

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, November 28, 2007 **1:00 p.m.**
 Date: 07/11/28
 [The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.
 Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

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

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Mr. Fred Underwood, a state of Texas transportation commissioner. The Texas Transportation Commission is much like our provincial ministry of transportation. Mr. Underwood is meeting with several of my cabinet colleagues and ministries, and together we're exploring areas where our great province of Alberta and the great state of Texas might work more closely together, such as in transportation, energy, and enhanced trade. Mr. Underwood will also be visiting our oil sands developments in Fort McMurray and learning more about Alberta's position as a secure, reliable, and growing supplier of energy to the United States.

Accompanying Mr. Underwood are Mr. Michael Reeves, the president of the U.S.-based Ports-to-Plains trade corridor commission, and Mr. Scott Flukinger, adviser, cross-border affairs, with Ports-to-Plains trade corridor commission. The Ports-to-Plains trade corridor is potentially a sister corridor to Canamex but on the eastern side of the Rockies.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask our honoured guests to rise – they're seated in your gallery – and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two different introductions today. The first is of a young woman who is volunteering in my constituency office in Edmonton-Centre. Madeleine Kobi was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo and was schooled in Ottawa, where she also participated in a gospel band. She has now moved to Edmonton and is starting in January in the social work program at Grant MacEwan College. She wanted to volunteer some hours in my constituency office to give her a better view of her future career. She has now stood in the public gallery, and I would ask you all to please welcome her to the Assembly.

My second introduction is for Victoria school. This is a very special school to me, Mr. Speaker, because it is a fine arts based school. We have 47 grade 6 students joining us in the public gallery today along with their teachers, Mrs. Stacey Taylor and Ms Carla Kerr. This is a terrific group of young people. They had very good questions for me when I met with them earlier today. I'm delighted that they've come to join us in the Assembly, and I hope they'll come back again. I would ask them all to please rise now and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is really a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a grade 6 class from John Paul I in Edmonton-Mill Woods. We have 23 students visiting today along with two teachers, Mrs. Elizabeth McKay and Mr. Dave King, and two parent helpers, Mrs. Pam Vona and Miss Faye Johansen. I'd ask them to please rise and accept the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure today of introducing to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Ms Debra Jakubec, vice-chair of the Alberta Community Council on HIV, ACCH, and executive director of HIV Edmonton. Debra is here today to witness the member's statement recognizing HIV/AIDS Awareness Week and World AIDS Day 2007.

The Alberta Community Council on HIV understands the importance of emphasizing prevention, public health initiatives, education, and community support in ensuring that people can be well and that our health system is available for all Albertans when they most need it. Members saw when they walked into the Chamber today that red ribbons were placed on their desks. By wearing a red ribbon, one can demonstrate understanding and concern for the issue of HIV/AIDS as well as recognize its impact on the lives of many Albertans and people around the world. I'd ask Ms Jakubec to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of this House student leaders who have played such an important and vital role in the development of the roles and mandates policy framework. We ensured that student voices were heard through the consultation process because that's what the postsecondary institutions serve. We have with us today Mr. David Hayes, chair of the Alberta Graduate Council; Matt Koczur, vice-chair, Alberta College and Technical Institute Students' Executive Council; Adam Boechler, executive director, Alberta College and Technical Institute Students' Executive Council; Duncan Wojtaszek, executive director of the Council of Alberta University Students; Mike Selnes, chair of the Council of Alberta University Students; and Steven Dollansky, vice-chair of the Council of Alberta University Students, or CAUS.

Mr. Speaker, these are just a few of the dedicated student individuals who I've had the pleasure of working with over the past months along with a huge array of other stakeholders. They are in the members' gallery. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly three people. The first is Sam Libin, who is a very typical nine-year-old except back in June he raised over \$5,000 for Kids Cancer Care by having his hair cut off. His brother Austin Libin, who is eight years old, is with him. Austin is starring, very much like his father, as Mortimer in the Robert Munsch play of the same name. They've brought their dad, Sean Libin, with them today.

They had the opportunity of meeting the Premier and talked to me and asked me some very, very difficult questions. I would ask Sean, Sam, and Austin to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The Associate Minister for Capital Planning.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure now to introduce some very special guests. Over three days during this past weekend and in honour of the birthday of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, the Punjabi media along with our Sikh gurdwaras and some local Punjabi organizations raised over \$72,000 in cash, and that amount is growing. [some applause] Yes. They also gathered three full two-tonne truckloads of donated food, all for the Edmonton Food Bank. They did an amazing job and have just received the personal thanks and congratulations from our Premier and myself during a brief luncheon that we had.

Mr. Speaker, I will ask each guest to rise and remain standing as I call their names, and then we can applaud and thank them all ensemble. The co-ordinator of the group, Mr. Gursharn Buttar, SurSangam Radio and Guldasta TV; Miss Rajwinder Klair, SurSangam Radio and Guldasta TV; Mr. Sukhdev Aujla, Desh Punjab Radio; Jasbeer Singh, Parivartan magazine; Gurbhalinder Sandhu, *Des Pardes Times* and Virrasat TV; Kanwal Lyall, *Des Pardes Times* and Virrasat TV; Ranjit Singh Powar, *Punjab Guardian* newspaper; Ashok Gangwani, Guldasta TV; Sukhdev Dhillon, Radio Punjab 101.7 FM; Harpreet Sandhu, *Desh Videsh Times*; and Dr. P.R. Kalia, *Asian Times*.

Bohut, bohut shukria. Lakh, lakh wadania. Many, many thanks and one million congratulations. [As submitted]

Please join me in saluting these outstanding members of the Punjabi community. Thank you.

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

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this House Dr. Jason Dewling. Dr. Dewling is a professor at Lakeland College in Vermilion. He sits on the Wainwright town council and lives in my constituency, and he's also a close personal friend. Jason is the gentleman who asked me if I first wanted to go to Guatemala to build houses with Habitat for Humanity. It was an incredible, life-changing experience, and I thank him for that. He's leading another delegation to the Dominican Republic in May, and if anyone is interested, they can contact my office as I hope to be going again, too. I'd ask Jason to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you several guests visiting today who have a very strong interest in Bill 41. They believe that a profession that has been very successfully self-regulating for the last hundred years should remain self-regulating. Margaret Hadley is the president of the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta. Unfortunately, her son Robert, who was to join her today, who is also an RN – and, as we all know, most RNs do double shifts, and that's where he is today. We also have Mary-Ann Robinson, the executive director of CARNA. I would ask them to rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a member of my constituency, Mr. William Eady, who is here. He's interested in educational issues, and he's here to see a letter by him tabled later in our proceedings. I'd invite him to stand and please receive the warm welcome of this House.

head: 1:10

Members' Statements

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

Bishop Routhier School

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Academic excellence is not a level of distinction which is easily achieved. It requires many hours of work and a tremendous amount of dedication by teachers and parents alike. One particular school in the beautiful constituency of Lesser Slave Lake has attained this standing. Bishop Routhier School in Peavine has made its whole community very proud with the latest provincial academic test, or the PAT, results.

In Alberta the PAT is used as an instrument to help monitor student success. It is a comprehensive test based on the curriculum for the entire year. In June 2007 a hundred per cent of the school's students wrote the test, and a hundred per cent of them passed. On top of that, 21 per cent of the students were in the excellence range. This was no easy task, Mr. Speaker. Parents diligently engaged their children to make sure their homework was being done while teachers made sure that each child received the attention necessary and understood the material being covered.

Furthermore, one of the main reasons these students improved so rapidly is the school's focus on reading. Bishop Routhier implemented the precision reading program, PRP, again this year. Under the program every day includes 40 minutes of reading time with each staff member meeting with a small group of students to do so. Every student in the school has gone up at least one year's reading level, and PRP has certainly played a key role in this.

What is most impressive of all is the school's determination to continue achieving such good grades. They are now focusing on elevating their excellence level for the next PAT. I commend the students of the Peavine school of Bishop Routhier, principal Brian Dewar, all the teachers, and the parents for working together to achieve such great scores.

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

Support for Seniors

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seniors are the fastest growing demographic. This is not new information. It has been talked about for the past 25 years. The planners knew it was happening, but it appears that no one even tried to guess what the consequences were going to be to society at large. Not only are the numbers increasing, but people are living longer. In my riding I gave out 13 centenarian medals in 2005, and my dear Mrs. Yvonne Harris, who I took to see the Queen at 100, is now 103 and bright as ever.

Seniors can be loosely generalized into three categories: the independent senior with enough money to ensure that they can live with dignity and have enough hired help when required; seniors independent but on a tight, often fixed income and who find it difficult to meet inflation; seniors requiring health care on an ongoing basis.

Seniors want to stay in their homes as long as possible but not at the expense of their sanity. Worse, senior suicide is on the increase.

People can die of loneliness. We need senior community centres that provide one-stop services, government information offices, small health rooms for basic assessments, exercise opportunities, outreach for shut-ins. This approach would save the health system millions and keep seniors active, healthy to live out their lives in the dignity that they deserve.

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

Stoney Trail Project P3 Award

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to share a success story with you, with members of the Assembly, and with all Albertans. This week the government of Alberta and the Stoney Trail General Partnership received a national award of merit for P3 implementation from the Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships. It's a very prestigious award, and it's very difficult to win, and I congratulate all involved for this great achievement. The northeast Stoney Trail project is an innovative partnership between government and the private sector that will save taxpayers millions of dollars over the life of the road.

This award further demonstrates that Alberta's P3 process for highways is a great success. The recently opened southeast Anthony Henday Drive in Edmonton was the first project to be built this way, and it was made possible by the innovation and progressive thinking of the minister at the time, who happens to be our Premier, and the outstanding staff at the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation. We're partway through the process for the northern section of Anthony Henday Drive.

The P3 process delivers these vital roadways sooner than the traditional approach, plus government receives a fixed price, which is especially important given the double-digit cost escalation we've experienced during the past few years. Government also receives a 30-year warranty on the work while we only get a one- or two-year warranty on most projects delivered conventionally.

This government is committed to exploring more P3 opportunities where they make good business sense and where they save taxpayers money. Mr. Speaker, the P3 model of building major projects is a major success story for Alberta, and I congratulate the Premier, the minister, department staff, and the Stoney Trail General Partnership for this prestigious award.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Violence against Women

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Violence against women is one of the most serious human rights violations on the planet. Across Canada and around the world there is a growing momentum for organizing around men's roles and responsibilities in ending violence against women.

I think violence against women troubles us so deeply because women are seen as caregivers, as mothers, as the foundation of family life. When a woman is assaulted, it's an attack not only on an individual but also on the community, on the collective values we hold dear.

Sadly, no community is free from the spectre of violence against women. This madness is a real and undeniable problem. It is a problem without a single solution. There is no magic wand that will make it all go away overnight. But we are not helpless. This is not an insurmountable problem. With a good education, with respect for women, with the conviction that violence is never the answer, we can dramatically reduce violence against women.

Colleagues, it's our duty to pass comprehensive laws against all forms of violence against women and to fund programs for survivors of this violence such as shelters for battered women and rape crisis centres and for services to treat violent men.

I believe that respect for girls and women and equality between men and women are preconditions to ending the violence. It has been the longest war, the greatest epidemic, and the biggest disaster. With strength and love we commit ourselves to work alongside women to bring this violence to an end.

Thank you.

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

HIV/AIDS Awareness

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to speak about the important issue of HIV/AIDS awareness. Please join me in recognizing HIV/AIDS Awareness Week and World AIDS Day 2007. Canadian HIV/AIDS Awareness Week begins on November 26 and culminates with World AIDS Day on December 1. It's a time to remember those lost to HIV/AIDS and recognize those who continue to live with the effects of HIV/AIDS.

As many of you know, HIV weakens the immune system. When the immune system is damaged beyond repair, infections and cancers overwhelm the body, resulting in the final stage of HIV infection, AIDS.

1:20

HIV/AIDS is still with us. It affects people from around the world as well as at home here in Alberta. There is no cure. In fact, in this province in 2006, 218 new cases of HIV were identified in Alberta compared to 170 in 2005. Most recent estimates from 2005 indicate that approximately 3,700 individuals are living with HIV in Alberta. The good news is that this government together with stakeholders and community organizations is developing a long-term strategy to address the prevention and control of HIV and sexually transmitted illnesses in all groups.

As an example of what great accomplishments can be made through strong collaboration, I refer to the Alberta prenatal HIV screening program. This program currently tests more than 95 per cent of pregnant women each year for HIV and routinely screens all for syphilis and hepatitis B. It is regarded as one of the best screening programs in the world.

Mr. Speaker, scientific data leaves little doubt that the presence of sexually transmitted infections facilitates HIV transmission through direct biological mechanisms, so early testing and treatment are critical to a high quality and comprehensive HIV prevention strategy. Additionally, we are increasing funds to AIDS service organizations in Alberta for 2007-2008 and continuing to provide fully funded testing for HIV to all regardless of health care coverage.

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

New Royalty Framework

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to bring to the attention of this House a concern I have for the future prosperity of all Albertans. In comments yesterday the hon. Premier displayed a profound and fundamental misunderstanding of the oil and gas industry and the investment world. When asked about the slashing of drilling plans in Alberta's natural gas industry, the Premier's answer was very naive. The new rates don't take effect until January 2009, he said, so the current slowdown is a result of other things.

It's a very basic concept in the oil and gas and investment world.

A business plan reflects what will happen in the next few years, not just this moment. Gas wells drilled today will pay royalties in 2009. Investors will be looking for returns in 2009. Apparently, the Premier does not understand this.

Preston Manning wrote about similar concerns earlier this month. Speaking of renegotiation of the Syncrude and Suncor deals of the Premier, he said: this creates long-term uncertainty and questions the competence of his government to lead on major energy issues. While this government may not be looking beyond the next election, the people and companies that have made Alberta great do look and plan long term.

Looking forward, there are real negative consequences of the new royalty framework. I quote BMO Capital Markets global portfolio strategist Don Cox, a respected financial adviser whose *Basic Points* column is read by investment world-wide. Cox said:

We considered the report such a poorly-written, poorly-reasoned, mean-spirited betrayal of the traditions of a great province that we assumed it would be treated as an embarrassment. It failed to achieve even mediocrity, so it could be safely ignored. . . . Premier Stelmach stunned us by endorsing both the tone of the Panel's collectivist rant and most of its recommendations. Most importantly, he broke a promise he had made publicly not to accept its recommendation to break promises made to Suncor and Syncrude, the pioneers of the oil sands development. . . . With deep regret we are forced to remove Alberta from the shrinking list of politically-secure regions of the world for the oil industry, taking its rating from AAA to A. . . . Once a political region has violated its vows, those who believe it can be trusted not to break its new pledges are betting their companies' . . .

[Mr. Hinman's speaking time expired]

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, a petition.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter and petition from 128 Albertans from Lac La Biche and the surrounding area in support of Métis harvesting.

Thank you.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to give notice of a motion to be moved tomorrow with respect to a motion to hold sittings on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evening, December 5, 6, and 7.*

I'd also like to give notice of a motion under the Standing Orders to allot one hour of time to debate the motion I just gave notice of for tomorrow.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to rise in this Legislature to make two tablings. The first is to table the appropriate number of copies of the roles and mandates policy framework for the publicly funded advanced education system. This framework was developed in consultation with Alberta students and our publicly funded postsecondary institutions. It more clearly

defines the roles and mandates within our system while supporting a high degree of collaboration and fulfilling the goals of Campus Alberta.

The second tabling contains letters of support from three of Alberta's postsecondary student leaders, including David Hayes, who on behalf of the graduate students commended the ministry for the leadership and vision for an integrated, sustainable system that clearly recognizes the strengths of graduate students in the future; another letter from Jonathan Hill, who represents students in colleges and technical institutes, who calls the framework a blueprint for a better postsecondary system; and finally from Mike Selnes, from the Council of Alberta University Students, who writes that this step will ensure that instructional excellence will remain at the core of Alberta's advanced education system and that they are excited about the possibilities that this framework can create. We will continue, as I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, to work with these students to ensure that that happens.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the June 12, 2007, by-elections held in the constituencies of Calgary-Elbow and Drumheller-Stettler. Copies will be distributed to all members early next week.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have letters from constituents Sandra Hill, James Hollett, Chris Byrne, Alice Bartram, Lorne Marr, Sylvia Wolowidnyk, Jijun Yuan, Yongjie Liu, Marie Kopr, and Jason Ness. All of them are expressing their concerns with Alberta's labour laws and, in particular, asking for the outlawing of the use of replacement workers.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Geoffrey Pounder of Rocky Mountain House. He is concerned about the number of weeks he has to wait for a simple doctor's appointment and asks how many people are unable to have their short-term ailments treated due to such waits.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is five copies of my letter and cheque dated September 6 to the Kainai Food Bank. As per my pledge of April 2, '07, half of my indexed pay raise, \$146.25, is donated monthly to a food bank until AISH is similarly increased and indexed. The Kainai Food Bank has 300 volunteers and has helped 3,000 families yearly. The executive director is Kimberly Jimmy.

I will table five copies of a letter from a Marg Triskle, in a long-term care facility, who suffers from multiple sclerosis. She is 58 years old, with all her mental faculties, and lives with very little social or mental stimulus. She states that she now is paying twice as much, the care has declined drastically, and this care is going to have to be increased as her condition does decrease.

I will also table five copies of a letter from Edward and Geraldine

*See p. 2249, left col., para. 8

Buchanan, who are my constituents and object very strongly to Bill 46. They feel that it is fundamentally wrong and has a profound impact on the democratic rights of Albertans.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to rise today to give two sets of tablings. One is a program from the Royal Canadian Golf Association. A few months ago the Royal Canadian Golf Association held the extremely successful Canadian Women's Open in Edmonton and made Alberta and Edmonton proud. It was at the Royal Mayfair golf club and had thousands of volunteers.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a document on advanced affordable housing solutions from CMHC and how people can contact that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to table the requisite number of copies of a report entitled Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan Statistical Supplement, 2006-2007. It is essentially an annex to the annual report of Alberta Health and Wellness and provides some very interesting statistics such as: 24 per cent of Albertans paid reduced premiums or were exempt from paying premiums, the number of physicians in Alberta increased 21 per cent in the last four years, a total of \$1.6 billion was paid in fee for service, and very many other very interesting statistics that members might want to see.

