new low in this House. I didn't think you could get any lower than they've been in the past, but they're doing it now.

I do listen to my constituents. I do represent them well in this House. I represent them in caucus, and I represent them in the constituency. I listen to them in meetings. I sit down with them. I have had a number of calls and concerns about Bill 46 that I have taken very careful time to listen to and to represent to the minister. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, as you well know, I'm on the speakers list today so that I can also make some comments on Bill 46 on behalf of the good people of Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Once again, I am asking that this member withdraw those comments. If you have to check *Hansard* to see what he said, then go right ahead.

The Deputy Speaker: I think I'm ready to make a ruling on this. I have noted that there has been bantering going on back and forth on this debate from all sides of the House that is probably bordering

close to offending the rules of Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). So if we're going to call one, we're going to have to call them all. I would caution the House to be a little more respectful of one another during the course of this debate, and we'll proceed from here. There's no point of order at this point.

Cardston-Taber-Warner is the next speaker.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, this is indicative of the emotion that is throughout rural Alberta and even the metropolis of Calgary over Bill 46. And there are a lot more problems that are going to continue on if we don't have a more democratic process and expose the regulations and all of the information regarding Bill 46 because there hasn't been enough. So I want to stand up and speak in favour of the amendment, that this really does need to go to committee. It would be to the benefit of all Albertans.

I want to share a few reasons why it is important that we refer this to the committee. The first and most important thing, I believe, in a free and democratic society is education. The problem is that when there's a lack of knowledge, that is when tyranny can come in and oppression and when people are taken advantage of because of that lack of knowledge. Right now when landowners are faced with a so-called accredited land agent that shows up, they have a bunch of information that is pretty much overwhelming for the landowners, and they're buffaloed by them saying: "Everything is fine. There's nothing you need to worry about. Just sign on the dotted line." And if you don't sign on the dotted line, all you're going to do is delay this by 60 days because we're going to take it to the board, and we're going to get there. So the problem is that the landowners are approached the first time, and they're not informed with enough information. They don't really have the ability to go out and to speak with what the government has put these . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, we are debating amendment A1, which is that the bill not now be read a second time and the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment. We're not debating the bill; we're debating the amendment to the bill, so if you could restrict your comments to that, I'd appreciate it.

3:40

Mr. Hinman: Yeah. I'll try and clarify. What I'm debating is why it needs to go to committee, and the reason is because the education process for Albertans needs to be there. Another reason why it needs to go to committee is because so far the debate that has gone on has been very limited, and it's going to be limited if we have to pass this by December 6 in what appears to be the rush of this government saying that we have to have this bill passed.

The information and the education is not there. What I'm trying to say, Mr. Speaker, is that this is a very tenuous situation. It's extremely important that the public is more educated on Bill 46. Even the experts that have read this in giving their opinions say: "Well, we need to see the regulations. We need to have more information."

The other reason why it needs to go to committee, Mr. Speaker, is because this is very much about public interest. The question, you know, with the 500 kV line: is it necessary? The question: is it necessary to have three, four, five sets of lines going down? That needs to go to committee so that can be openly debated, and the public can come in and say: this needs to happen.

An excellent situation in southern Alberta is that we have an abundance of wind down there. There have been a lot of windmills put up. Windmills are a benefit to society, yet there was a restriction there because there wasn't a line big enough to carry it, so the

government put a cap on the wind production. Thankfully, they've raised that cap now, and we can go forward. But in the interest of trying to get that line through there, again, a lot of hard feelings and problems were brought forth. Luckily those landowners were able to come together enough in unity to put a stop to the abuse of it going across their lands when they didn't want it. But not every group every time is going to have that ability to get the people of Alberta to come together to protect the community as a whole, especially with the notification process only within one mile of the pipeline, the power line, or whatever. It's very limited and it's hard. Not every time can the people get the communities surrounding to gather together to fight these things.

It's critical that this goes to committee so that we can understand and study this problem more and make sure that these areas aren't, well, basically just walked over by saying: well, you've had your say, and now you go forward. It goes to a quasi-judicial judge, and basically he has the authority to just say: well, I've listened to you, and now I'm doing it. It's not good enough.