I'd also, if I might, Mr. Speaker, just indicate that I misspoke when I said December 5, 6, 7. I was looking at the November calendar. It should have been December 3, 4, 5.* I assume the Clerk caught that, but I did definitely say Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.

head: 1:30 **Oral Question Period**

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

Fall Session Timetable

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Assembly has about 30 bills before it that have not yet had full debate, yet the legislative session is scheduled to end next week, as far as we know. These bills include the Premier's own flagship bill and others that impact the fundamental rights of Albertans. My question is to the Deputy Premier. Will this government commit to extending this session beyond the end of next week until these critical pieces of legislation have had full debate?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we'll consider anything that's appropriate in order to deal with the business of the week. But as I've just given notice, we anticipate that we should be able to accomplish that by having not unduly extended evening sittings next week, and if we make appropriate progress on bills without undue repetition, we should be able to accomplish the full agenda in that time. But if that's not the case, I will certainly look to the opposition to assist with unanimous consent, if necessary, to extend the sitting.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, there are 30 bills before this Assembly; six days left. Legislation that touches on Albertans' fundamental rights deserves full debate. All the impacts need to be understood, all the voices need to be heard, and all amendments, including many from the government, need to be considered. One particularly contentious bill, for example, has had less than four hours of debate here, less than four hours to decide whether and how rights are going to be respected. Again to the Deputy Premier: will the Deputy Premier commit that time allocation or closure will not be used to stifle debate and stifle democracy?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very interesting in that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition attended in the House not too long ago when Bill 46 was up for debate and used 60 minutes of time to speak to an amendment, which is clearly, of course, within his right to do. But if he had been a little bit shorter and focused on why the amendment should have been voted on and we could have moved on to the other amendments, he might have afforded other members of his caucus and other members of the House the opportunity to actually speak to the amendment that was on the floor.

The Speaker: We're not going to use the question period for debate of bills.

The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'll look for a straightforward answer from the Deputy Premier. The question is this: will this government commit that it will not impose time allocation or closure to ram through legislation next week?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would never want to have anyone consider that legislation is being rammed through. There will be an appropriate amount of time available for debate on Bill 46 and other bills, but certainly, if necessary, time allocation is one of the tools of the House, one of the Standing Orders that this House passed, and it's available to be used.

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

Support for the Homeless

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the mercury drops outside, thousands of Albertans are on the streets freezing. These people rely on organizations such as the Bissell Centre in Edmonton to provide basic necessities, such as warm clothing. The demand is so great this year that the Bissell Centre is turning to the public to help people in need. They've run out of supplies. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. You talk about helping those in need, but what about walking the talk? Will you commit to helping the Bissell Centre and other similar organizations across the province by providing emergency funding so that they can meet this emergency demand?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We do provide \$35 million to agencies for the homeless to support approximately 3,100 spaces. We have also added 7 and a half million dollars for emergency funding for the homeless. The Bissell Centre has and

*See p. 2248, left col., para. 12

will continue to work with the government and provide services that they provide to individuals that aren't as fortunate as us.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I visited many shelters in Alberta: the Mustard Seed and Drop-in Centre in Calgary and last week the homeless shelter in Fort McMurray operated by the Wood Buffalo housing corporation. At each shelter I heard the same message: one-third of the homeless have mental health problems, one-third have addictions issues, and one-third are in situations of distress because of abuse. What these people need is the ability to move beyond the shelter into transitional housing and, even more, into permanent supportive housing. To the same minister. The homeless need two things. They need a roof over their heads for sure, but they also need support services to help them deal with the issues that they deal with daily. Why have these two solutions not been linked together and . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, we have linked those two solutions together. In fact, we have put funding aside and are using funding for transitional housing. It's important to look at housing or the homeless in four different aspects. First of all, prevention. The second one, shelters, making sure that all the homeless have a space. At this present time in Edmonton and Calgary there are still spaces available. All shelters are not full. The third one is transitional housing. The fourth one is independence. We are working with the agencies, and we are working with individuals that need support.

Dr. B. Miller: Well, Mr. Speaker, everybody needs a home. In the case of the homeless they need a place to move beyond the shelter. It's not just single adults. There are thousands of children who will end up in shelters, and the numbers keep growing in this province. In this rich province of prosperity no child should be without a safe place to live. We have to govern with compassion and not assume that the homeless should have their butt kicked and just get a job. That's what the President of the Treasury Board said in this House. We need compassion on the part of this government. To the same minister: I mean, a 10-year program for homelessness? We need action right now, not something that's going to happen 10 years from now.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously the member opposite wasn't listening to what the government is doing right now. I will tell the hon. member that we are working not only for today but working for tomorrow. About a month ago the Premier did announce a project to end homelessness in 10 years. At that time he also appointed an hon. member from this side of the House to be the secretariat for that committee. We are compassionate, and we are looking at the future to end homelessness.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Support for Seniors

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2005 Auditor General's report on seniors care stated that the Seniors and Community Supports department has not reviewed or assessed whether the monthly disposable income rate of \$265 for lodge residents is appropriate. Seniors in Lethbridge and throughout the province have told me that they cannot get by on \$265 a month. My question to the

Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: as the monthly disposable income for lodge residents was set in 1994 and has neither been reviewed nor increased since, will the minister adjust the monthly disposable income so that it reflects the lodge residents' increasing personal income requirements due to the increased care needs . . .

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, I want to first point out that that program that we do have to see that seniors can be in supportive-living arrangements and have some form of income left on their behalf for disposable income is still one of the best among any of the provinces in this country. While you may look to some in the past, much of our supports have been much more targeted to the greatest need, ensuring that we have more spaces available.

Ms Pastoor: The rest of the provinces do not have our economy, which is why they can't afford it.

The dental assistance for seniors program provides up to \$5,000 for dental care. However, it is only of benefit to those who have dentures or require basic dental care. This program completely excludes seniors who have different varieties of dental care needs that exist, such as crowns, caps, implants, et cetera. A program that does not assist is not a benefit. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: will he review and amend this benefit so that it reflects and includes all dental needs required by our deserving low-income seniors?

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do review always the programs that we have available. We try to make sure that we have a good, comprehensive package that's available to seniors. It's in that response that designs were made to include optical and dental expenses. Those were recent additions to the program. Also, to ensure that supports are there, we give the targeted financial assistance to those in greatest need.

Ms Pastoor: They don't reflect the reality of dental care today. We're all going to be there, and we've all got caps.

A comment I heard in Public Accounts this morning about low-income seniors requires me to ask this question. Is it the position of the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports that 40 per cent of Alberta seniors require Alberta seniors' benefits because they failed to plan for their future, keeping in mind that a goodly portion of these seniors are single women who spent a lifetime raising children?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, 40 per cent of Albertans, which is correct, do receive some form of the Alberta seniors' benefits. That's a correct statement. That's not an issue of design as to whether a person is prepared or not prepared; it was the design of our program. In that sense 40 per cent have qualified to receive those benefits.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

New Royalty Framework

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I start, I want to indicate that it's very difficult to prepare questions when the

list of ministers in attendance constantly changes, almost by the minute, leading up to this session, and that's a serious concern.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Institute's 6th annual oil sands conference last week in Calgary was attended by a room full of big oil executives who paid \$2,000 for the privilege, among other things, of listening to the Minister of Finance. The Minister of Finance at that time, according to reports of people who were there, indicated that the review of royalties in this province was an idea that came from the media and was picked up on by some of the leadership candidates, who all then jumped on the bandwagon. I would like to ask the minister . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry, but the time has now evaporated, so I don't know where we're going with this one.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a well-documented fact that the royalty review was picked up by all of the leadership candidates in the past election, and everyone agreed. Our Premier was the one who won, and subsequently he instituted exactly what he had promised.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It would be interesting to know whether or not the Minister of Finance supports this process. Apparently, the Minister of Finance also voiced his concerns about the impact of changes to the royalty system to the Royalty Review Panel, but they told him to mind his own business. My question is to the Minister of Finance. Did he attempt to influence and interfere with the Royalty Review Panel in its discussions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much for that question, Mr. Speaker. My comments were in jest at that particular conference because I had absolutely no contact. I had absolutely zero contact with the people. Indeed, even if we were at a social occasion, it would be that the royalty panel would go to the other side of the room. So the royalty review report was 100 per cent absolutely independent. There was no government interference, and there was no interference from myself.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. I wonder if the Premier shares the Minister of Finance's sense of humour.

If there are unintended consequences, said the Premier, they will change the royalty review framework. I'd like to ask the Minister of Energy now: what changes are you considering? When will you tell Albertans exactly what you intend to do about royalties? Are you not concerned that the government's position on royalties is becoming as vague and confused as that of the Liberals?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, what I would indicate to you and all Albertans is that who is confused here is the member opposite. The fact of the matter is that the Premier has come out very solidly and said that the new royalty framework is in place, it is solid, it's a framework for the future, and we'll move ahead with that framework. There is no intention with this government or this ministry to stray from that particular pathway. Twenty per cent, \$1.4 billion by 2010: that's what we're expecting. If there's any confusion, it rests over there.

Roles and Responsibilities for Advanced Education

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, it would be clear to everyone here in the House that the key to the future of Alberta, of course, is within our postsecondary system, the postsecondary institutions that we have throughout the province. The Minister of Advanced Education and Technology has tabled his roles and responsibilities mandate framework, and I want to question him on this from this perspective. In the late '90s and the early part of this century there was a fair amount of work and also political capital invested in terms of Campus Alberta.

The Speaker: I think the time is gone, so if the minister wants to respond.

Mr. Horner: Well, perhaps, Mr. Speaker, I would let the hon. member go to his next question. Being one of the members of this House and this government that actually started the idea of Campus Alberta, it would be most interesting to find out what his question is.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dunford: Yes. If I may continue, then. What I'm most concerned about are the principles that surrounded that whole concept of Campus Alberta. Have they maintained their presence in the new roles and responsibilities mandate?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. One of the concerns that we've always had during the consultation that we started some 11 months ago was to ensure that we had a document that had some meat to it, that had the principles that everyone agreed to that would make the system that we have in this province the best in the world: the best at collaboration, the best at transferability, the best at access for our students, meeting the three goals of what our postsecondaries should be doing, and that is for the students, for the taxpayers of Alberta, and for our society, and they are entrenched in this document.

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, I have two very good institutions in the city that I represent: the Lethbridge College and, of course, the University of Lethbridge. The Lethbridge College had written the minister and used the term "diminished framework" in terms of their ability to look at degrees. I'm wondering now: can Lethbridge College continue to have flexibility and move forward in degree granting?

Mr. Horner: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, a good question. This is about our institutions working together as a single system, Campus Alberta system, but we also know that all institutions can't be all things to all people at any given time. We want our institutions to focus on their strengths. We want them to focus on the delivery mechanisms that they do best. But we also recognize that there are exceptions. They are going to be rare. After consultation we have provided within the document some flexibility for colleges in very limited circumstances and, after a very thorough review as it relates to the Campus Alberta concept, the ability to offer degrees should the system see the need for that to happen.

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

Electricity Exports

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are still more scandals in the Department of Energy. Electricity deregulation has

increased prices and reduced supply. Last year there was a net decrease of 335 megawatts in the installed generating capacity in our province. Now we find out this Progressive Conservative government secretly wants to increase electricity exports even though there is a shortage of electricity here in Alberta and our prices are increasing at an alarming rate. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why does this government want to export large volumes of electricity from this province . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, this question relates to the fact that there had been a question put forward from our department to the AESO with respect to our interconnect capacity in the province of Alberta. I've answered this question previously, and again I'll say the same thing. Perhaps the member wants to climb a pole someplace and watch the electrons. They can go both directions. This whole issue has nothing to do at all with exporting electricity. There is a particular merchant line that's involved in an export capacity. The intertie connections in the province of Alberta, according to our interconnected capacity, are weak.

1:50

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, I'm shocked by that answer.

To the Minister of Energy: how does the minister explain the Department of Energy's own proposal, which indicates that we want to export thousands of megawatts of electricity per day from this province to the American market by the year 2020?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, the AESO has the responsibility and the mandate to ensure that the electricity utility system in the province of Alberta, both on the generating side and the transmission of that commodity, is robust and meets the needs and requirements of Albertans. That is the number one priority of the Energy department and, most certainly, any of the bodies that work in conjunction with the Energy department. Our number one priority is Albertans, and interconnection may or may not allow the increased export of excess capacity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the Minister of Energy cannot pass the buck to the AESO. This is your own report, which indicates you're planning to export large volumes of electricity. My next question: given that Tonbridge Power Inc.'s own documents acknowledge that the rationale behind the Montana/Alberta tie-line project is to export Alberta's power to California, where it is needed, will the minister admit that this project is the first step in the plan to export large volumes of electricity to U.S. consumers? This isn't about Alberta's interests. It's about Americans with their interest in our power.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the situation that we have here is that Alberta is actually connected to a number of different places in North America with respect to commodities that we produce. We export grain. We export oil. We export natural gas. If a circumstance would arise through the prudent use of the systems that we have in Alberta, and perhaps 4,000 or 5,000 of megawatts of energy that could be produced in conjunction with cogeneration, some of our other industries – if that excess capacity became available, I don't think that commodity, if it wasn't needed in Alberta, should not be exported to someplace where it could be used.

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

Alberta Office in Washington

Mr. Lukaszuk: Castle Downs? Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This was such an electrifying conversation, I just couldn't stop listening.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has a number of foreign offices throughout the world, and one of them is our office in Washington, which we've had for some three years. It is colocated with the Canadian embassy, and the official over there has the title of minister-counsellor. Can the minister of intergovernmental affairs please tell us: what actual value is there to taxpayers of having that office abroad?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to say that our neighbours to the south, as we're all aware, are the largest trading partner in the world, with almost 90 per cent of Alberta's exports, almost \$75 billion a year worth of goods and services, that go to the United States. I might also say that of Alberta's top 25 trade destinations, 21 of them are in the United States. It's very obvious that our office in Washington is doing very good work.

I might add that I'll be announcing, of course, as the Premier has done yesterday, that Gary Mar will be filling that position effective December 3.

The Speaker: That was inappropriate use of a member's name. The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know that the United States is Alberta's largest trade partner and is also very important in the world economy. What will that newly appointed individual do to make sure that Alberta's views are duly represented to the U.S. government?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, in this past year the Washington office has given numerous examples. You may not be aware, but did you know that in the past year two federal government cabinet ministers, the Secretary of Energy and Secretary of the Treasury, have visited Alberta, have visited the oil sands capital of the world. They are clearly getting the message in Washington from our office: Alberta is a reliable, safe place, politically and otherwise, to be able to invest dollars. Billions of American dollars are being invested in Alberta, which is clearly excellent news for Albertans, with tremendous opportunity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each office abroad has a different priority and a different focus. What will be the focus for the next few years of our Alberta office in Washington?

Mr. Boutilier: The message has to be very clear. Our royalty regime, one of the lowest taxes of provinces in all of Canada, in fact the lowest, clearly our commitment to resource development, environmental responsibility, and being good partners are good examples of what Albertans are doing in terms of investing and the opportunities and jobs that all members and their constituents enjoy because of how we manage the resources we enjoy in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Local Government Issues

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week Alberta's urban municipalities are holding their annual convention, and they're bringing with them many resolutions for the province to consider. The Municipal Government Act provides no formal consultation mechanism on matters affecting local government, so the resolutions are really the only available method they have to get the province's attention, and they have many concerns. To the Minister of Environment. A common resolution is ending the practice of giving water licences for deep well flooding with fresh groundwater. AAMD and C passed a similar resolution this year, and this has been brought up many times in the past. Will the minister commit to immediately phasing out this practice and protect fresh groundwater sources for human consumption?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, this issue has been under discussion for quite some time. The member opposite should understand and should know that, in fact, we are moving in that direction, that we have recently initiated an agreement, put into place guidelines with respect to the use of fresh water for oil field operation. One of the first things that I did when I became minister was to ensure that those guidelines were implemented as quickly as possible.

Mr. Taylor: I guess he missed the word "immediately" in my question, Mr. Speaker.

Another common resolution that we've seen before and are seeing again is enhancing the ability of municipalities to protect natural areas within their boundaries. Cities and towns are willing to step up on this issue. The question is whether the provincial government will allow them to take strong environmental protection action. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: will you commit to amending the Municipal Government Act to give municipalities more authority to protect natural areas within their jurisdiction?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to add to the first question that the hon. member talked about, saying that there is no other way of consultation. First of all, the association, the AUMA, meets, has resolutions so that they can discuss the issues and have a democratic process to bring forward an idea and at the same time bring to the government those ideas, those directions. It is not the only way of consultation. In fact, this government through many ministries goes out and has meetings and has consultation with municipalities, with their associations throughout Alberta, making sure that the voices of municipalities are heard.

Mr. Taylor: You know, Mr. Speaker, I was going to be nice to him. All he has to do is answer my questions and I'll sit down. Affordable housing continues to be a critical issue in Alberta. Providing funding to municipalities is only part of the solution. A key element is bringing developers into the equation and making them an integral part of the solution. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who I guess isn't going to do anything on the natural areas file. In order to motivate developers to construct new affordable housing, there must be incentives offered. Will the minister follow the Alberta Liberal caucus affordable housing plan and the resolution of the city of Calgary and provide tax incentives to developers to get more affordable housing built faster?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, first of all, tax incentives are under the jurisdiction of the federal government, and we are continuing to work with the federal government to look at incentives of taxation for increased housing. Also, \$285 million of new money has been

put into the housing portfolio, \$143 million given to municipalities for them to have the autonomy to decide how they feel that the areas of concern in their municipalities are addressed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

2:00

Bow River Fishery

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not much of a fisherman, but in the past I enjoyed being able to see trout or whitefish in the beautiful Bow River, that flows through our constituency. Recently as the representative for Calgary-Bow my constituents have been telling me that they have been catching fewer fish than normal from the Bow River. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Is the minister aware that the quality of the fishery in the Bow River has degraded?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am aware of this change. The fishery in the Bow River is changing for the better, but you have to distinguish between upstream and downstream from the city. SRD's research on the fishery below Calgary this year confirmed very healthy trout populations and high densities of fish. I want to assure the House that I spent several hot, hard, long days personally verifying the research of our people.

Now, upstream is a little different. The good news, though, is that the water is cleaner. There are fewer nutrients, but fewer nutrients mean fewer fish. But there is a self-sustaining population both above and below the city of Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Can the minister tell us whether his department plans to supplement the fishery in the Bow River and increase the number of fish by stocking the river?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the short answer to that question is no. The Bow River has not been stocked since 1954, when we put rainbow and cutthroat in. Restocking is not appropriate on a river like the Bow. Fish stocking works best when fish populations have been eliminated either due to overfishing or a catastrophic change in the habitat, and neither of these situations applies here. I reiterate: there is a good, healthy fishery both above the city and below the city on the Bow River.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. My second supplemental to the same minister: are there any conditions under which his department would consider stocking the Bow River with trout?

Dr. Morton: Well, if the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow will let me set up a barbecue in her backyard and fish off the bank, maybe; otherwise, the answer is no. Our practice is not normally to stock rivers and other flowing bodies. This is due to the adverse effect on fish that are in the river – there's a risk of changing the gene pool – and also the poor survivability rate of the stocked fish. We believe in sort of free love when it comes to the fish: let the fish reproduce on their own. This is the most biologically sound and cost-effective way to maintain our fish populations.

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

Childhood Obesity

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. School board trustees in Red Deer and Edmonton have shown phenomenal leadership in the efforts to curb childhood obesity and have committed to ban the sale of junk food in schools. The Ministry of Education would do very well to make the most of this momentum and aid school boards in their efforts to promote healthy eating in schools. Will the Minister of Education implement initiatives in order to encourage this pattern to continue across the province of Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, just last week this hon. member was rather critical in a member's statement of the government interfering with what school boards' jurisdictions are. Clearly, this is a matter for school boards to assess, and I applaud those who have. But that is clearly something that school boards are elected to do.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought the department was a leader in things. I may be mistaken.

A second critical factor to addressing the efforts to curb childhood obesity is poverty. Last May the Minister of Education stated, "It is not the government's responsibility to feed, clothe, and shelter every child in Alberta," yet the Centre for Science in the Public Interest emphasizes government responsibility to ensure access to healthy foods for all children. In 2005-06 the provincial spending average was \$5.54 per student per year for school meal programs. This government spent nothing. To the Minister of Education . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] We're out of time, hon. member. [interjection] The hon. Minister of Education has been recognized.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the provincial government through the Northland school division, which is the only one that we are directly involved in with a hot lunch program – again, the hon. member is asking the provincial government to get down into the day-to-day operations of school boards, and we simply don't do that. It is up to school boards to determine places of need where they feel that a hot lunch program would be appropriate. There are a number of those that are under way, and that's the way it should be.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, what about envelope funding, Mr. Minister?

Can I just go into this? Promoting physical fitness is another crucial aspect in fighting childhood obesity, yet high school students all over the province are often charged an annual fee in order to access their school's wellness centre. If the government and the minister are serious about tackling obesity problems, will they commit to elimination of exercise facility fees for students across the province?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, this is just another spending ask of this particular opposition. I would ask this particular member to have the discussion with his colleague the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, who at the same time wants to put 30 per cent of nonrenewable resource revenue directly into the heritage fund. Where is all the money going to come from?

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

Support for Cow-calf Producers

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has been talking about their losses every time the Canadian dollar goes up a penny, but the big hit is being taken by family farms. Low cattle prices and the high dollar make it near impossible to turn a profit these days for cow-calf producers. In the mid-1990s cow-calf producers got 60 cents to the pound while packers and retailers took a dollar. Now farmers get 35 cents for the same pound while packers get almost \$2.50. To the Minister of Agriculture and Food: will you do the right thing and help family farmers now, or will you just hand out subsidies to big packers like you did the last time with the BSE crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, I just have to say this over and over again, that we just came out with a \$165 million package for the red-meat industry. I think that if the hon. member across would check, at the present time the red-meat industry is in great distress, including the packers, who just happen to be all losing money at this particular stage of the game.

Mr. Eggen: Well, that's interesting, Mr. Speaker. Last year Cargill set a record profit of \$2.3 billion while family farmers across Canada had a combined debt of \$54 billion. Putting taxpayers' dollars in the pockets of the world's second-largest privately owned corporation does not help farmers here in Alberta. What would help farmers is a base price that would make sure that farmers got paid first for their cattle. To the same minister: when will you put local ranchers and farmers ahead of big-business profits?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would check, Cargill is an international company. It operates in Canada. Right now with Cargill the monies they make are international at this stage of the game. I think that probably the truth of the matter is that if he could come up with a program that he's talking about that's not countervailable, I'd certainly like to listen to it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. You know, I definitely sense that there's something wrong here. Farmers are going broke raising beef, but prices keep going up in the grocery store. Maybe the Minister of Agriculture and Food doesn't have an answer for farmers, but farmers do have an answer for him. For long-term success: number one, restore farmers' market power and limit the economic power of the big corporations. Number two, in the short term there is an answer as well: set a base price so that farmers don't go broke putting food on the table for all of us. Farmers are not asking for handouts. What they want is control over their own business. To the same minister: when will you do the right thing and set a base price for beef, paying the farmers first?

Mr. Groeneveld: I suspect, Mr. Speaker, I would have to move across the House before I could come up with a solution like that.

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

Groundwater Stewardship

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no question that water, both above and below ground, is important to all Albertans. As we see more and more development in rural Alberta, we're also seeing more demand for both surface water and groundwater. While it's often easy to see how surface water is doing, it's much harder to see what's going on with groundwater aquifers. To the Minister of Environment: what is your department doing to gain more understanding about groundwater and groundwater supplies in Alberta?

2:10

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is indeed a need for us to learn more about Alberta's groundwater, in particular the interconnection between groundwater and surface water. We've made a significant commitment to work with Alberta's Geological Survey and the pool of knowledge that they have. We're working in conjunction with that data as well as completing groundwater protection mapping and a preliminary look at underground geology.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, on Friday of this week we will be announcing an aerial survey down the highway 2 corridor, further enhancing our knowledge of underground water. You might wonder how you study water from an airplane, but I'm told that the technology exists to actually use radar-like equipment that will actually allow them to view underground from an aircraft.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are many people in my constituency who rely on groundwater for their household use and for their livelihood. There are also a large amount of oil and gas developments in the area, which some residents worry could impact the safety of the groundwater supply. How is the minister making sure that my constituents' groundwater supplies are not negatively affected by the oil and gas activities?

Mr. Renner: Protecting water supplies, Mr. Speaker, is critical. We first of all investigate each and every complaint that we have. To date there is no conclusive evidence of well contamination from coal-bed methane activities. All of our investigations show that in most cases well location, construction, and maintenance tend to be the main causes of water problems. Nevertheless, we will continue to work with the EUB as well as oil and gas companies to ensure that if there are issues that are identified, they're corrected and rectified as quickly as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The largest river in my constituency, the Battle River, has some unique constraints since it's not glacial fed but, rather, fed by runoff and groundwater. The river is often dry, and the groundwater levels fluctuate. Will the minister consider on-stream and off-stream storage to regulate more consistent river flow and enrich groundwater supplies for the Battle River watershed?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, considering off-stream storage and implementing are two different things. So the answer to "Will I consider?": of course I will. Will we in the next short period of time be able to implement? That's a bigger question. Frankly, work is under way to identify, first of all, opportunities for storage of upstream water and then, secondly, to prioritize those opportunities. Once that work is complete, I can assure the member that it will be part of the Water for Life strategy and is part of the Water for Life

strategy to begin to develop some of those storage opportunities as they become available.

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

Infection Prevention and Control in Hospitals

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have learned that former patients of Vegreville's St. Joseph's hospital have tested positive for hepatitis B and C. There are still some outstanding questions that need to be answered to assure Albertans in this community that their health is not at risk. To the minister of health: how is the minister going to determine if these hepatitis cases were linked to poor sterilization at St. Joe's?

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

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That may not be something that can actually be determined. But what I would want hon. members to know and the public to know is that if you test any population within the province, any group of people within the province, you will find a certain incidence of hepatitis C and AIDS. What we've found in the testing that's happened with respect to East Central and particularly in Vegreville is that the incidence that has been discovered in the testing is no greater than one would expect in the normal population. So the conclusion that one might draw is that there hasn't been a linkage to that particular incident.

Ms Blakeman: You still need to identify the other risks.

Again to the same minister. Since day one the Alberta Liberals have been encouraging this government to put monitoring and enforcement mechanisms in place for infection control. You have plans but no action. When will the minister re-establish monitoring and enforcement responsibilities within the ministry?

Mr. Hancock: Well, we have plenty of action, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the Health Quality Council report, the infection prevention control report that we did relative to a review of standards for professions. We've brought forward Bill 41 and Bill 48, which deal with both the professions and with the health authorities and voluntary organizations, to put in place the structures. Within the department we're preparing a provincial standard with respect to infection prevention and control, and part and parcel of that will be an auditing and enforcement mechanism.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In June the minister said, "It would be unnecessary and premature to assess the risk of lawsuits." Now that people are testing positive for hepatitis B and C, will the minister now begin to determine the scale of this government's liability?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, this minister and this government are focused on people, on making sure that they get the services they need when they need it, the quality of care they need when they need it, that there is an infection prevention control standard, that there is an assurance for the people of Alberta that standards are in place and that they're being followed. If there are legal implications of anything that happens in the province, those will happen, and we will deal with them as and when they happen, and we'll prepare for them where appropriate and where necessary. But our focus is not on our potential liability; our focus is on service to Albertans.

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

Water Management and Erosion Control Program

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For years many of my municipalities and, of course, my constituents and other Albertans have received financial assistance from the government's erosion control program. This funding is necessary to help cover the costs of water management of erosion control projects. My question is to the Minister of Environment. As there is such a high demand for this kind of funding, can Albertans expect to see more stable funding for the Alberta water management and erosion control program?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a very interesting question because, although a very popular program among municipalities, this has traditionally always been funded with a minimal amount of dollars. We have found in Alberta Environment that the opportunities to actually accomplish some significant amount of work have always been compromised by the relatively small budget that we have available. Given the fact that the government this year has announced that there will be \$1.4 billion made available to municipalities through the municipal sustainability initiative, we are in fact reviewing this policy.

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, as much as I love to have reviews done, there are some issues relative to the water erosion control program in my municipalities. To the same minister: because this is such a well-used and critical grant program for Albertans, when can my constituents and other Albertans expect to see the results of the minister's review of this grant program? It is truly needed, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, we are reviewing this program to determine whether there are some better alternatives to accomplish similar objectives. That review should be complete by September 2008, and that would be sufficient time to incorporate any outcomes from that review in the '09-10 budget.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Ms Calahasen: No. That's good.

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

New Royalty Framework (continued)

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the Premier announced his response to the Royalty Review Panel's recommendations, he proudly boasted that his government had delivered. Well, that remains to be seen. My question is for the Minister of Energy. Last week a former Royalty Review Panel member stated that the new oil sands royalty system may in fact leave Albertans worse off than they were in 1997. Given that the minister likes to ignore expert opinions and advice on royalties, how does the minister respond to the claim put forward by this expert economist? Is the economist wrong?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, certainly, everybody in the province of Alberta is entitled to an opinion with respect to what we may or may not collect at some point in the future in a royalty regime. There are a number of parameters around how we calculate the expected

outcome from our royalty regime. We have continued to hold true to the idea that our framework is solid. I believe it's solid on a go-forward basis. The Premier has indicated that we will have an increase of 20 per cent in the royalties we collect, and I am sure that we're going to attain that.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberals committed to the same total increase as called for by the Royalty Review Panel. We acknowledged that reaching the benchmark would require further consultation with industry. Now, after weeks of criticizing us for our position, the Premier has admitted that details in his plan have unforeseen consequences. Will the minister admit that the Premier's plan was flawed from the start and that the government has now adopted the approach taken by the Alberta Liberals except that we're missing out on \$500 million?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, what we have in front of us today is a framework that's a very solid framework to move forward and move the royalty structure forward in the province of Alberta to the benefit of all Albertans. There needs to be a balance reached here. Although the members opposite may not be responsible for Albertans' jobs, I believe that I am responsible for Albertans' jobs. The balance that we will find will provide jobs for Albertans, and it will also provide a maximum return for Albertans on the resources they own.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. The expert Royalty Review Panel strongly opposed the idea of ending the Crown agreements with Suncor and Syncrude. Doing so may cost Albertans tens of billions of dollars in settlement costs.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. R. Miller: Tens of billions. Further, Alberta's reputation as a secure place to invest may be irreparably damaged. How many billions of dollars will this government decision to ignore the expert advice once again cost Albertans? How much is it going to cost us?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, you know, I'm not going to go into this diatribe again that we keep hearing and answer these questions that have to do with what may have happened, what might have happened, what could have happened in the past. There are very clearly hundreds of billions of dollars and thousands and thousands of jobs that have been created for Albertans by the policy set by this government. Those members and any panel that's structured by this government are not responsible at the end of the day for government policy. We're responsible for the policy. We will develop sound policy to move forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, that was 88 questions and responses during today's Oral Question Period.

We'll now return to the Routine. We were on the subject of Tabling Returns and Reports. The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

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

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the Cardston-Taber-Warner Progressive Conservative Association Premier's golf tournament advertisement that they took out, indicating their platinum sponsors, one being a school division, which they accepted money from in that Premier's golf tournament.

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

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings this afternoon. The first is from the parents and staff of Mr. Cake's Daycare in Sherwood Park, indicating that under the new Child Care Licensing Act, if they are required to comply, "the consequences would be devastating."

Another one is from Kathleen Vestby, indicating that "increasing the regulations and restrictions for licensed childcare facilities will only worsen the current crisis."

I have another one from Fred and Leah Sacha. "Currently wait lists are long and the new regulations [for child care] will increase the lists."

One from Marcie Whalen concerning the problem of homelessness in our city and province.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of letters I've received from 200 of my constituents calling for changes to Alberta's labour laws. The letters express strong support for such changes as first contract arbitration, full legal recognition of bargaining rights for public employees, and one labour law for all unionized workers, among other issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings today. The first two are in regard to my questions earlier today regarding electricity exports. This is a document from the National Centre for Upgrading Technology, An Integrated Energy Solution, dated September 25, 2006, Alberta Department of Energy, oil sands business unit.

My second tabling is a PowerPoint presentation from Tonbridge Power Inc. It's regarding Merchant Transmission and Wind-powered Generation: A Natural Fit? It's the background to the Montana-Alberta tie project.

My third tabling is a proposed amendment that the Official Opposition caucus asks for to the Alberta Utilities Commission Act. This is amending section 28.

My next tabling is also a proposed amendment to Bill 46. This is regarding section 29(2).

My last tabling today is also an amendment to the Alberta Utilities Commission Act. This is a proposal to amend section 91.

Thank you.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter to table from Mr. William Eady, who was introduced earlier, whose concern is about education, that young people are not learning how to use a

cash register, especially grades 8 and 9, so they're not ready to take up their employment with adequate training and typing skills.

Thank you.

head: **Orders of the Day**
head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 56
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply)
Act, 2007 (No. 2)

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on behalf of.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. the President of the Treasury Board I would like to move Bill 56 for second reading.

It is, of course, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007 (No. 2). The Committee of Supply dealt with the details of the bill on Thursday afternoon in committee. Certainly, with respect to the supply that's requested there, I think there was three hours of debate at least on Thursday afternoon with respect to the responses. I would commend the bill to the House and ask for its support.

The Speaker: Shall I call the question?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. I'm looking forward to this opportunity to begin discussions about Bill 56, the appropriation bill. I have great concerns that a number of fixed-income individuals – those on AISH, those on PDD, seniors – are not getting the subsidy and the support that's necessary for them, whether they're fortunate enough to be able to maintain an independent residence, live in an apartment, or whether they're in a long-term care or an assisted living facility.

This past spring I brought up the fact that in a 292-complex apartment the individuals there, who are primarily on fixed incomes, received an increase in their rent of 50 per cent. What that resulted in was that for one individual on AISH, who lived in a 540 square foot apartment, his rent went up to \$1,100 a month. Keeping in mind that AISH payments were \$1,050, that provided him with a great deal of hardship. That hardship that this individual faced is repeated over and over again not only for residents of this particular complex but in apartments and basement suites throughout the province.

The failure of this government to provide subsidies other than through the eviction fund does not provide the type of stability that renters, especially the most vulnerable on fixed incomes, are reliant upon. Therefore, when we're talking about Bill 56, the appropriations bill, I would hope that the government, if not now at least in the very near future, would consider giving renters some kind of predictable, sustainable support and would consider what we have long said, and that's the idea of a temporary rent cap, a sunset clause, a rent cap which would provide the predictability and the sustainability that currently isn't available. Government subsidies have gone from \$10 million to \$21 million. This continual increase in subsidies, which go directly into the landlords' bank accounts through the tenants' temporary fingers, is not sustainable, and it is not a very good usage of taxpayers' money.

2:30

I also, when it comes to Bill 56 appropriations, have concern over support for education both in terms of programming and in terms of infrastructure. There are 60 schools in Calgary alone that have

reported leaks in their roofs. There have been examples, Brentwood elementary in Calgary-Varsity, where an entire ceiling of one wing and hallway collapsed after a heavy rainfall. Previously there was evidence of collapsing tiles in the library.

What adds to the concern with regard to the collapse not only is the concern for the children who are living underneath these roofs but the fact that a number of these schools were built in the 1950s, when asbestos was one of the key components of the roof tiles. When these roof tiles are damaged and the asbestos fibres are then exposed, it's not only the children who face the risks; it's the teachers and the maintenance staff who then go into these schools to provide the repairs.

When it comes to infrastructure, again, the average age of schools in Calgary is 40 years, and the Western Canada high school in my colleague from Calgary-Currie's ward has fencing around the front of the school because of fears of the windowsills falling out. Already we've had examples, and you can see on the school where plywood has gone over what used to be windows because the windows have actually dropped out.

The repair bill for that school has gone from an initial estimate of \$32 million to well over \$60 million now, and I'm just talking about one particular city, the city of Calgary, where the combined infrastructure deficit of both the Calgary public and the Calgary separate is now well over a half a billion dollars, at \$700 million and rising. With regard to appropriations, my suggestion would be that we have the pay now/pay later concept. The longer that these infrastructure concerns are not dealt with, the greater becomes the risk to the inhabitants: in this case, the children, their teachers, and staff caretakers. There is no acceptable reason in a province that is reporting billion dollar surpluses to not invest in education infrastructure.