The other problem is for the landowners to be able to reach out and find that there's a very limited amount of lawyers and land agents that actually work on behalf of the owners in the province. It's not in the best interest to move forward on this without a lot more debate on whether or not there's sufficient land agents that are accredited for the property owners. We know the incident in northeast Edmonton where someone tried to represent the landowners, and he was taken to court. I was just amazed at the outcome of that. We need other corrections in the Legislature before we can go forward.

The other thing is because of the failure of the government to plan and to realize that the need for power lines doesn't make it – what would I say? – an emergency on their part. It doesn't make it an emergency on the public's part to say: well, we've got to go ahead with this dictatorship bill.

There are so many reasons, Mr. Speaker, why this needs to go to committee. It's just critical that we understand that this is not in the best interest of the public to immediately say, "Let's pass this and go forward. The regulations will come along later," and we just don't have any worry in that area.

The other concern, I guess, and why it needs to go to committee is the fact that the landowners really are in a conundrum right now on how to protect their property. Really, this is the debate when it comes to a democratic society: do the landowners have, you know, property rights, or is it in the public interest? Unfortunately, if you want to look at the worst cases of abuse of the people and of the land, it's in those countries where the government is in a position of power to say, "Well, in the public interest we are taking this," and are doing – you know, some in here are very nervous about a nuclear plant going in. The only places where we had trouble with nuclear plants is where government can actually say, "We're putting one up, and we're going to have our own rules and regulations," as opposed to . . .

Mr. Mason: An industry looking after itself.

Mr. Hinman: . . . a body that is looking after the best interest of itself, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood says.

The point, Mr. Speaker, is that we need to protect property rights. This bill is an attack on property rights. It's an attack on the ability of people to say no to something that they're worried is not in their best interest. Basically, this bill could be – I hope that it will not be, though – rammed through by December 6. It's the same when people go to the old board or perhaps this new board: it's rammed through, and it's not in their best interest.

We have this balance, Mr. Speaker, and it needs to be debated

more in committee. It would benefit all Albertans for us to come up with a much better process to protect the rights of the landowners and the rights of industry to find a balance between development and keeping their land the way they want it and not being told: "Well, it's too bad. We're coming through because this is in the public interest." It isn't in the public interest when government is in a position of power where they can say that. Once again, like I say, we look around the world where government has taken away the property rights and said: we will expropriate and develop as we see fit. Those are the biggest environmental disasters, the poorest people in the world because the government first says, "We're going to take it from the big and the wealthy," and then six months later they come back and say, "Well, we're going to take it from you as well." There is no rule of law once they pass that point.

I once again want to speak in favour of this amendment. I would urge all members of this Legislature to take the thought that we need to have more time, more public input, more debate. This isn't an emergency, needing to pass this Bill 46. It will not be in the best interests of Albertans, so I would urge all members to support this amendment and send it to committee to be further debated openly and publicly for all Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to ask the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner – as it happens both he and myself are on the all-party committee to which I'm making reference to refer this bill. What in your view has been both the tone and the success of the all-party Standing Committee on Resources and Environment thus far? Do you think it would be worthwhile to send Bill 46 there, considering the tone that we've seen so far?

Mr. Hinman: Well, I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder for that question. It is an honour to sit on that committee. One of the questions that we asked when we were discussing in that committee is: what are the more important issues that we should be looking at? I can't think of a more important issue than property rights and proper development throughout the province when it comes to energy and the environment. I think that this is an excellent bill to be referred to that committee. We sent many others already this past summer. We've gone through them in other committees, and I think it's been an excellent democratic process. I totally agree – that's why I'm supporting this – that it needs to go to that committee so that Albertans can and will have much better input, and I believe we will have better legislation for development in the future.

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

Mr. Agnihotri: I want to speak on the amendment, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Agnihotri: No. On the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, back to 29(2)(a).

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, once again talking about the success of that all-party committee thus far, how did you find the process functioning between the parties? Did we have success? Do you think that we could apply that to Bill 46 and come to some fruitful conclusion?