Another infrastructure concern I have is that with Calgary's growing population and the area that the Calgary health region supports being well over a million individuals, the ability to keep up and provide programming through the health care – and, again, I'm going to refer to the health care infrastructure – is inadequate. The cost of the southeast hospital, which has recently at least had its ground broken, rose from approximately \$500 million to well over \$1.2 billion. While I appreciate the fact that the government has maintained its commitment to the project even though the price has escalated, with proper planning this hospital would have been up and built before the General was imploded.

A similar concern with regard to the Tom Baker cancer centre, which borders my constituency. It actually falls into the constituency of my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View. The Tom Baker cancer centre is so oversubscribed that the CHR is coming up with plans on how to alleviate and provide timely cancer care, and in their desperation they've considered leasing more space at great public cost at the Holy Cross hospital. Again, this was a hospital that had \$32 million of renovations to it before it was sold to the Huang brothers at a price of a little over \$3 million.

Since that time the Calgary health region has been forced to lease space from this facility of dubious infrastructure components. We're all very well aware of the asbestos that was found in the facility. We're aware that the government in its wisdom shut down the seniors' care facilities, yet the government seems willing to consider the temporary arrangement again of going back to the Holy Cross, which should never have been sold in the first place, to provide care for cancer patients. At some point we have to invest our money wisely the first time so that we're not doing band-aid repairs and continually contracting out and leasing space that was once public.

We had in the constituency of Calgary-Mountain View the wonderful Grace hospital, that was probably among the top hospitals

for serving women in Canada. That hospital, again, was sold, and what we're left with now is scrambling to keep up with the population.

The University of Calgary, while younger than the University of Alberta, recently reached the enviable age of 41 years and celebrated that anniversary. The buildings are starting to feel the wear of that 41 years of existence. I will credit the government for the \$260 million injection into the ISEEE building, the institute for sustainable energy, environment and – it has been changed from economy to experiential learning. But that \$260 million arrived about a year and a half too late. Then to cover the costs, it was estimated by the former head of the institute, Dr. Mansell, that to provide the thousand spaces that that \$260 million was supposed to cover would now in fact require closer to \$320 million to achieve the same effect.

These ad hoc decisions and this delay in agreeing to write the cheque but then deliver that cheque so that the actual construction could take place has proved extremely costly not only at the University of Calgary, in the constituency I represent, but also at the University of Alberta. The government has recently provided money to the University of Lethbridge. It has provided money to the college in Medicine Hat. While that money is appreciated, the longer we wait and the disbursement in sort of bits and pieces as opposed to having a long-range plan are very disconcerting.

Another concern, because I represent the University of Calgary, that comes out of Bill 56 and the appropriations is the fact that for two years the government held back on increases to postsecondary tuition. Well, that cap is now gone, and students are experiencing the additional costs not only of their tuition. When you apply the costs that they're experiencing from increased rents, then it is very hard for a student not to be simultaneously studying and holding down one or two jobs. In a province with such wealth based on our current nonrenewable energy, we need to be looking forth into the future and consider the effect of not providing the education and tuition support.

2:40

Last year with Bill 40 the decision on tuition raises went from legislation into regulation, and the opportunity for the discussion of tuition increases left the floor of this House. That's why with regard to Bill 56, the appropriations bill, I want to encourage the government to recognize the investment of postsecondary institutions not only in their infrastructure but also in tuition.

I would like them to recognize that providing residences on the universities enlivens the facility. Right now the University of Calgary cannot cope with more than 8 per cent of its population in student residences on the campus. That adds the extra costs of getting to and from their basement suites, whose exorbitant rents have gone through the sky, from apartments, taking transportation. All kinds of bills are added to those students.

The government has suggested that the ideal amount of money spent on housing or accommodation or rent for an apartment should not exceed 30 per cent of an individual's wages. But whether it's the students at Mount Royal or whether it's the students at the University of Calgary, Bow Valley College, SAIT, the Alberta College of Art and Design, these students are faced with putting forward 50 to 75 per cent of the money that they manage to scrape over the summer into accommodation as opposed to directing it towards their learning, their studies, their books, and decent food.

The government needs to realize that not only do they have to spend wisely, do they have to make investments wisely, but they need to realize that we have passed the peak for conventional oil and gas. If we don't put money away at this time in a balanced approach such as the Alberta Liberals have recommended, the saving of 30 per

cent and putting that into the heritage trust fund and then creating separate endowment funds for postsecondary – we recommended that 35 per cent of the 30 per cent of nonrenewable revenue that we receive be set aside for postsecondary. We recommended that 25 per cent of that 30 per cent be set aside for infrastructure, and we've said: let's take 35 per cent of that 30 and put it into the heritage trust fund so that we could wean ourselves from this one-trick pony of oil and gas revenue so that by 2020, using the old royalty scheme, we would have \$120 billion sitting in our heritage trust fund, which would . . .

Mr. MacDonald: How much?

Mr. Chase: A hundred and twenty billion, using the old figures. That would provide us more money through interest than we're currently receiving on conventional oil and gas.

When the government is deciding on areas to invest in, I would suggest that more of the money that comes from lotteries, slots, and casinos be put into preventative programs like AADAC. Currently AADAC receives only 3 per cent of the total monies that are earned from lotteries and casinos, et cetera. Therefore, what we have is kind of a revolving door. Whether it's addiction to gambling, whether it's addiction to alcohol, addiction to drugs, the pressures of a booming economy are driving people to areas that are of great concern not only to themselves individually but to the well-being of this wonderful province as a whole. So when we look at Bill 56, the appropriations bill, I would encourage you to put more of the profits from gambling, from lotteries, back into prevention programs like AADAC, also into shelters for individuals that have ended up on the street as a result of their addictions or the mental illnesses that have arisen from the stresses placed upon their lives.

We have a wonderful opportunity, but it's an opportunity that is rapidly drawing to a close, to invest in programs such as education, such as health care, such as crime prevention as opposed to the necessary expansion of remand centres because crime prevention wasn't a primary concern.

We are fortunate, but in Alberta our good fortune, dependent solely on nonrenewable resources, has an expiry date on it. So I'm encouraging this government to look at the investments: the investments in safe roads, in schools, in health, in education, in keeping seniors in their homes as long as we possibly can, in recognizing the contributions of caregivers, whether they're ones that are contracted directly by the government or are subcontracted and, unfortunately, on a different level of wage than those working directly for the government.

Our most important resources are people, and until we recognize that people require an investment and a security, a predictability, and a sustainability, Albertans will continue to be underserved. Let's make the expenditures right the first time so that we're not having to continually remake them into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 56, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007 (No. 2). This is the second time around that the government has come to the Legislature to seek funds to continue funding its business by way of supplementary supply estimates. This time around the government is asking for an additional \$1.498 billion or so towards defraying the further charges and expenses of the public service, classed as expense and equipment/inventory expenditures.

Mr. Speaker, looking at the various departments and the amount

of money they are asking for by way of this bill and the supplementary supply, I note one particular department; that is, the Department of Seniors and Community Supports. While Bill 56 shows that department asking for only an additional \$15 million, the supplementary supply estimates indicate, in fact, that it will be \$25 million that the department will be putting to new uses. Of that \$25 million, \$10 million have been slashed off the budgeted amount for one particular program, the assured income for the severely handicapped program, usually known as AISH, and those \$10 million are being transferred to approved rural affordable supportive living projects.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The fact that the rural affordable supportive living projects need more money is not something that I find difficult to understand given the growing costs of housing, whether it's new housing or rental housing or whatever. The concern that I have is with the transfer of funds out of one program which is in great demand by those Albertans who use AISH program arrangements and putting it in another area of high need. What worries me is that what's happening here resembles the old adage of robbing Peter to pay Paul.

2:50

I'm reminded of various phone calls and letters that my constituency office received in the summer in the wake of exorbitant rent increases that recipients of AISH in my constituency had begun to receive, the alarm on their part and desperation expressed in their letters as to how, with the given AISH amounts that they receive under the program, they're going to be able to pay for their increased rents and at the same time pay for other necessities of life in order to live a life which is more or less living at the margin of mainstream society. With these \$10 million being transferred from the money that was potentially available to AISH recipients, I am worried that their concerns are going to become even deeper and more serious.

The presumed argument that is given for this transfer is the fact that there has not been the expected uptake in the AISH program and that the lower than budgeted rate of growth in caseloads is the reason that there was this \$10 million sitting around to be transferred to some other areas. Mr. Speaker, my concern with respect to this alleged lower than budgeted rate of growth is that I wonder if the assessment criteria have been changed and altered in order to disqualify a larger number of Albertans, a larger percentage of applicants who try to access the assured income for the severely handicapped program. I must confess that I'm not entirely sure if those assessment criteria have in fact been changed to the detriment of applicants being accepted to the program. My fear is that that may be the reason behind the lower than budgeted rate of growth in caseloads in the AISH program.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, I hope that the minister and the staff responsible for the AISH program are listening and would read the comments that I'm making and will address the two concerns that I've expressed: the need to perhaps bolster the minimum payments made to AISH recipients in order to enable them to not have to cut back on their food budget and other life necessities in order to pay for the increased rents that they must pay given the housing crisis that we face; secondly, I want some assurance that the lower than budgeted rate of growth in caseloads is not due to changes in assessment criteria which make it more difficult now than was the case before this current budget was passed for people to be able to access the AISH program.

With those two concerns expressed, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat and let other members speak to Bill 56. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions?

There being none, the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first thing I would like to address in terms of the debate on Bill 56, I believe, is the question of school maintenance. I've talked to a number of trustees about this in the last 10 days. They're really asking the government to consider regular ongoing maintenance dollars, and they're suggesting that they would like to have it in a three-year plan so that they can plan on it, do some planning in terms of school maintenance across different parts of the province. That's one of the things that seems to be very, very important in terms of giving them some idea of when the dollars are coming and how to plan for using the dollars.

Now, in terms of my own constituency, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about roads. We have two major road considerations in St. Albert. One is referred to as the West Regional Road. The fact is that we really don't have a clear understanding as of this moment, as I understand it – I was just talking to a person from city hall this morning – as to the dollars that are going to be allotted to the West Regional Road. The main thing I'm trying to speak to here is the fact that if St. Albert has to pay the total cost of the West Regional Road, it will have a very difficult impact, an insurmountable impact, on our tax base.

The other road that we're looking forward to hearing more clearly from the government about is what we refer to in St. Albert as the Anthony Henday extension. About a month ago, maybe two months ago – I think it was in September – we had a meeting regarding this in terms of the alignment of this new road. A number of citizens from the Akinsdale, Heritage Lakes, and Grandin Park areas of St. Albert attended those meetings regarding the alignment of the road and the issues related to it such as noise, pollution, et cetera, et cetera. It was their understanding that there was input taken from them which would have some bearing on maybe adjusting the alignment of where the road went. We're anxiously waiting to hear from the government if the concerns of the citizens of the communities mentioned will be taken into consideration. So that's dealing with roads.

One of the serious situations in St. Albert is housing, housing for young people and for seniors. We have a series of apartments in St. Albert that have just got an increase of 17 per cent. I was talking to one of my constituents on the phone this morning. Her rent in St. Albert went from \$860 to \$1,010. This particular lady is a mother with one child, and 45 per cent of her salary goes for rent. The other thing about this apartment that we're talking about with this increase of 17 per cent: there are a number of people living in that apartment that work at one of our largest long-term care facilities, Youville Home. Many of those people are going to have to relook at where they're living and may have to leave St. Albert. This really quite concerns me.

There is another issue in St. Albert facing us in long-term care. We have people now in our Sturgeon hospital waiting for long-term care facilities. There is not accommodation available to them, and they're waiting for this move. As a result, some of them are required to pay after I believe it's 30 days – Bridget is gone. I think it's some period of time before they have to start paying the hospital a stipend for daily care. This whole question of not having long-term care for those people is a concern. We have the Youville Home in St. Albert, which I've already mentioned. Unfortunately, the question there is: we have accommodation, but again we don't have the staff, and certainly all those people can't fit into that type of facility. It's a big issue for us. The long-term care issue for our seniors is a big issue for us in St. Albert.

Another area of concern is our agencies, our nonprofit agencies, particularly the agencies dealing with services for persons with disabilities and another agency called Help Society, offering seniors help staying in their own homes: maintaining them, supporting them. The issue here with these nonprofit agencies, as I've mentioned, Help and services to persons with disabilities transitions, is that there's not the dollars for staffing, there's not the dollars for professional development, and dollars are not available for these people for their benefits. This is becoming a very serious problem as to if these agencies are going to be able to carry on and not only provide service but maintain their staff. In fact, Help is down to having a board with two people on it. So anybody that's retiring, like Mr. Loughheed, and willing to sit on a board in St. Albert, we'd welcome that.

3:00

Ms Pastoor: He missed your offer.

Mr. Flaherty: Yes, I know. He wasn't paying attention, and he said that he was going to listen to my speech. I'm quite disappointed.

So we're talking about nonprofit agencies needing dollars for salaries, benefits, and . . .

Ms Blakeman: Capacity.

Mr. Flaherty: Excuse me?

Ms Blakeman: Capacity. Build capacity.

Mr. Flaherty: Build capacity. Thank you.

Another area that concerns us is a school. We understand that the Protestant board is receiving the possibility of having their prayers answered for a new school. The problem is, of course: where will that school be located? The whole question of school location is, to me, paramount. At one time this school was going to be located in the Erin Ridge community. Of course, it's very significant because it was going to be dedicated to Lois Hole. The rumour has it that that placement has changed now with what we call political implications. So the question is: where will the school be located, and, again, how long will it take for that school to get started? We're reaching a crisis stage. We understand it's a P3 school. It will be interesting to hear from the government, hopefully soon. Maybe when the election is called, we'll get some insight on where they plan to put this school. Unfortunately, right now we seem to be in muddy waters.

Mr. Speaker, I've tried to touch on school maintenance. I've touched on, in St. Albert specifically, the west regional road issue in terms of dollars, the Anthony Henday extension in terms of where the alignment will be, where we'd get the information on that. I've talked about, again, the question of housing and this whole question of how we look after people that can't take these heavy increases. This has been a discussion in this House in the spring and now. People are not going to be able to live in our constituency if this continues. They just can't do it. I've talked about the long-term care issue, by the way. I think it was when the audit was done. Was it in 2005?

One of the things that is very, very sad is that the most important people, in my opinion – maybe because I am one of them – have given us yeoman's service. I'm going to be at a Christmas party with our aquacaze group. You know, we don't even have someone that could advocate for them on a day-to-day basis. I think it's so sad. Our seniors are not getting the help they need, and it's a crisis.

I see the minister of health smiling. I can tell you, Mr. Minister,

I wish you'd come out and talk to our seniors. You wouldn't smile. It's a serious matter, I'm sad to say, even when you have lots of money, sir. My good friend who is a multimillionaire can't get help for his wife. It's serious, and I'm sad about it. Money doesn't solve all the problems – that's what we're finding – because there are no people. People can't go in his home. She's so big and heavy – no disrespect to her; I love her dearly – that they can't lift her. He can't lift her anymore. He's 76 years old. Now we're trying to fight for a place, hopefully the Citadel or somewhere, for him. It's a big issue, sir, and I feel very, very badly about that.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll close up. Thank you very much for allowing me to address the issues that I think are facing our good citizens of St. Albert. I appreciate it. Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I may be repeating some of the things that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona has said, but I think that they bear repeating. The ministry that has supplied this, Seniors and Community Supports, has transferred \$10 million from the budget for the AISH program to rural affordable supportive living. I was absolutely flabbergasted when I read that. I could not believe that this type of thing had happened, so I have to find out how on earth they could have possibly had a \$10 million surplus when people who are on AISH are suffering. They can't afford the rent, they can barely afford their food, they're living in substandard housing, yet \$10 million is taken out of their allotment.

I suspect that the changes in the intake procedures include provision for vocational assessments and medical file reviews. There really should be a formal policy and procedure to reconcile conflicts between these and the opinions of the treating physicians. This is also where there are quite a number of appeals created. Many of these appeals I think would probably just be straightforward if we didn't have these arguments between different doctors on who is eligible and who isn't eligible.

On page 4 of the AISH medical exam there's the following question: given the impact of a patient's medical condition on their activities of daily living, in your opinion what is the degree of impairment caused by the diagnosed condition? There are four choices that the physician can choose. This is where the problems occur. Varying physicians obviously have different ideas on what constitutes the activity of daily living and how that actually would transfer to the ability of someone to carry on a position in the workforce. To my knowledge there's only one program available in Canada in which disability is assessed in terms of activities of daily living, and that's the federal disability tax credit. All other plans use variations on employability to define eligibility for benefits.

Again, to my knowledge there is no reference in the AISH or regulations to the activities of daily living. There are questions about them in the medical exam questionnaire, yet they aren't in either the act or the regulations. I find that a bit peculiar.

It also would appear that this is a criteria that they're using to assess employability, and I believe that that really is quite inappropriate. I think that this is the mechanism that has been used to decrease the number accepted into the AISH program for funding. If this is the case, then no wonder they've got \$10 million in the kitty.

To call this a lower than budgeted rate of growth in caseloads and then create \$10 million to transfer out, I think is just wrong, particularly wrong when the economy, inflation, and the cost of living are so beyond the vulnerable in our society. These people often use 80 per cent of their income for rent. Yes, AISH recipients do receive health benefits. They receive child care and transporta-

tion costs. Yes, they have benefits that are over and above the actual cash payment that they get; however, these benefits are not useful to be able to pay the rent or actually buy basics like food. I find this transfer of dollars to housing to be very, very wrong. These dollars could have created a small increase and certainly indexed AISH payments.

Reviewing AISH payments every two years is probably commendable, but it really isn't acceptable because people wait year after year to find out if they get a raise if it will even remotely catch them up to what inflation is. It's not fair to keep people dangling year after year after year. Be fair. Increase it, and index it. Increasing it based on the dollars that were at least six or seven years behind in terms of their meeting inflation . . .

3:10

Ms DeLong: No. It was already brought up to date. It is brought up to date and increased every year.