3:50

Mr. Hinman: Well, I think the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake would even agree with me on this. That committee worked very well. There was good, open discussion. A lot of the politics were taken out, and it became, you know, a nonpartisan discussion. We were looking for the public interest, that all sides brought forward, and there was excellent discussion. I believe our report will benefit Albertans. When it comes to recycling, we will do a better job in the province because of the work of that committee.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

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

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've noticed that a very venerable person, a former employee, a former leg. assistant as a matter of fact, has sneaked into the public gallery here while we were heavily debating Bill 46. That is Teresa Lightfoot, again, a former leg. assistant to myself and the Member for Strathcona. I see her up there. I think she's in the Legislature doing some research for a project she's working on. I would ask Teresa to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Bill 46
Alberta Utilities Commission Act
(*continued*)

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. On amendment A1 the chair recognizes the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're in Bill 46. The Member for Edmonton-Calder is asking that it not be read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment. Timing is often everything in politics. Even if this government thought that this was the best bill that they've ever thought and gone through all the processes, they should recognize by what has happened in the most recent past that there's going to be a great deal of cynicism no matter what because of the spy scandal and the other things that are occurring. For the life of me I can't see why we're in such a hurry to do this.

The policy field committees, it seems to me, were set up precisely – precisely – for these reasons: that you could take a controversial bill, send it to the policy field committee, and they could hear from various groups and come back to the Legislature with a bill that in their best wisdom after many public hearings is a better act.

So there's going to be cynicism. We've had the troubles with the EUB, and all of a sudden we bring through a major bill like that. What do you expect? What do you expect, Mr. Speaker, is going to happen? It's precisely what has happened. If we ram this through in the next little while without proper debate and proper public

hearings, that we could do through the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment, I mean, that cynicism is going to be out there even more. It's not just rural Alberta. We certainly know that they're very upset about it. But as mentioned previously, the mayor of Calgary has said that this process is wrong. We know a number of other people that have concerns about it.

Now, the government's response, basically, is: "Look, this is a good bill. Trust me. Just trust me. Just trust us." Isn't that a leap of faith, Mr. Speaker, from what's just happened with this particular organization? You know, I'm not saying that this is a perfect bill – far from it – but even if it was a perfect bill, you would still have this difficulty.

It seems to me that that's precisely the reason, as I say – and I want to reinforce the fact – that we set up policy field committees: to look at bills like this that could be referred to us. I mean, what's the hurry about this? Why is this such an urgent situation that all of a sudden after all the problems we've had with the EUB, we have to get it through this legislative session this fall?

An Hon. Member: By December 6.

Mr. Martin: As somebody said, by December 6.

Why not take the time to do it right? If the government's right in their arguments, they can make those to the policy field committee. They could make them to the various groups that have concerns, and if they can convince them or if the groups can convince them differently, that to me is what democracy is all about, Mr. Speaker. I don't understand why we can't do this. This seems to me to be a perfect way out for the government. You know, you just can't have the situation that occurred with the spy scandal, that was national news all over, and expect people to trust the government on a bill like this without going through the proper procedures. Mr. Speaker, that's precisely what we're doing here. We're not going through the proper procedures.

This is just a policy field committee. We could call it a chamber, if you like, of sober second thought here before we rush into this and create more anxiety, before we create more cynicism out there. If we did this, I think the government would be complimented. All we're trying to do is help the government a bit here. Lord knows they need the help. If they took the advice, I think, if they walked away and said, "Yes, this makes sense; we have policy field committees that work well, and we'd like to take it upon ourselves to do this properly," the government would get some credit for it, and they would get out from under this situation, as I said, Mr. Speaker.

Now, no matter how the government cuts it and says, "Trust me; don't worry," there are groups that have been saying – and I believe that to be the case until the government can convince us differently. You know, it's not just, as I say, rural Albertans. The Consumers' Association of Canada, Alberta branch, says that Bill 46 strips – and we know – intervenor funding. They make the claim that that will cost taxpayers more money. They say that every dollar spent at intervention saves consumers \$10 and that in 2005–2006 an estimated \$90 million was saved. Now, I think that that should be an important argument for anybody, Mr. Speaker, that we could actually save some taxpayers' money if we do this right.

Who will represent the small consumers? Well, they tell us that an office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate is going to look after all the small consumers. But again, that's cynicism because here would be a group hired by the government, you know, and you take the complaints there. Well, obviously people are going to be cynical. So that's why we need to go back and have a discussion about this at the policy committee.

The Environmental Law Centre. I mean, they're not political, Mr.

Speaker. They say that it's going to be almost impossible for landowners to show that they're affected in a material way. This has been alluded to. These are all major problems.

The other problem that we looked at: can the developments proceed without a hearing? The minister says, well, they could do that before. Well, maybe they shouldn't have been doing it before, Mr. Speaker. Just because they could do it before doesn't necessarily make it right. We should be looking at that.

Can landowners hire lawyers? Well, only if they're directly affected. It's already been talked about. What does that mean, directly affected? Without money for people that have some knowledge and intervenor status, I think we have some serious problems.

If the government believes so strongly that all these arguments that all sorts of groups are putting forward are invalid, then surely they should have the courage to say: "We will take it back to a policy field committee. We will sit down, and we will listen. We will make our case, and you will make your case, and then we'll come back to the Legislature." They might change their mind, Mr. Speaker. That wouldn't be a bad thing, you know. Again, I just stress that I do not understand why we have to push ahead without this.

It seems to me that this particular bill, Bill 46, was handmade for policy field committees. It's what we looked at in trying to make the Legislature more responsible with all-party committees to take a look ahead at controversial bills like this. It seems to me this was tailor-made for this sort of bill. For the life of me I just do not understand why they want to antagonize, you know, thousands of Albertans, rural Albertans, people in the city of Calgary, all over, Mr. Speaker, why they have to do this. It's so unnecessary. They could walk away and say: "We're going to do the right thing, go to a policy field committee. We'll have this debate, and we'll hear from people. Then we'll come back to the Legislature after we've done that." Why do they need to create this anxiety, hostility, cynicism? It's so unnecessary. Unfortunately, when you create that hostility and cynicism, nobody really wins. Nobody really wins.

4:00

I would just conclude by urging the government to do the right thing. As I say, even at this point they could say: "Okay. We're not in a big hurry. We have time. Let's go back to the policy field committee, which we helped to organize." They'd get credit right around the province, and it would be taken away as a political issue, and the Legislature would work the way the Legislature should, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly, obviously, will be supporting this amendment. It makes absolute good sense at this time. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, does anyone wish to comment or question under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Saying none, back on the amendment. I have the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I find myself torn by this amendment. The idea of sending it to committee is the equivalent of raising Lazarus, and there was only one individual who was able to accomplish that over the last two millennia. When something is as flawed as this piece of legislation is, I'm not sure that members of the committee would recognize how many hours and hours of writing, basically starting from the first capital letter and ending at the last period, would have to be rewritten for this bill to be acceptable, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview pointed out, for rural Albertans or urban Albertans.

It's fairly safe to say that the members of the government won't take my advice, but I'll offer it anyway. The government has the

potential of being perceived as getting on with good governance. If their plan to eliminate the unfunded pension liability succeeds – I thoroughly hope it will for the sake of teachers, for the sake of students, for the sake of school boards – if they can see that through, that'll be the first major piece of planning that they've been able to accomplish in almost a decade and a half. All the goodness that would be associated with putting an end to the unfunded liability, which means not only the \$2 billion and not just simply contributing the \$80 million a year but dealing with the actual \$2 billion and then the \$4.1 billion on top of that – the government has put forward a plan on getting rid of that unfunded liability.

Now, they haven't necessarily put a timeline to it or how much will be paid out other than the teachers' wages and so on over that time period. But if it can be accomplished, you know, I'll take my hat off – I only wear one hat at a time – to the government and recognize that accomplishment. In the face of that potential achievement, which I really hope goes through successfully – I don't have that same potential bitterness that it's just an election ploy. Having been a teacher for 34 years, I really want this thing to go through.

However, contrast the forward thinking of reducing a pension liability, which by 2060 would be in the area of \$45 billion, to this piece of legislation, that not only annoys the 2 million people living in urban centres but attacks directly their own Conservative credibility, that they have fought to establish over the last 36 years, in their power base in the rural areas. I can't understand why the government would go against the very people that have been their staunch supporters over the last number of years. Based on the distribution of rural MLAs to urban MLAs, the rural vote remains the strong point. The rural vote decides who forms the government. Why this government would be so anxious to cut out the people that they have been elected to represent, to give them an appeal process that would be cut down to 30 days providing they are somehow affected in a material way – I don't understand why they would be opposed to the notion of referring this to committee.