Ms Pastoor: I would beg to differ with my colleague sitting on this side of the House from the opposite party. That isn't true. They are not even close to what they should have been in terms of where it was. They have not caught up to inflation. On top of that, I then want it increased, and I certainly want it indexed. I only think it's fair. If MLAs can be indexed and they never have to worry and they know that every year they're going to get an increase, then so can AISH people. They deserve it. In fact, they probably deserve it a lot more than we do.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Members, Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have a question for the Member for Lethbridge-East. I'm wondering if she is aware – and perhaps it was before her time – that there were actually a couple of groups. There was a social advocacy group from Calgary that recommended that AISH be increased from I believe it was either \$800 or \$850 up to a thousand dollars a month. Also, the AISH review committee made the same recommendation, you know, in conjunction with this advocacy group from Calgary. They made this recommendation, and the government followed it. Since then the government actually increased AISH again more – more – than the cost of inflation for the past two years since we did that major increase. I'm wondering if she's aware of that or if she has done any research or if she is just kind of making these statements off the cuff.

Ms Pastoor: Oh, I can't thank my hon. colleague for that question; I couldn't possibly thank him enough for that one. There have been three increases since 1993. May I point out that two of them were under the auspices of the former minister, Yvonne Fritz, of Seniors and Community Supports. Two of those were made under her, and there are three since 1993. A very admirable job on her part, may I point out.

Yes, they did get increases, but as I've pointed out – and I will stick to that, and, yes, I have researched it and, yes, I know what I'm talking about – the original dollars that they started with and have then been given the increase for still were behind inflation because they started way back in '93. They still really do not have the money that would reflect this economy today. No one can live on a thousand dollars and fifty a month and actually pay the rents that they have to.

The Acting Speaker: We'll move on.

Ms Blakeman: I wonder if the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has a comment or a suggestion, given the housing crisis that we're experiencing in the urban areas, where the baseline studio apartment has increased from \$550 to \$850 a month. We now have people on an AISH rate of \$1,050 who are paying \$850 for their rent, which is far away and above the 30 per cent that is recommended. Has she considered whether it's appropriate to be advocating to government that they should be increasing the AISH rate by that same \$300 a month increase that most people on AISH have experienced with their rent increase?

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

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you for that question. Certainly, I would advocate that. I think what might be better is that there would be that rule that many subsidized housing projects go by that it's actually 30 per cent of your income that goes towards your housing. That could easily be applied to people on AISH, and it would free up that money.

I think part of the point is that, really, we don't have any kind of affordable units that these people can live in. There is no supply out there. Yes, I sat here all night saying that we should have had a temporary cap, and I use the word "temporary" because whoever puts on the temporary cap also has the power to take it off. It would be only political will. If the political will has to put it on, then the political will would be there to take off a temporary cap. In my mind, I still believe that that's one of the things that would help not only the people on AISH but the working poor that we have in this province.

Ms Blakeman: I'm just wondering if the Member for Lethbridge-East has a comment on the fact that we are in need of 7 per cent of our housing units to be wheelchair accessible. Again, a large percentage of people in the wheelchair-using community are on AISH. Some are not and have employment of their own; they still require housing that is specifically wheelchair accessible. If she has any comment on that.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, you have 30 seconds.

Ms Pastoor: No comment other than to agree that the 7 per cent is just a number that really has to be addressed. People are house-bound, people are not getting out of their houses, and, yes, we have to start keeping track of suicide rates because it's happening because of those reasons.

Speaker's Ruling Referring to a Member by Name

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, before I recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, I just want to caution everyone that there is a practice in this House of not referring to members by name. That has already happened three times in the last little while, so I'm just cautioning you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Debate Continued

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 56, the appropriations bill, and add my comments to concerns on this side of the House regarding the extra requests each year. It's almost become a routine, and I guess it reflects, again, on the lack of planning and the lack of recognition

that Albertans expect. They expect a budget to be followed, and they expect an investment in the future that would recognize that the resources we're so richly blessed with, that we can take no credit for having, will be gone in just a few decades. We need to do ever more careful planning and hold ourselves to account for this wonderful province and the planning and investment that's going into it and not focus so much on the short term but look at the longer term impacts of some of our decisions.

Clearly, the public in Alberta has an appetite for improved infrastructure and education and all the important services that government provides. They also have a tremendous anxiety, I think, about the future and how we're going to manage within a much more stringent budget and are looking for signs that the government has a vision for the future, is setting aside an appropriate investment in the future, as we on this side have been advocating for a number of years, and are looking to diversifying and, again, get off our addiction to fossil fuels, to move us towards a more sustainable economy and the ability to live within our means.

Increasingly Albertans are asking whether it's possible for a government to have a backbone and stand up for sustainable planning, sustainable investments, and not continue to spend as if we don't know where we're going and allow for issues like infrastructure breakdown and maintenance costs as well as the investments that are needed in issues like housing and in people. If there's one area that I hear a lot about in my constituency of Calgary-Mountain View, it's people struggling with the rising costs of living, housing among them, but other expenses including medications for seniors are a big issue, some of which is covered by Blue Cross, but a good deal of the newer drugs are not covered by Blue Cross and represent an increasing load for seniors to bear.

I'm also very concerned because I have a number of housing support institutions in my constituency that house handicapped folks who are increasingly struggling to make ends meet. The notion that \$1,050 a month is adequate to have a quality of life in Calgary is absolutely absurd. The cost of living in Calgary has gone through the roof, and it's an embarrassment to me as their MLA to say that our government only provides \$1,050 a month for you to live, of which up to two-thirds or more of that goes into basic housing.

3:20

With my other colleagues on this side of the House I look forward to the time when we'll see an indexing of the benefits to people with AISH and those who need supports for living. It's clearly the case that we have fallen way behind what the real needs of people are, and we are paying very seriously in terms of their health, mental health, physical health. They end up in the health care system if they're not adequately supported financially. It's penny wise, pound foolish in terms of not investing in people and those who care for the handicapped, the persons with developmental disabilities. Unless we start to invest more fully in those areas, we are going to have to be facing increasing health care costs and criminal costs and lack of productivity among the very people that this government says they want to be more productive. People cannot be productive if they're not secure, and in many ways we have added to their sense of shame and powerlessness through not adequately supporting these folks.

Let me say that it's also an embarrassment for me as a member of the Legislature to receive an annual cost-of-living increase when the most vulnerable in our society are not treated in the same way. I find it difficult to stand up here and proudly represent a constituency when we are not treating the most vulnerable fairly by indexing their incomes each year.

On the issue of Environment, there is a small two and a half million dollars under supplementary budgets going into Environ-

ment. It's clear to me that this department is so inadequately funded that it is no longer able to be trusted in caring for, protecting, monitoring, and enforcing the legislation that we have to protect water, air, soil, and, indeed, human health. Until we take that more seriously, I think we're going to fail Albertans in a very significant way, not only in the present but for the future.

The government has less than 1 per cent of the annual budget. It's clear that the massive growth and development projects – the complexity of these projects, the cumulative impact of these projects – are inadequately assessed under the present dispensation for Alberta Environment. If there's any department that does need a supplement, it is the Department of Environment. People in the field, both some staff that I know of and those who are out in the field as private industry and landowners, call me on a regular basis about the lack of oversight, the lack of monitoring, and the lack of enforcement.

It gives me great anxiety about the future in terms of our groundwater, where 600,000 people depend, with the growing evidence from scientists of the U of A and the U of C that there is in fact gas migration into groundwater from oil and gas resources, and it's not being addressed. In this case we've been waiting two years since the minister instituted an investigation of groundwater and gas contamination for people living in the Horseshoe Canyon formation in southeastern Alberta.

Other aspects of the Environment department that are critically underfunded: the Water for Life program, that continues to rely heavily on volunteers and lacks technical and expert scientists to advise. We have talk by the Minister of Environment about a cumulative impacts framework for three areas in Alberta, including the Industrial Heartland. There's no talk of new funding, no talk of new expertise to assess the cumulative impacts, the total impacts on a region. It's hard to believe that a new program with such demands could be initiated without new resources and expertise, but that's what we're led to believe, that they're going to institute a brand new way of assessing development, called cumulative impact assessment, without any new resources.

The whole question of groundwater assessment has been alluded to, and the government, to its credit, is investigating more of the inventory of groundwater, its location and volumes and flows and its connection to surface water. That's welcome, and that's an appropriate investment. For many of us there is a need to speed this up and to expand it. Water is the critical issue for this next decade. In that context climate change has a tremendous potential for putting us in a very compromised position economically, not to mention socially and environmentally. The in-stream flow needs have been compromised in southern Alberta, and clearly climate change is only going to add to those problems, which have arisen partly because of seasonal rainfall shortages over the last while.

So if there is any need for supplemental supply, I would strongly encourage the other side of the House to look at its totally inadequate investment in the environment. Albertans have said that that is a number one consideration, right next to health care, and it's very clear that our future depends on a much more rigorous capacity to monitor and enforce existing environmental legislation, to upgrade environmental legislation to some of the best. It could be much, much better in the world than it is. It falls short even of the United States in many respects and certainly far short in terms of its monitoring and enforcement and prosecutions, which are extremely rare in this province.

The other area that needs, clearly, more adequate government involvement is the monitoring for gas leaks. There have been increasing numbers of hydrogen sulphide exposures of people in this province. The EUB website documents roughly 800 gas leaks per

year in this province, most of them very minimal, but it reflects an increasing risk and liability that all of us sustain as a result of lack of maintenance, lack of early identification, and prevention of these leaks in the first instance. It cannot be overstated: the risk of even a tiny leak in proximity to people and animals will cause death within minutes. So these are very significant issues that a supplemental supply, if it's serious, would have to look at in terms of the future.

Those are the key comments I needed to make in supplementary supply, Mr. Speaker, relating to housing issues, AISH and the indexing of their incomes, seniors and their supports, which are progressively being eroded, and the environment and our capacity to properly monitor and implement the legislation we have for the environment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. I have travelled with my colleagues to areas such as Ponoka, Trochu, Stettler, Drayton Valley, and I wondered if the hon. member could comment on what we heard from so many rural individuals about concerns over coal-bed methane intrusion and whether my colleague feels that .5 per cent of the total general revenue spent on the Environment ministry is sufficient for them to be stewards of our water resources.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, this is a grossly inadequate capacity in Alberta Environment to do the technical isotope assessment of groundwater. We've been waiting two years now to get the CBM assessments on groundwater. There's indication from scientists that there is migration into groundwater but no action and no communications about that. It's clear that it's a very serious concern and a threat to our rural folks. Rightly they're concerned about getting to the bottom of this with an independent assessment.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. When we met with members of the town of Nanton and the Pekisko Group about concerns over Compton's well proposal and fracking, did you share their concerns about the lack of their ability to intervene in the process for the drilling of that well that could affect the town's water supply and that of all the ranchers along the southeast slopes? Do you believe that Bill 46 will improve the appeal process, or will it further limit their availability to ask needed questions?

3:30

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, we're dealing with Bill 56, not 46. Go ahead.

Dr. Swann: Within the context of Bill 56 I think what we're talking about here is where we're spending extra money and are we seriously considering investments in what is going to be a long-term threat to not only the environment but to human health? I would definitely agree that the definition of directly affected needs to be expanded. It does not look like it's going to be expanded this session, and that is going to create increasing anxiety and anger in the rural area about the future.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, with Bill 56, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2007 (No. 2), we're looking at, as they say, considerable ka-ching, and we first must look, whenever we are examining this bill in detail, at the estimates in supplementary supply. It's interesting to note that there were not only the estimates for expenditures, but there was a reallocation of previously approved estimates.

When we look at what happened in the Department of Agriculture and Food, we see that from the middle of October of this year the government, of course, announced the \$165 million farm recovery plan, a new financial assistance program to assist livestock farmers with rising fuel and feed and fertilizer costs. Benefits under this plan will be distributed by the Alberta Agriculture Financial Services Corporation using CAIS, Canadian agricultural income stabilization, program data and processes. Funding to the corporation for the plan will be provided using a portion of the department's \$62 million-plus that lapsed in crop insurance premiums and the entire \$135 million that was lapsed in its CAIS program. That is interesting, and I think we should note that because, certainly, Agriculture and Food has not been listed under the schedule here to receive additional monies under Bill 56, and one can only hope that that money – it's a significant amount – is well managed and goes to those who need it and fit the program criteria.

Now, there's also a reallocation of previously approved estimates for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation, and there is a surplus of money that is going to provincial highway systems and safety and also to Crown-owned facilities for preservation, \$20 million. Now, as I understand it from this information, Mr. Speaker, this is due to a decrease in anticipated natural gas rebates, and the voted authority on that was \$137 million, which remains unused. Of this amount \$22.6 million is being reallocated to provide for these capital maintenance and renewal projects. Now, I don't know where the rest of that money is going.

Not the past weekend but the previous weekend I had an opportunity to visit the project in Riverdale, a house being constructed that, actually, if everything works out – and I'm confident that it will – will have extra energy that possibly could be put into the electrical grid.

Mr. Liepert: For export. You could export it.

Mr. MacDonald: It's not for export. The hon. Minister of Education should be very careful before he promotes this government's plan on electricity exports. I can understand why the Minister of Education gets nervous whenever energy issues come up because the government's handling of any number of energy-related matters has been scandalous, to say the least, and I'm going to get to that in a minute, Mr. Speaker, with the Department of Energy.

Why some of this money in the natural gas rebate program – and the Alberta Liberals have been talking about this for a couple of years – could not be used to encourage more projects like the one in Riverdale, which is going to be very energy efficient, is beyond me. Conservation is a large part of the solution to our increasing energy use, but it seems to be lost on this government. Whenever they hear about conservation, I don't know what they think about, Mr. Speaker.

However, the Department of Energy: over \$3 million allocated here, but \$2 million of that, I believe, is going to be used to implement the royalty review program. Yes, \$2 million is to begin implementation of Alberta's new royalty framework. Now, I would like to know how much of that \$2 million is being used to deal with

the Suncor and Syncrude issue around their orders in council that were issued, again in secret, behind closed doors, by this government over 10 years ago, these orders in council that provided these special deals for Syncrude and Suncor, and if any of this money is going to be used to try to resolve these issues with these two corporate enterprises.

As I understand it, there's a bit of a rush on this because, initially, it was thought that this matter could be concluded by December 31, just like the implementation of Bill 46, which, as I understand it, if the bill goes forward, is going to be implemented on January 1. Now, I know you've got the \$500-an-hour guy hired to head up the implementation team, but that gentleman is probably going to have to work a lot of overtime, Mr. Speaker, in the month of December to get that project done.

The Crown agreements. How is all of this going to work for Syncrude and Suncor? Is any of this money going to be used to hire outside legal help to try to get around this? We know that this is an important issue, and we know that it's a complex issue. I would just like to know if any of that money is being used for that matter.

Also, is any of that money being used to resolve the issue over bitumen pricing? The Hunter report states, "Let the markets decide" appears unlikely to resolve this issue in the best interests of Albertans." Now, we both know, the panel and both sides of the Legislative Assembly, that the bitumen valuation methodology has been under discussion for quite some time with this government, but the Hunter panel thought that this issue should be resolved. Now, again I'm going to quote, Mr. Speaker.

A permanent, generic "bitumen valuation methodology" (BVM) applicable to all calculations requiring such a value, used by all participants in the exploitation of Alberta's bitumen resources where a bitumen price needs to be calculated, should be put in place by 30 June 2008. It would replace all current or intended uses of temporary BVMs and alternatives to the permanent BVM would not be allowed.

In very strong terms, the Panel recommends that a truly independent, unconflicted, world-renowned and highly experienced advisor be hired to consult widely, consider relevant international practices and then develop a permanent BVM, or bitumen valuation methodology.

3:40

Now, is this what part of the 2 million bucks is going to be used for? This is a very, very important issue, and I don't think it's good to deal with this behind closed doors. I'm not convinced that this government wants to deal with the issue of the bitumen valuation methodology. They've been working at it for quite some time unsuccessfully for whatever reason. Some of the producers of oil sands that appeared before the committee had a lot to say, as does Mr. Hunter and his panel, regarding this whole issue of bitumen valuation. In light of the time – and that's only seven months – is any of the money being used to deal with that? Also, with the \$2 million are there any calculations being done to determine exactly how the government's proposed oil sands royalty program is going to work?

I had the pleasure, Mr. Speaker – and I almost felt like I should have to pay something to attend. One of the panel members, Professor André Plourde, conducted a lecture in the basement of the Faculty of Business over at the U of A last Friday afternoon. Quite frankly, I was surprised to look around and not see any of my colleagues in attendance, particularly from the government side. I thought there would be at least two or three, if not four or five, of them over there with pens and notepads in hand getting advice from the good professor. Now, maybe there was an agent sent there. I don't know what goes on with agents these days, if the government or government agencies . . .

An Hon. Member: A spy.

Mr. MacDonald: There could have been a spy there. It wouldn't surprise me with this government. They laugh, but possibly that may have been how the information, if it did get back to the Department of Energy and the minister, got there. Or they could pick up the local newspaper the following day and read an interesting account of Professor Plourde's presentation.

The professor had a lot of questions, a lot of very good questions, about how this royalty rate would be calculated and whether it would be calculated on a credit or a deduction. I would strongly urge this government, if necessary, to use part of this \$2 million supply budget to maybe get some more advice from the professor. Maybe he'll give it to you for free, but his information is very sound. If he were to say, "Well, I need a few dollars for my time," I couldn't object to that. You're paying 500 bucks to a fellow to implement Bill 46. Surely, it would not be unreasonable if this gentleman asked to at least be provided with a modest sum for his time because we could collect, if we were to listen to this gentleman, I think, additional revenues for the resource owners of this province.

As the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has pointed out, we could really make our heritage savings trust fund something special with millions and millions of dollars in it. The public is finally waking up to the fact that the current government has done a very, very poor job of looking after their heritage savings trust fund.

Also, perhaps if it's not suitable for this government to go over to the university and talk to Professor Plourde, maybe they could go to PricewaterhouseCoopers with this \$2 million. Did I hear the hon. Minister of Justice say that \$2 million wouldn't be enough? No, I didn't hear that. Oh, dear.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Just a question to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, Mr. Speaker, on the matter of the \$500 per hour consultant. I think it was to the Minister of Energy you were talking, and it was regarding bitumen. Would you prefer, hon. member, that there be a boilermaker or an operating engineer there? Which would you choose?

Mr. MacDonald: I would have to say that the operating engineer would be asking for a lot more money than the boilermaker, and I'm not convinced that he would do a lot more work.

The Acting Speaker: Any others? Any other speakers?
Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on behalf of the President of the Treasury Board to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 56 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll call the committee to order.

Bill 9

Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my understanding that you do have the amendments that I will be tabling. If you could go ahead and pass those out, it would be great.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the amendments that are being proposed are being circulated, and we shall refer to them as amendment A1.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. May I go ahead?

The Deputy Chair: No. Just a minute.
You may proceed now.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The amendment that is being put forward is a very minor amendment. It applies to a situation where employers have their employees living in a work camp. The proposed amendment expands the exemption to independent contractors who also stay in those work camps and who are providing services to the business. It is sometimes the case that a business, for example, operating in a remote location will hire both employees and independent contractors to work in this business. This exemption will put them both on the same footing. The other amendment clarifies that the work camp exemption does not apply to hotel operators who hire a contractor and provide a free room for the service. In those situations, the room is subject to a tourism levy.

3:50

Mr. Chairman, I also want to raise a few of the other issues that were brought up in second reading. First of all, when it comes to overcharges, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had commented about the number of overcharges. In fact, there were only a couple of these cases, and the amounts overcharged in both of these cases were less than \$1,000. There were also some cases where operators charged purchasers who had stayed in the room for more than 28 days, which obviously they're not entitled to. What Bill 9 does is allow those operators to be compelled to refund the overcharge to the customer or to remit it to Alberta Finance, which at the moment it does not.

There was a question about administrative costs. The annual costs for the tourism levy program are estimated at around \$200,000. System operating and maintenance costs cannot reasonably be estimated. They are not really that significant.

The other question that was brought up was about performance measures. Mr. Chairman, Travel Alberta has several performance indicators. First of all, there are five objectives: number 1, to increase awareness of Alberta as a tourism destination in all markets; number 2, increase and diversify tourism product marketing in primary geographic markets; number 3, expand and improve the market readiness and marketing capacity of Alberta industry operators; number 4, provide timely, accurate, and comprehensive travel planning information to customers; and number 5, collect, package, and distribute tourism data and market intelligence to the tourism industry. Mr. Chairman, included under these are 14 specific performance measures that support these objectives, which include things like total number of inquiries to Travel Alberta and so on.

There was also a comment about the Leitch report. Mr. Chairman,

the Leitch report looks at the governance of Travel Alberta whereas this amendment act proposes only administrative changes and improves clarity and compliance within the industry and does not deal with governance.

Mr. Chairman, the Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007, is before you, and I move the amendments as circulated. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the sponsoring member for clarifying some of the questions that were put on the record by members of my caucus previously.

Essentially Bill 9, Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2007, is a housekeeping bill that seems to be trying to keep pace with the times. Clearly, the government listens very carefully to the Alberta Hotel & Lodging Association. I'm sure they'll turn up on one of our lobbyist registry lists right away quick here because they seem to talk and be very persuasive in getting the government to put in the changes that they're asking for. The industry does seem quite happy with this bill.

I know that when we first talked about this tourism levy, we had been raising concerns about how that would be affecting those that were in the work camps, and we were talking about the increasing number of them that we're seeing in the province. So the amendments that are being brought forward here appear to continue to protect those who are in a work camp situation or are getting lodging as a result of work in remote locations. Maybe I can put it that way as well.

At this time I believe that this tourism levy is functioning pretty well. We've had a significant amount of money returned to the tourism, marketing, and development fund. I sure hope that's being used to bring more people into Alberta. I'm sure it is.

Again, I thank the minister for providing answers to the most vexatious of our questions, which was primarily about the small operators being charged more in a fine than they seem to be for the original. So I appreciate that.

At this point I am happy to give our okay to Committee of the Whole for Bill 9. Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Now, I'm just looking at the consolidated financial statements from 2005-06 and the tourism levy, the hotel tax. We've seen in 2005 a \$61 million amount and a \$58 million amount collected in 2006. I realize this is primarily a housekeeping piece of legislation, but the hon. member alluded to the purpose of this money. I'm just curious, with the expansion of the cabinet, if any of the money that has been collected in this is being used for tourism promotion here. It's the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw who is the associate minister of tourism, parks, and culture and something. Is any of the money here being used to fund that office? That would be one question. The second question would be: is any of this money dedicated to the Olympics in 2010 in Vancouver?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Currently, the associate minister's office is not funded by this tourism levy. It is purely for projects within Alberta and is utilized as such.

The Deputy Chair: Any others?

Are you ready for the question on amendment A1?

Mr. Backs: Mr. Chair, just a point of information or a clarification. I can ask a question on this amendment?

The Deputy Chair: We are at committee stage. You can do that.

Mr. Backs: Thank you. I just saw this, Mr. Chairman. A question to the minister on section A2(a)(vi).

(B) is not in the business of selling lodging, in a work camp that is owned by the employer or managed by or on behalf of the employer.

The practice that I've seen quite often is that there will be those types of situations where, for example, Suncor will own their main camp. There will be other situations where, for example, PTI will manage a camp for Albion. But there may be other situations as well where they are, in fact, work camps that are deemed commercial camps that are not at all in any way for tourism and that are in a situation where they are sometimes taking people for a week or two or for the short term for contractors that are not managing that camp. Would those fall under this provision?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Those camps that have occupants under 28 days would be required to pay the tourism levy. If they are over 28 days, they would not be required to pay the tourism levy. This covers a situation where an employer owns a camp and is having private contractors working on that particular project so that the private contractors can stay there and not pay the camp. But there are some commercial camps, as the hon. member has alluded to, which in essence and in reality are a variation on a hotel. They will have to pay the tourism levy unless the person is there for longer than 28 days.

Mr. Backs: Just another question or comment to the same minister. There's a very large industry in terms of shutdowns in this province, most of which actually employ people for less than 28 days. They may have as many as 4,000, 5,000, and 8,000 tradesmen on these shutdowns, which encompass the shutting down of a plant for debottlenecking, for annual maintenance, for fixing up certain projects. Contractors come in on behalf of these employers come and live in these camps. Would these employees be exempt?

Dr. Oberg: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

4:00

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Anybody else wish to speak on the bill itself? Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 9 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 11
Telecommunications Act Repeal Act

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West I would like to offer a few comments at the committee stage on the Telecommunications Act Repeal Act. This act received first reading during the spring session and second reading during the fall session and is now being considered for Committee of the Whole.

The Telecommunications Act was proclaimed in 1988 to regulate the operations of two public organizations, Alberta Government Telephones and Edmonton Telephones. Mr. Chairman, the reason I'm asking for this act to be repealed is because both of these organizations no longer exist as corporate entities. Furthermore, the regulation of all telecommunication companies remains under federal jurisdiction through the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'll be extremely brief. I realize that Bill 11 is strictly housekeeping, but I just wanted to get on the record that I miss the idea of government-regulated, publicly owned companies, such as Alberta Government Telephones. I miss the regulated services and the stability that organizations like AGT provided. I miss the same type of reliability, sustainability, predictability, and influence of the government, whether it be on water suppliers or telephones.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

In other words, governments in the past and in other provinces adjoining us continue to be in control of their public utilities and consider the greater good. While this Bill 11 is moving us to our current state, I just want to sort of bemoan the historic fact that public utilities are no longer regulated, controlled, supported, and as sustainable as they once were under the government's auspices.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity to speak very briefly to Bill 11, Telecommunications Act Repeal Act. This certainly is a bill that reminds one of the history of the privatization drive that this government adopted and pushed forward with in the '90s and, in the process, left lots of roadkill.

AGT, Alberta Government Telephones, was one of the most successful public utilities. It was sold, and I think that in terms of the quality of service provided by its successor, which is a private unregulated utility, there has been a decline in that service. Lots of people complain about the way that one of these companies that replaced it, Telus, has not been upfront in terms of charges that it introduces once in a while, which people have to then object to. They can only read their bills and find out that if they don't buy this or that as part of this service, they will be charged. There's a question of the transparency of the business practices of this private company that replaced this wonderful, publicly built, publicly regulated, and publicly owned utility that Albertans once had. The revenues that it generated for the public treasury were quite considerable.

While this bill is housekeeping, the repeal of the act is to finally bury AGT for good from the records and the statutes of this province. It is regrettable, but it's history.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat. Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 11?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 11 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? It's carried.

Bill 24
Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007

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

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We've had some very good debate on this bill so far, and I'm looking forward to the conclusion of that debate.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I second the member's comments. The Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon and the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie waxed eloquent in second reading of the bill and provided the House, as I previously mentioned, with a fantastic in-service. The questions were answered in a very forthright manner, extremely knowledgeable, and concerns over property were dealt with. I, too, support the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon and wish to get on with our next process.

Thank you.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Chairman, I also echo the statement and the position that's expressed by my hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity. The NDP caucus is in support of this bill. I think the bill does update the language and identifies ways to investigate suspected fraud or mishandling of mortgage transactions. Legislative changes include, of course, a criminal record check as a prerequisite for real estate agents, mortgage brokers, and appraisers who wish to be licensed. I think this is certainly a move in the right direction given the overheated real estate market and all kinds of fly-by-night types who want to enter it as agents to take advantage of that market by buying and selling. The changes in the language and the legislative ability to investigate suspected mishandlings is a good thing. We are supportive of the bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 24, Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 24 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

4:10

Bill 23
Unclaimed Personal Property and
Vested Property Act

The Chair: Are there any amendments, comments, or questions with regard to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm doing the cleanup batting for today. I just wanted to recognize, as I mentioned with Bill 24, the Real Estate Amendment Act, 2007, that questions and concerns had been covered, such as if a property title was transferred and then there seemed to be confusion as to the ownership five years into the process, it would revert back to the original title and an individual's proprietary rights would not be lost.

I, again, commend the government and thank you for the thoroughness in which Bill 23 was debated and for the answers provided.

The Chair: Are there others?

Dr. Pannu: I'll be very brief, Mr. Chairman, again. The bill, I think, certainly has our support. It outlines policies and procedures over unclaimed properties and vested properties while at the same time repeals the Ultimate Heir Act. The bill outlines how unclaimed private properties and vested properties are to be dealt with. For unclaimed properties the bill certainly outlines the rights and responsibilities of the holder of the land in dealing with the owner of the land and regulations set out when the land is considered unclaimed.

All of these provisions, Mr. Chairman, are quite unproblematic. We have no problem with the provisions of this bill, so it has our support. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd move to adjourn debate on Bill 23.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 2
Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Thank you very much. I cannot guarantee the speed with which the other bills were passed because there is controversy associated with the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007. Part of that controversy relates back to Bill 1, the lobbyists registry act. The purpose of Bill 1 was to increase the transparency of the lobbying process, but Bill 2 after the fact contradicts some of that transparency. Under Bill 1 the government is not necessarily obliged to reveal to whom they are initiating the contact. On our first discussions of Bill 1 the sort of phrase I used was that if the government comes courting, there's no reporting.

We're very aware that there are so many individuals who were

appointed to boards and committees, whether it's the Energy and Utilities Board or whether it's a local health region. Without having elected individuals, who are the true representatives of the people who they've been elected to represent, then there is the potential for conflict of interest because of the old expression: you can't serve two masters. An individual who is appointed to a board by the government to represent the interests of the public is in a conflict of interest because: to whom do they report? The government. Who pays their salary? The government. Who are they expected to represent? The people. As such, there is a conflict.

It concerns me that we had the brief experiment with elected health regions. After a period of only nine months the government decided that there was just a little bit too much public contribution going on at board meetings and that the people who were elected did not necessarily represent the wishes and intent of the government. So after a brief sortie into the world of elected health boards, that ended.

In terms of elected boards I can't help but remember in the late '90s the firing of the entire Calgary public board. The individual who was the chairperson of that board at that time has now received the Conservative nomination. While that individual has worked very hard for a number of ethnic organizations and supports, it concerns me that the individual who was elected by the constituents basically called the then Minister of Education and indicated to that minister that in her opinion the board was dysfunctional. Therefore, the entire board, the elected members of the Calgary board of trustees, at that point were fired.

I would suggest that that was very much a conflict of interest, that the Education minister overrode the rights and responsibilities of a duly elected board that had very successfully managed at that point an over \$500 million budget, basically firing some individuals over allegations of note passing and considering that this was a dysfunctional board because there were divisive factions within that board. But despite those factions they were able to carry out the trusteeship that the people of Calgary had elected them to do. This is just one more indication of a conflict of interest.

What we need to be having is the best person for the job, and that best person for the job, whether it's on a board or a committee, should be reviewed in an elected fashion. Let the individuals – the electors, the voters – and the democratic rights of Albertans be recognized. Let them hear from the various candidates. Let them have a say in the decision that is made as opposed to strictly a government appointment.

In terms of conflicts of interests, I had and continue to have respect for a former Finance minister who recently received a government appointment. Given the rency of that appointment, I am not sure that the year-long aspects took place. There are just too many sweet deals going on. It seems that there's a board or a committee chair or some kind of an appointment for just about everybody that at one point served this government in some fashion or another, whether they were elected to serve or whether they worked within the ministries, and that is definitely a conflict of interest.

4:20

The individual whom I've replaced in Calgary-Varsity, former Energy minister Murray Smith, cost Alberta taxpayers \$500 million because he single-handedly decided that they should be paying for the transmission lines that formerly provided the service and continue to provide the service primarily for industry, that the taxpayers should be on the bill for half a billion dollars' worth in private transmission lines. For that act and for his warming comments of "If you're cold and you don't like the price of gas, put

on a sweater,” based on that resumé, the individual was promoted to a very plum position in Washington, DC.

Now, I don’t dispute the idea of having a trade office in Washington, DC, but the candidate who receives that position should be able to demonstrate a tremendous understanding of international relations. They should have a background in diplomacy. Simply finding a cozy, cushy job in a Washington appointment because they had a former Conservative connection is not acceptable.

Bill 2, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007, doesn’t go nearly far enough in resolving the current and past conflicts of interest. I know several of my caucus colleagues would like to address other concerns with regard to conflicts.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Today is the second opportunity the House gets to talk to Bill 2 in Committee of the Whole, and I appreciate the opportunity to participate.

As I said yesterday, I sat on the first committee which studied the Conflicts of Interest Act, the Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee, in 2006, and then this year I also served as the deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Government Services, which was tasked with the job to review Bill 2 and to solicit input and feedback from stakeholders and interested members of the public. We did that, and we issued a report, Mr. Chairman, as you know, and the recommendations contained in the report appeared before the House yesterday in the form of an amendment. That amendment was comprised of four parts, which were all passed yesterday, and I’m pleased about this.

Today we’re talking about the bill itself after it was amended by the committee. I think that overall, Mr. Chairman, I have to start by saying that I am quite pleased with the progress that has been achieved both in the House and in the committee. Bill 1 and Bill 2 are very important to the endeavour to renew democracy in this province. We all know that the Alberta government has been criticized on numerous occasions for failing to deliver on their promise to be open and accountable. The Alberta Liberal caucus, even in the 2004 campaign, when we were all candidates, advocated three things. We advocated for a lobbyist registry. We advocated for a revamping or strengthening of our conflicts of interest laws. The third thing, which hasn’t happened yet: we wanted a whistleblower protection mechanism to be put in place to protect whistleblowers, should they come across any wrongdoing, in coming forward and to not fear for their jobs and not fear for their employment or employability. I would say that this is two down, one to go in terms of our major democratic renewal initiatives.

One of the other ones would be to strike a citizens’ assembly to engage citizens in the dialogue with respect to proportional representation or some form of proportional representation and so on. So two initiatives are before the House: the lobbyist registry, Bill 1, the conflicts of interest act, Bill 2, and I have to say that I am quite pleased with the progress both in committee and in this House.

Now, let me recount a discussion we had in the committee, Mr. Chairman, whereby I actually moved a motion in the committee to strengthen a good act even more, to make it even better by extending the cooling-off period to senior political staff and deputy ministers and people like that in those capacities from the current proposed six months in the act to 12. This was done in the proper legislative fashion. It was basically moved by myself in the committee, and members of the committee had the opportunity to debate it back and forth, and then we had a vote. To my pleasure – and it was something that I felt was really reassuring as it’s an all-party committee

– members from all sides of the House agreed that this was actually a good move and that we would better increase that cooling-off period from the proposed six months to 12 to make it, you know, in line or uniform with what we’re doing with former ministers, for example.

Now, why are we doing this? Well, I know, Mr. Chairman, and you know that we’re doing this because people who have either held ministerial posts or people who worked with ministers, like chiefs of staff, like executive assistants, like deputy ministers, have a lot of inside information. We feel that it would actually give them an unfair advantage if shortly after they leave that post, they come back as a lobbyist and have the ear of government because these are the same colleagues and the same people they worked alongside, that they had many dealings with, that they had many interactions with. They probably worked in the same office space or, you know, shared elevator rides or water cooler talks. They know these people, and they’re using that information to further the interest of someone out there who is hiring or contracting that person to lobby his former colleagues, his former employees and subordinates in some cases to get stuff done for that entity that’s out there. So we felt that by, first, sending the message and, second, actually doing it, we are definitely moving in the right direction. I was really, really pleased that the committee in its wisdom actually agreed with the direction of that motion. It was voted for, and it was adopted. It was accepted.

Now, one week later, because the committee had not finished yet, my hon. colleague from Calgary-Bow came along and introduced a motion that basically rescinded the earlier motion. While I am not an authority on parliamentary practice, Mr. Chairman, I think that in my three years here I have learned a thing or two about parliamentary procedure. I checked *Marleau and Montpetit*, for example, and there is a clause – I can’t remember which page in particular – that basically talks about the fact that this is a practice that is frowned upon. When a motion is adopted by the House, you don’t come right away and reverse it immediately thereafter. Granted, it was a proper motion – the motion in its language and its content was proper – and there was another vote. The composition on the committee had changed, and the vote was reversed, so today I am willing to reintroduce my motion in the form of an amendment, Mr. Chairman. It was tabled with the table officers yesterday, and I will wait for the pages to distribute it, and then we’ll get the discussion going in this House.

4:30

The Chair: We will just give the pages a moment to distribute it. We will label this amendment A2.