Now, I'll give the government another bouquet, two in a row. We have long criticized the government for a lack of accountability and a lack of transparency. We were the only province that didn't have all-party standing committees, and the Premier in his wisdom – well, that's three compliments – noted that standing committees should consist of members of all parties. He recognized the combined wisdom – the combined wisdom of the member of the Alliance Party, the combined wisdom of the members of the New Democratic Party, the combined wisdom of the Liberals, and the wisdom of the Conservatives, who are currently forming the government – to come to consensus through the committee format.

As I said, I'm torn because I know how hard the committee worked and the number of hours they spent coming to the decision that it was very important to recycle milk containers. We know that they recognized the problem that almost two-thirds or more of containers were ending up in dumps, and that wasn't, obviously, very effective. They recognized that not only should milk containers be recycled and that in order to encourage people to do so, they would have to provide a certain reward in terms of a deposit, but the government also – and I think it was partly through this committee – recognized the fact that not only were milk containers not being recycled, but likewise pop bottles, cans, beverage containers, and so on weren't being recycled.

The committee came up with the idea – and I'm attributing it to the committee – of raising the bottle deposits and the cans and so on so as to improve the environmental quality of life. Also, since there are so many homeless individuals whose livelihood, basically, is dependent on the recycling that they do, this gave people an

opportunity to actually participate in an ecologically supportive endeavour. However, I know how hard the committee worked on recycling milk cartons and rewarding people for it with a deposit.

When you compare the recycling of the milk containers to the difficulty associated with rewriting Bill 46 – taking out the covert clauses, extending the appeal period beyond that limiting time of 30 days, allowing for elected members on the commission – basically they would be starting from scratch.

Now, with regard to the covert nature of Bill 46 and why it's so difficult to correct, the individual who originally spent so much time in helping the Energy minister draft this contentious bill is no longer around. His disappearance from employment with the government would suggest that he found a more lucrative position. Possibly he reconstituted himself as a consultant and is being hired by another government ministry at \$500 an hour. But he's no longer around, and we have a new individual. We have the new sort of Steve Austin of government consultants at \$500 an hour, the bionic consultant, and so far he has cost Alberta taxpayers \$84,000. If his work is reflected in Bill 46, then we're going to need another consultant at goodness knows what an hour to undo the damage that this individual has contributed to the secrecy of Bill 46.

4:10

Now, the committee will be like an archaeological dig. They're going to have to do the equivalent of going to a mushroom factory and sifting through the various layers of detritus and dirt and try and uncover pieces of potentially amendable information. I'm not sure, even given the combined wisdom of this House, that that task is possible. It concerns me that the use of the member's time could be better spent than trying to breathe life into a bill that the signs along the roadway to Lacombe indicated should be killed. So I'm not convinced that the committee and its attempts to revitalize this bill will be successful.

However, I do recognize that there has been good work done; for example, on Bill 1, the Lobbyists Act. Here are four compliments. Please. I hope we're keeping track today. The government recognized that nonprofit organizations in Bill 1 should be exempted. They recognized the flaw of requiring charitable organizations to be registered as lobbyists, so now they're going to be exempted. It does go to show – and, again, this is why the yin and the yang, the pulling I'm feeling – that there's the possibility of taking a bad piece of legislation and, with the help of all parties, turning it into a worthwhile piece of legislation that Albertans will appreciate because it takes into account the concerns that they have expressed through their representatives on the all-party committee, and the whole democratic process is revived.

Today I have taken the opportunity between debates to write approximately 110 times to a class in my constituency who came up to do the tour of the Legislature from St. Vincent de Paul. The expression I've written close to a hundred times is: democratic participation is essential. That is what amendment A1 suggests. It suggests an underlying faith in the democratic process, that despite 72 years of a Conservative-dominated agenda there is still the possibility of new thought, of shining light into those dark recesses by the combined efforts of all the members in attendance.

I don't want to see it as a sentence for those members. I want them to enjoy the love and the connection and the rejuvenation of being with their families over the Christmas period. I realize that in order to fix Bill 46, so much effort will have to be expended and so much time away from their constituents and their loved ones that I'm having trouble balancing the amount of time that would be necessary to fix Bill 46 as opposed to simply, as the signs on the way to Lacombe indicated, killing it.

With Bill 46, if it does go to committee, it does, as the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview indicated, give the government an