I believe you may proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I think that part of *Marleau and Montpetit* was in chapter 19, talking about committees of the House. I think that basically, in layman’s terms, it was talking about the fact that no negative motion should be adopted immediately after a positive motion. So if you’re asking the House or the committee to do something, another motion should not be presented to negate it in effect or in language.

Anyway, regardless of the fact, today we have an amendment before the House, and the amendment is doing two things. It’s basically amending two sections. In section 22 subclause 32.1(1) modifies that six months to 12 months. That first part is on page 14, talking about former political staff. It basically extends the cooling-off period from six months to 12. Then the second section is on page 21 in section 30 on section 23.1(2), again, for deputy ministers extending it to 12 months from six.

Now, Mr. Chairman, let me reassure you. I am not attempting to restrict anybody’s employability after they leave office. I’m not

jeopardizing their right to seek work, to seek meaningful employment, to make tons of money should they choose. What I'm saying here is that the only restriction we're placing on them is a time restriction, that they cannot act as a lobbyist and use that inside information for the duration that is stipulated here. I'm not saying they can't go work for another department in government. I'm not saying that they can't work for private business, that they can't start their own business, and so on and so forth.

What I'm saying is: why are we so worried about some deputy minister or some executive assistant to a minister or chief of staff for the Premier, for example, after they leave their post, that they absolutely have to become lobbyists and they absolutely have to come and lobby within six months? Why is that? I don't think it's sending the right message, and I think anything we do in this House to tighten that law and to make people out there more comfortable and make us more transparent to those people out there is an advisable move. Again, nothing in here to restrict their employment: it's just basically restricting one activity that they cannot engage in before 12 months have elapsed.

I have to remind everybody that it was adopted by the committee, and the committee was an all-party committee. We had the discussion in the committee. I was really dismayed that that other motion came one week later, and it was actually reported in the media, too. People were puzzled. How come a good committee, a good group of people working together, has agreed to do something and then it was reversed just because the composition has varied from one week to the next? It was basically something that I felt a bad taste after in my mouth.

So an amendment before the House. I encourage all my hon. colleagues to support it, but should they choose not to, I really would like to hear why. What is the rationale that we have to go out of our way to protect people's right and ability to become lobbyists right after six months have elapsed? I think 12 months is not an unfair request and not an unfair restriction, and I honestly hope that members will show that progressivity today and adopt that amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak on the amendment before the House, amendment A2. I was also pleased to have had the opportunity to take part in those policy field committees that considered bills 1 and 2. I found that the exchanges and the discussions and the debates in those committees were very helpful. They were frank. We engaged each other in good faith and came to some interesting conclusions that reflected a broad-based consensus across party lines on some important issues related to bills 1 and 2.

I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has summarized my feelings as well with respect to the rescinding of some of the decisions that the committee had made just a few days prior, the recommendations to amend the bill to make the provisions for the ministers and the political staff not to be able to engage in lobbying activities in relation to departments or in government entities for which they had worked prior to their retirement. A 12-month period seemed quite reasonable. If they're reasonable for ministers, we thought it's equally reasonable, if not more so, for senior deputy ministers and political staff. In fact, the senior political staff and deputy ministers and others get paid very well, so I didn't think that it was asking too much for the political staff and the senior ministry officials to be included in the provisions in the bill which would prevent them from being able to lobby vis-à-vis the departments they had served in.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Chairman, one of the submissions that the Standing Committee on Government Services received was from the Sheldon Chumir foundation. That bill notes that the cooling-off period for ministers in the federal act is five years. We think that we needed to go farther. But at least the bill as it was considered by the committee was, we thought, a move in the right direction. So we tried to address the minor problem that we had with that exemption for the senior ministry officials and the political staff and to make it identical to the prohibitions that the bill intends to apply to the activities of ministers. I was very disappointed that the decision that had been made in its wisdom by the committee after full deliberation was quickly reversed within days after the committee made its first decision.

The Member for Edmonton-McClung raised issues about the procedural propriety of it. I'm not sure where to go with it. But I think it's a matter that perhaps needs to be addressed more clearly both by Parliamentary Counsel staff and by the committees in future so that we can clarify the procedures that we want to be guided by and be bound by. There was some confusion as to whether a motion passed two days ago or three days ago could be reversed so quickly by the same committee. It seemed to me a rather arbitrary use of the procedures at the time. But we are new committees, and I'm willing to give some leeway for us to have time so that we can find the right procedures and/or follow procedures well established and that seem to have done well in other jurisdictions so that we don't engage in a similar exercise again.

Mr. Chairman, I had prepared the exact same amendments that have been brought before us, so I am pleased to support amendment A2, introduced by the Member for Edmonton-McClung, which is identical to the amendment that I had also approved from the Parliamentary Counsel. With that, I'll take my seat and hope other members will have opportunity to speak to the amendment as well.

Thank you.

4:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise to join debate on the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize his contributions through the all-party committee to the work in examining Bill 2 very, very carefully and making some definite improvements with respect to the bill, which have already been accepted as amendments to the bill before the House.

Bill 2 proposes a six-month cooling-off period for the Premier's chief of staff or deputy chief of staff, for the head of the Premier's southern Alberta office, as well as executive assistants to ministers. Certainly, there were some members of the standing committee who felt that these officials should be subject to a full one-year cooling-off period. Indeed, I was in favour of that proposal as well. However, as the hon. member and the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona have mentioned, there was a motion put by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, and upon reflection the majority of the committee agreed that six months was a more appropriate time period for that cooling-off or postemployment provision.

However, Mr. Chairman, I would say that there is no perfect time. There's no magic formula for a cooling-off period. A cooling-off period is a restriction in postemployment activities. As I stated in the report of the select special committee, the appropriate length of a cooling-off period is a question of judgment and balance. The right of the former employee to obtain gainful employment after leaving elected office is certainly a consideration. Desirability of

encouraging interchange between the public and the private sector is another consideration which was brought to our attention during our deliberations and the need to encourage qualified and successful people to public service. All of these factors mitigate for shorter cooling-off periods.

On the other hand, the reality or the perception that former officials may use inside information or close contacts to improperly benefit themselves or their employers or their clients mitigates for longer postemployment restrictions. Unlike ministers, however, policy officials do not have automatic transition allowance of three months per year of service, and I respect the fact that a majority of the members of the committee felt that the six-month period strikes a good balance between avoiding conflict of interest and the need to attract and retain good public servants. I think that all members can appreciate, as the committee did, that a fine balance is required here. While it is not the decision that I would have made, I'm prepared to support it in the interests of democracy and moving forward with the good parts of this bill.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, I have been listening to the discussion on amendment A2 to the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007, as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. I would urge all hon. members of this House to consider supporting the amendment in section 22 as proposed, to increase, essentially, the cooling-off period from six months to 12 months, and also in section 30 as well, which deals with the Public Service Act.

If we are to look at the three basic principles of the Conflicts of Interest Act – public disclosure, independent ethics commissioner, and rules for public office holders – this certainly would fall into all of that and more. When we consider that if we are to improve the integrity in government and in politics, I think this is worth while and certainly has merit. If we look at other suggestions that have been made over the years and what the committee has done in the recent past, then this is an amendment that I would encourage all hon. members to support.

It's interesting to note with this bill that, you know, the current time period as proposed is six months. This is regarding the dealings with government by former political staff members. Many of the former political staff members are members of whichever respective party is in power. In Alberta here, Mr. Chairman, for the last 36 years it's been the Progressive Conservative Party, so this is not an extraordinary request. I think this is fair.

We look at, for instance, ourselves, Mr. Chairman. If we were to have a cabinet minister that did not resign but for one reason or another – and I'm not going to get into this – was removed from cabinet, let's say at the middle of November, and they carried on their duties as an MLA until the middle of December, perhaps the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill could clarify this for me: does the six-month cooling-off period for that person start with their resignation from cabinet or their resignation from this Assembly?

There are a number of things that confuse me with this legislation, and that certainly would be one of them. What exactly is that cooling-off period for a cabinet minister who is removed or resigns from cabinet and then a month or two later resigns his or her seat? What is the cooling-off period? How is that determined? Is it six months from the resignation from cabinet or the resignation from the House?

With that, I would in conclusion, Mr. Chairman, encourage all hon. members to please have a close look at amendment A2 and consider supporting it. I think to increase these time frames from six

months to 12 months will go a long way to restoring public confidence in the whole political process. I'm not going to get into the long list of people who, in my opinion, have been not in violation of the act, because the act is too broad and too general, but have left one form of employment or another with the government and taken up another form of employment that certainly would not be suitable. I think if we strengthen this conflict of interest legislation, we're all better off.

Thank you.

4:50

Dr. Brown: Mr. Chairman, I may be able to clarify for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar the point which he raised, which is with respect to the application of the cooling-off period to ministers. Nothing has changed in that regard except for the time period which is proposed in Bill 2, which would extend it from six months to 12 months.

The purpose of that cooling-off period is to ensure that the minister in question does not take undue advantage of the special knowledge or the contacts that they've had in their position as a minister of the Crown. In that regard, I can advise that the cooling-off period would begin to run from the time at which they ceased to hold office as a minister regardless of whether or not they continued to be a member of the House. Of course, there aren't any cooling-off periods which apply to members at large in the House. They only apply to ministers of the Crown and now the policy officials which are stipulated in Bill 2.

Mr. MacDonald: I would just like to thank the hon. member for that explanation. I appreciate it.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to make some brief remarks on this amendment A2 to the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007. Everything that has been said by my other colleagues is certainly correct. We all sat on the same committee, and I believe that it really was a good process to have the all-party committee. However, this little manoeuvre disappointed me because up to that point it looked like we were all working together, sort of leaving party colours at the doors, so to speak.

I'm still puzzled. I just found that the complete reversal within one week, using different people on the committee, was very, very interesting; in fact, probably quite odd. It almost appeared to be staged, and then it was done, probably before we really thought about it. It just sort of appeared to be that, obviously, there was something going on in a different arena, and it really wasn't going on in the open committee. So I am disappointed about the process, the way this particular six months to 12 months has been reversed.

I think everything else has been covered, but I do believe that this should be approved by the House, which would then, I think, give even greater authenticity to the all-party committee. I guess it would send a message that maneuvering and questionable reversals wouldn't be allowed. Certainly, I think that, as has been mentioned, Parliamentary Counsel should look at this kind of behaviour and perhaps speak with all the other committees in terms of that.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The Member for Calgary-Nose Hill appeared to be suggesting that when a person applied for their first government job, they should potentially be lining up their next

job as a lobbyist internally. If a person is qualified and they're the most qualified person for that job, under most circumstances that job will wait for them for the time period necessary for them to assume that position. Asking people to sit back for a year is certainly a minimal expectation.

Now, the Premier, when he first was chosen by his Tory colleagues, started off with great guns in terms of bringing forth a number of innovations such as the all-party standing policy committees. I credit him for that consideration that combined wisdom trumps any wisdom that belongs to any one party. However, when it came to another action that he did in terms of cutting down the size of the number of ministries, again I was applauding him, sort of cheering from the sidelines.

I was extremely pleased, for example, when he got rid of RAGE, restructuring and government efficiency, and put it back under the auspices of Government Services. That was a good move. What I wasn't pleased about, however, was that there appeared to be a make-work project for every government member. When it appeared that there was a complaint about too many rural ministers, the Premier decided: well, I'll appoint a Deputy Premier from Calgary, and that will assuage some of the concerns of Calgarians.

Then when the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing seemed to run into a degree of trouble, we had a secretariat individual appointed. Actually, before the secretariat we had an associate minister, who then assumed the responsibility for a secretariat. As though there wasn't enough work involved for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, then we had an associate minister of, I believe it was called, sustainable development appointed to help out the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. So very quickly we ended up with just as many faces and places, only with new titles. They were no longer the full-fledged minister, but we had so many associates, and we had so many chiefs.

Mr. Hancock: Point of order.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Chairman, yes. Relevance.

The Chair: Just one moment, hon. member. Hon. members, it's very difficult to hear with the background noise.

Mr. Hancock: I believe it's 459 of *Beauchesne's* on relevance. We are speaking to the amendment, and the amendment is relative to the time, whether it's six months or 12 months, relative to how long the cooling-off period is for a former political staff or a senior bureaucrat. It specifically mentions a deputy minister or other senior person under the Public Service Act. We should really try to stick to the point. That's the question. The question really is a very narrow one. It's a question of: how long is enough time for a cooling-off period? That's what the amendment is. I would hesitate, normally, to interrupt, but this is a very narrow amendment with a very narrow purpose.

The Chair: I'm assuming that the hon. member was going to link his remarks back to the amendment very quickly.

Mr. Chase: I am going to try and get into the framework of narrowness, and I will achieve that very quickly.

Debate Continued

Mr. Chase: You cannot talk about transparency and accountability if you keep voting on something until you get it right. It was the decision of the committee to extend the cooling-off period to 12 months. Then some members of the committee didn't like that original decision, so they revoted on it. What we have here today is a chance to bring it back to its historical significance, agreed upon by the members of that committee, and I suggest that we vote on the amendment and show that we are a transparent, accountable, collegial group.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, Mr. Chairman. In regard to (b) of this proposed amendment A2 could any member of the House clarify for me in regard to the Public Service Act how, if in any way, this would catch contracted employees, individuals who are contracted for one reason or another by the government to provide advice or expertise for one reason or another?

5:00

It comes to my attention that we have started a process in this province of hiring individuals through contract that are outside, as far as I know, the Public Service Act. Would this cooling-off period affect them? We hired an individual on contract, Mr. Chairman, from California to advise and consult and direct the electricity business unit in the Department of Energy. I'm wondering if a position like that, that Mr. Kellan Fluckiger used to have here, would be caught in this cooling-off period. Or are those contracted individuals outside the Public Service Act?

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will try to maybe explain my understanding as a layperson to my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar. On page 14, part 6.1, Former Political Staff Members, Dealings with Government by former political staff members, 32.1(1)(a) talks about "on behalf of himself or herself, solicit or accept a contract or benefit from a department of the public service or a Provincial agency with which [that person] had significant official dealings." This offers the clarity and the focus that it's not all of government. It is not all of government boards, commissions, agencies, and departments. It's basically those particular ones with which that person had significant dealings, not even in passing. These are significant dealings, so a contract for either himself or herself.

Then sub (b). Now, my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar would be interested to find out that it talks about "any other person." So you're talking about the person himself, and then you're also talking about any other person as in advancing the interests of other people as well. The example you gave would probably be caught.

The idea behind my amendment is to basically extend that restriction time zone from six months to 12. I think it's a fair requirement. If we're doing it to ministers, why can't we do it to, you know, former deputy ministers and former chiefs of staff and former executive assistants to ministers? They have the same access to information, if not even more sometimes.

I can give you examples of people in the government in the front bench who probably know a lot less than the employees that work with them. Occasionally they even admit that, and they bring them here to the House and thank them, and they say: you know what, without you guys, we can't function and we can't shine and we can't

conduct the business of the government as we're supposed to. So I would argue that if we're doing 12 months for ministers, we should do it for the same length of time for those staff that have all the information at their fingertips. They know where things are, they know where the money is, and they know who to talk to.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on amendment A2?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:03 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Chase	MacDonald	Pastoor
Elsalhy	Mason	Swann
Flaherty		

Against the motion:

Abbott	Fritz	Morton
Ady	Goudreau	Oberg
Amery	Graydon	Pham
Backs	Hancock	Prins
Boutilier	Jablonski	Shariff
Calahasen	Johnson	Stevens
Cao	Liepert	Strang
Cenaiko	Lougheed	VanderBurg
Coutts	Lund	Webber
DeLong	McFarland	Zwozdesky
Ducharme		

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 31
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. This may seem like just the rejection of an amendment, but it goes much deeper, into the whole democratic fibre of the intention of Bill 2, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007. The government finally caught up with the rest of the nation by having all-party policy committees, and the reports that I've had from all my caucus colleagues were that these were effective representations on the committees, that, as my hon. colleague from Lethbridge-East expressed it, people park their partisan beliefs at the door. They came forward and recognized that there was one goal in mind, and that was achieving the best interest of Albertans.

What we have witnessed today is the type of rewriting of history that I have referred to before. When a decision is made within the standing policy committee process and that process is then brought to the larger House for approval, there is an expectation that in some ways while we may not agree with the whole idea, we support it. What we've seen today is that you'll just keep voting in that committee until the majority gets its way, which totally defeats the reasoning of having an all-party committee.

I just wanted to go on the record for saying that I'm disappointed in this process, that takes away from the validity of all-party

committees, and I hope each of the four committees does its best to restore confidence in the process, which I believe has been damaged in this House today.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Chairman, normally I wouldn't be provoked to rise, but I do want to make sure that I have some brief comments on the record with respect to the last comment. First of all, our rules provide that one should not go back and debate a matter that's already been voted on.

Secondly, the all-party committees did good work. They worked through the course of the summer, and all of the committees did excellent work and reported out to the House. The report says, as we've seen with respect to Bill 1 and are now seeing with respect to Bill 2 and which we will see with respect to Bill 31, that there are pieces that come back to the House. There was an amendment which I brought forward with respect to one of the bills which was with respect to volunteers. As we know in this House, once you've put a bill on the table, once you've seen a report, there's always some more opportunity for work. Even when a bill is passed and becomes legislation, the process of evergreening that legislation always continues.

I would not want someone reading the last speaker's comments in *Hansard* to not perhaps go to the next speaker's comments and would say that the field policy committees that we've set up, the all-party committees of this House, did good work, heard from the public, and responded. It is not in our mouths, then, to come back and say that the House itself, which is, of course, the master of the work, does not have the opportunity to come back and visit that and deal with it. It is not appropriate at all, in my view, to say that.

5:20

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. It seems that revisionism suits at some points but not at others. I was not discussing the quality of the committee, and I want it on record that the committee made the right decision the first time. It was the revisiting that caused the problem. Then, when we had an opportunity to recognize and support the initial committee decision, that was turned down.

The Chair: Hon. member, we're debating Bill 2, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, not the committee process.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate that, and you're seeing the conflicts of interest that are occurring today over Bill 2.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's an honour for me to rise for the first time and have an opportunity to speak to Bill 2, the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007. I want to commend the committee for its diligence and its work on this important issue for all Albertans. Clearly, the foundations of public trust rest in the ability of people to know what's going on and to recognize and address real and perceived conflicts of interest. So it's important that this be done. Obviously, from many of our points of view it's overdue that we have a strengthened conflicts of interest amendment here.

For the record, this amendment extends the ministerial cooling-off period to a year from six months. It creates the six-month cooling-off period for senior political staff, including EAs and the Premier's chief and deputy chief of staff. It extends postemployment restrictions to the deputy ministers. It strengthens postemployment

restrictions for ministers and increases fines for violations. It also strengthens rules against using office, including information, to further private interests of any individuals. This is all positive. It makes substantial improvement in a number of critical areas, including those that have been recommended for years by this side of the House and the all-party review committee.

It affirmed, basically, three principles of the Conflicts of Interest Act: public disclosure, an independent Ethics Commissioner, and rules for public office holders. It recommended but did not support the legislation against apparent conflicts of interest and the general impartiality clause to cover activity that's unethical or inappropriate, even if it doesn't involve financial conflict of interest.

I want to recognize that in my experience these all-party committees have been positive and constructive and useful, and I look forward to more of the kinds of activities and dialogue that is possible within these committees. Indeed, this has been a step forward, and I acknowledge the Premier for fulfilling his commitment during his leadership to establish these all-party committees. It's a very progressive step for democracy in Alberta, and people, frankly, have been dismayed and rather discouraged, shall I say, prior to these signs that the government of Alberta is interested in democracy and interested in a full and an open discussion and participation.

To close remarks, Mr. Chairman, I think I can say with some support from this side that in general we have positive feelings, and certainly I will support this bill in its final reading.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 2, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007?

The hon. leader of the third party opposition.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to just very briefly put on the record my support for the passage of this bill. I certainly think that it's one of the issues that we've been talking about for many years, and we've seen many instances where high profile individuals, including our most recent Premier, have taken appointments or positions with law firms or other organizations. We felt that this is not right, that they possess so much knowledge of the government's plans . . . [interjection] Well, I'm speaking generally, hon. House leader, about your previous leader.

In general people who leave government as a senior official or an elected official in cabinet will have a tremendous knowledge of policy and plans of the government. It's the plans, the knowledge of what the government is planning to do, that are extremely valuable and give any firm or private interest that's able to acquire that individual a tremendous and an unfair advantage. That's why this kind of legislation is so important. To not have this kind of legislation really ends any sort of sense of a level playing field in business or in law or in professions or in any activity where lobbying or a government policy is of critical nature.

I just want to indicate that I think in some cases these cooling-off periods could have been extended even further, and it would have been in the public interest to do so. But this is a step in the right direction, Mr. Chairman, and I am prepared to support it. I think the whole question of conflicts of interest is something that we all need to be concerned about regardless of what political party we're from because a failure to deal properly and completely with conflicts of interest does undermine public confidence in the ability of government to provide equally for all without bias or unfair advantage for any party.

I think this is indeed a step forward. If the government continues along this line, they will, I think, move in a way to eliminate some

of the tarnished reputation the government earned under the previous Premier. I think it's clear that this Premier wants to put some distance between himself and the type of things that went on under the previous regime.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat and indicate we'll be supporting the bill.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll be very brief. I'd just like to rise in support of this bill. I think it's an indication of a new attitude in government and a new approach to government that we're seeing under the new Premier. I very much support this bill, and I commend the government for coming forward with it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 2, Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 2 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 38

Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I, again, cannot be as succinct as I was for bills 9, 11, 23, and 24. This is my first opportunity to speak on Bill 38; therefore, I want to point out my concern that Alberta did not follow the B.C. example of bringing the concept of a trade and labour mobility agreement to the Legislature and to its people first. In B.C. the democratic discussions took place before the fact, not looking for a simple rubber-stamping after the fact.

5:30

Now, what I find difficult with Bill 38 is that we're talking about sort of an economic bond between the province of British Columbia and the province of Alberta that potentially realizes the least standards of both. In other words, if there's a minimum wage in B.C. that is even lower than that of Alberta, it seems that the least attractive would be the concern expressed.

What I find surprising is, for example, when our leader from Edmonton-Riverview put forward the notion of a western tiger. He put it out there for discussion rather than that, you know, had we formed the government, the concept would have been discussed before it was rammed through the legislative process. The western tiger takes the TILMA concept and makes it considerably more transparent and accountable. What the western tiger recognizes is that instead of transferring our wealth to the south, having our bitumen and our raw gas and our raw oil upgraded in refineries in either Chicago or down in Texas, why not realize that advantage across western Canada? It also recognizes that we have limited

water resources. We can't necessarily upgrade all the bitumen in this province in the upgrader alleys that are proposed, the 10 upgraders, without it having a very damaging, detrimental effect on our water.

Bill 38, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007, or in its acronym and briefer form, TILMA, does not take into account that we could, as is proposed by the western tiger concept, be sending some of our upgrading via pipeline to B.C., for example, or to Saskatchewan or Manitoba. Instead of relying on our current preoccupation with dirty, coal-fired generation, we could be using the much cheaper hydro from B.C. We could be trading bitumen processing for considerably less expensive power.

Likewise for Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Instead of us using all our water, whether it's potable or grey water, in the refining process, some of that refining could be shared with our western neighbours. I gather that with the election of the new government in Saskatchewan that process is more likely to occur. This government seems to be more ideologically connected to the new government. What we're commenting on in the western tiger is that not only do we share the potential gain of a western co-operation, such as Bill 38 suggests, with B.C., but we would expand that concept to include Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Manitoba has the advantage of also having hydro power. The transmission lines that the Minister of Energy noted in question period this afternoon, which go both ways: we could be trading the power, which would not result in extra emissions in Alberta but would result in hydro from Manitoba or hydro from B.C. powering the industrial separation and refining here. The western tiger concept recognizes that Alberta can be a leader in not only the transference of energy resources and refining but also the transportation of innovation and technology and, sort of, intellectual properties, sharing with the provinces and decreasing our dependency on our southern neighbour.

At some point I am sure that the province of Alberta will be urging their federal counterparts to revisit the trade agreements over natural gas because when our market does recover, with the type of cold winter that we're experiencing now and that is going to be prevalent throughout the States, with our current dollar being almost at par, we're no longer having the advantage that we once had with the higher American dollar.

What the western tiger says is: let's negotiate within our Canadian provinces, increase the economic clout of the western provinces, and do trades that work to the mutual benefit of our western Canadians. By sharing the bitumen, we share the stress. We recognize that we don't have the resources, whether it be using natural gas as an energy source for refining bitumen, nor do we have the water. So in order to eliminate those stresses, we share them as well as the profits with our neighbouring western partners, not just British Columbia but Saskatchewan and Manitoba. What we achieve as a result of this sharing is cleaner skies in Alberta, cheaper power for both industry and consumers, and a win-win circumstance for western Canada.

Bill 38 looks very narrowly at a trade deal with British Columbia. The western tiger concept looks at what's best for western Canada, not just what is best for the B.C. or Alberta internal governments.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much. Colleagues, the Alberta/B.C. trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, or TILMA, does what the national agreement on internal trade, AIT, which has been around for quite a while, was supposed to do, and it eliminates interprovincial trade barriers.

I would just like to remind the House that politics is the art of the possible. What we're doing here is we're doing the possible. We're doing the step that we can do with B.C. now when it comes to TILMA. This is a barrier-busting agreement and the most comprehensive internal trade agreement. The TILMA effectively creates a single market of 7.7 million people in Alberta and B.C. Yes, we can expand that, but it creates Canada's second-largest economy.

The TILMA came into effect April 1, 2007. On that date the movement of goods and services between Alberta and B.C. became a whole lot easier. For example, commercial vehicles no longer need additional registration and permits to carry loads across the Alberta/B.C. border. These changes have reduced administration and costs for Alberta companies that rely on commercial trucks, also for B.C. companies that rely on commercial trucks. Under TILMA Alberta and B.C. companies are now able to bid equally on more government procurement in both provinces. We've also made a commitment to end business subsidies that favour an Alberta company at the expense of a competitor in B.C. and vice versa.

5:40

When the TILMA is fully implemented in 2009, businesses and workers in both provinces will have seamless access to a larger range of opportunities across all sectors, including energy, transportation, and agriculture. A business registered in one province will be deemed registered in another, and there's no residency required, no added administration cost, and commercial vehicles no longer need to be reregistered for temporary travel in another province.

With a skilled tradesperson like a plumber or a welder, or a highly trained professional like a teacher or a nurse, they'll be able to move to Alberta or back to B.C., either way, and keep working without having to go through extensive recertification or retraining.

The TILMA is all about treating citizens within our country equally no matter whether they happen to be in Alberta or in British Columbia and, hopefully, the rest of Canada very soon. With the TILMA we cut the needless red tape put in the way of skilled Canadians seeking employment opportunities in another province within their own country. We break down the needless barriers in front of businesses seeking opportunities in another province within their own country.

We know from years of AIT disputes – that's the agreement on internal trade for Canada – that the national agreement lacks teeth. Provincial governments have ignored six of the last eight dispute panel decisions because there are no consequences for noncompliance. For example, Quebec continues to ignore a 2005 AIT panel ruling that prohibited the sale of coloured margarine in that province, and it's an impediment to interprovincial trade. It's estimated that the economic benefit from the opening of the Quebec market to coloured margarine may be worth as much as \$17 million per year to Alberta margarine producers and canola processors. This kind of thing won't happen under TILMA. Under TILMA Alberta and B.C. have taken firm steps to show consumers, workers, and businesses that our two governments are serious about dealing with interprovincial barriers.

Bill 38, the Government Organization Amendment Act, would be implemented in an enforceable dispute resolution process under the TILMA to ensure that provinces comply with dispute panel rulings. The legislation will allow for a penalty imposed by an impartial dispute panel established under the TILMA to be filed in Alberta courts. Such a penalty is strictly a last resort.

The TILMA itself lays out the process to resolve disputes, starting with dispute avoidance and then dispute resolution. The TILMA has a three-step dispute resolution process: dispute avoidance, consultation, and finally, if none of these are successful, resolution through

an impartial panel. In the third step complainants will be able to make their case before a dispute panel. The panels are independent and impartial. They have the ability to levy a financial penalty against a government but only if it does not change a measure that has been found to violate the TILMA.

The maximum penalty is \$5 million. The amount of a penalty, though, would depend on such things as the extent to which any harm is occurring in the province and on the complaining party. Monetary awards under TILMA are only available if a province has acted contrary to the agreement and only if that province does not comply with a panel ruling. If a government changes an offending measure, that's where the process stops. There's no penalty. This is to encourage compliance, not compensate individuals or companies for business losses.

Remember, the dispute resolution process is also a tool for Albertans to use to ensure open markets in B.C. Private parties cannot sue through the courts for damages under the TILMA. They can access the dispute resolution process, and they can seek recourse only on measures related to trade, investment, or labour mobility. Under the dispute resolution process only one dispute can be launched on what is essentially the same complaint at any one time. That allows the situation to be supported or corrected, reducing grounds for further complaints. To reduce the likelihood of frivolous complaints, the dispute panel can charge the full costs of the dispute resolution process to losing complainants.

Now, in no way does the dispute resolution process or Bill 38 put provincial authority at risk. The TILMA is very clear about what it does and does not cover. It specifically excludes legitimate public policy objectives; for example, water, labour standards, social policy, environmental and consumer protection, workers' health and safety, and provisions of health and social services. Okay? That's very, very clear in the agreement. It will not prevent local governments from acting in their citizens' best interests through such things as zoning bylaws or land-use decisions. Bill 38 is part of the process to fully implement TILMA by 2009. This amendment parallels legislation introduced in B.C.

During previous debate on Bill 38 some hon. members have stated that the TILMA process has been secretive, or that nobody knows about TILMA. In fact, TILMA includes a two-year implementation period so that Alberta and B.C. can get input from interested stakeholders to help shape what the final agreement will look like. The government of Alberta is working with regulators and professional organizations for more than a hundred occupations to ensure that their credentials are recognized in both Alberta and B.C. by 2009, when TILMA is fully implemented.

We consulted with municipalities, academic institutes, health authorities, Crown corporations, and financial institutions all across Alberta to get their input on TILMA provisions that may affect them by 2009. We discussed TILMA with groups such as the AUMA, the AAMD and C, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. We met with the city of Edmonton, the city of Calgary along with dozens of other cities, towns, counties, and municipal districts from all parts of Alberta. Consultations have been carried out with more than 60 professional regulatory bodies, such as the Alberta Association of Architects and the association of registered nurses.

Government has discussed TILMA with such diverse groups as the Council of Canadians, the chambers of commerce in Calgary and Edmonton. Officials have met with industry groups such as the Alberta building trades council, the Alberta Construction Association, the Alberta real estate council, and the Alberta funeral directors association.

TILMA has been presented to other governments in Canada through the committee on internal trade. We met informally with

officials from the federal government, from Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Yukon about TILMA. TILMA was even praised in the March 19 federal budget.

So has TILMA been a secret? I don't think so. If it is, it's the worst kept secret yet.

Lack of consultation with those who will be affected: if this is not a consultation to the highest degree, I don't know what is. TILMA has received positive reactions from various groups in Alberta and B.C.

A few weeks ago Alberta economist Mike Percy was quoted in the media as saying: I think TILMA should be the template that the rest of Canada looks like because it actually does allow for free trade in labour and investment across the provinces.

TILMA is consistent with our obligations under the pan-Canadian agreement on internal trade. Now, AIT public consultations in 2002 in Alberta indicated a strong desire to have government pursue further liberalization of interprovincial trade and labour mobility, and that is what we have done. We can ensure the benefits of TILMA by also ensuring that the agreement has teeth, and that's what we're doing today.

We've seen the negative impact on Albertans from the lack of an enforceable dispute resolution process under the pan-Canadian agreement on internal trade. Alberta's agrifood sector is still being denied access to the Ontario market for many of their products. Approval of the amendment that is before us will give the TILMA dispute resolution process teeth. TILMA panel decisions will be enforceable, unlike the decisions handed down by AIT panels that years later some Canadian governments continue to ignore.

Alberta has never been brought before a panel in the 12 years that we have been a party to the AIT. Any issue that was brought to our attention was resolved through consultation. Clearly, this is a demonstration of Alberta's commitment to dealing with unnecessary impediments to interprovincial trade and mobility. Alberta has a record of fairness in trade deals. Alberta has a record of compliance with its agreements. Alberta is not threatened by enforcement provisions.

I encourage all members to support Bill 38, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2007, to make any panels handed down under TILMA dispute resolution panels enforceable. Thank you very much.

5:50

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 38.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think it would be prudent at this time to move that the committee rise and report bills 9, 11, 24, 2, and report progress on bills 23 and 38.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the

Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 11, Bill 24. The committee reports the following bills with some amendments: Bill 9, Bill 2. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 23, Bill 38. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading
(continued)

Bill 52
Corrections Amendment Act, 2007

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

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move Bill 52, the Corrections Amendment Act, 2007, at second reading.

The proposed amendments to the Corrections Act will enhance inmate disciplinary procedures, provide for safer correctional facilities and communities, and support victims of crime by providing greater access to information about offenders. Bill 52 will ensure that inmates subject to discipline are dealt with by hearing and appeal adjudicators who are external to the correctional centre, give victims access to more information about an offender convicted of a crime against them, and allow for electronic monitoring or recording of inmate phone calls to enhance safety within the correctional facility and in the community. Mr. Speaker, at this point I will speak to selected sections of Bill 52.

Amendments to section 15. These amendments respond to the December 4, 2006, ruling of the hon. Justice Marceau of the Court of Queen's Bench that some aspects of the current inmate disciplinary process breach the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Justice Marceau found a potential lack of impartiality when disciplinary boards are comprised entirely of staff members who work within the same correctional facility as the inmate who is subject to discipline. As a result, he struck down section 15 of the Corrections Act. The proposed amendments to section 15 will have disciplinary hearings and appeals conducted by individuals external to the correctional institution.

Hearing adjudicators may be appointed by the minister to review breaches of rules or regulations of the institution and determine punishment. Appeal adjudicators may be appointed by the minister to conduct appeals of decisions made by a hearing adjudicator in a disciplinary hearing. If an inmate or the director of a correctional facility is not satisfied with the decision of an appeal adjudicator, they can apply for a judicial review of that decision. We believe these amendments to section 15 will increase impartiality and independence of the hearing and appeals process.

Mr. Speaker, with the inclusion of section 14.4, which is a new section, this amendment would allow the electronic monitoring and

recording of inmate phone calls in certain circumstances. Similar legislation exists at the federal level and in Manitoba and British Columbia, where inmate calls have been monitored for some time. Telephones are an important way for inmates to communicate with individuals, including family members, outside of institutions. However, they can and have been used by some inmates to connect with gang members, to threaten, intimidate, or harass individuals, including witnesses or victims, or to continue their involvement in illegal activities. All monitoring would require the prior approval of the director of the correctional facility. The director could decide to monitor and/or record telephone calls if there are reasonable grounds to believe the calls, whether made or received by the inmate, would contain evidence of an act that would risk the security of the correctional facility or the safety of any person, be it a criminal offence or a plan to commit a criminal offence, harass, or intimidate the recipient of the call. Notice will be prominently displayed in all correctional centre admission areas and inmate housing units that telephone communications may be monitored or recorded.

Before drafting this amendment, we sought legal opinion with respect to possible Charter challenges and incorporated that opinion in the language of the proposed act. We are therefore confident that this amendment fully complies with the provisions of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Inclusion of section 14.3, Mr. Speaker. This amendment would specify the kind of information the director of a correctional facility or a community corrections manager can disclose to victims about an offender convicted of a crime against him. There are similar sections in the federal Corrections and Conditional Release Act. The information provided could include the offender's name, the offence for which the offender was found guilty and the court that found the offender guilty, the date of commencement and the length of the sentence, the location of the correctional facility where the sentence is being served, the date of the offender's release from custody or on a temporary absence, the conditions attached to the offender's release that relate to the victim. Providing victims of crime with this information may contribute to their sense of safety and acknowledges the importance of victims' concerns at all stages of the criminal justice process.

Mr. Speaker, those are my comments regarding Bill 52. I'd like to move that Bill 52 be moved through second reading.

The Deputy Speaker: A point of clarification, hon. member. You're moving on behalf of another member?

Mr. Cenaiko: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I'm moving on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, and I'd like to adjourn debate as well.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 1 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 5:57 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1 p.m.]

