



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature  
First Session

# Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, April 28, 2008

Issue 9

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

# Legislative Assembly of Alberta

## The 27th Legislature

First Session

Kowalski, Hon. Ken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Speaker  
Cao, Wayne C.N., Calgary-Fort, Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees  
Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

Ady, Hon. Cindy, Calgary-Shaw (PC),  
Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation  
Allred, Ken, St. Albert (PC)  
Amery, Moe, Calgary-East (PC)  
Anderson, Rob, Airdrie-Chestermere (PC),  
Parliamentary Assistant, Solicitor General and Public Security  
Benito, Carl, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)  
Berger, Evan, Livingstone-Macleod (PC),  
Parliamentary Assistant, Sustainable Resource Development  
Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)  
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Montrose (PC),  
Parliamentary Assistant, Advanced Education  
and Technology  
Blackett, Hon. Lindsay, Calgary-North West (PC),  
Minister of Culture and Community Spirit  
Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (L),  
Official Opposition House Leader  
Boutilier, Guy C., Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (PC)  
Brown, Dr. Neil, QC, Calgary-Nose Hill (PC)  
Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)  
Campbell, Robin, West Yellowhead (PC),  
Deputy Government Whip  
Chase, Harry B., Calgary-Varsity (L),  
Official Opposition Whip  
Dallas, Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)  
Danyluk, Hon. Ray, Lac La Biche-St. Paul (PC),  
Minister of Municipal Affairs  
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)  
Denis, Jonathan, Calgary-Egmont (PC)  
Doerksen, Arno, Strathmore-Brooks (PC)  
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)  
Elniski, Doug, Edmonton-Calder (PC)  
Evans, Hon. Iris, Sherwood Park (PC),  
Minister of Finance and Enterprise  
Fawcett, Kyle, Calgary-North Hill (PC)  
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)  
Fritz, Hon. Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC),  
Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs  
Goudreau, Hon. Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace (PC),  
Minister of Employment and Immigration  
Griffiths, Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC),  
Parliamentary Assistant, Agriculture and Rural Development  
Groeneveld, Hon. George, Highwood (PC),  
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development  
Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC),  
Minister of Education, Government House Leader  
Hayden, Hon. Jack, Drumheller-Stettler (PC),  
Minister of Infrastructure  
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (L)  
Horne, Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (PC)  
Horner, Hon. Doug, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert (PC),  
Minister of Advanced Education and Technology  
Jablonski, Hon. Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC),  
Minister of Seniors and Community Supports  
Jacobs, Broyce, Cardston-Taber-Warner (PC)  
Johnson, Jeff, Athabasca-Redwater (PC)  
Johnston, Art, Calgary-Hays (PC)  
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (L)  
Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC),  
Minister of Service Alberta  
Knight, Hon. Mel, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC),  
Minister of Energy  
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)  
Liepert, Hon. Ron, Calgary-West (PC),  
Minister of Health and Wellness  
Lindsay, Hon. Fred, Stony Plain (PC),  
Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security  
Lukaszk, Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC),  
Parliamentary Assistant, Municipal Affairs  
Lund, Ty, Rocky Mountain House (PC)  
MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (L)  
Marz, Richard, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (PC)  
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),  
Leader of the NDP Opposition  
McFarland, Barry, Little Bow (PC)  
McQueen, Diana, Drayton Valley-Calmar (PC),  
Parliamentary Assistant, Environment  
Morton, Hon. F.L., Foothills-Rocky View (PC),  
Minister of Sustainable Resource Development  
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),  
Deputy Leader of the NDP Opposition,  
NDP Opposition House Leader  
Oberle, Frank, Peace River (PC),  
Government Whip  
Olson, Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC)  
Ouellette, Hon. Luke, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (PC),  
Minister of Transportation  
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (L),  
Deputy Official Opposition Whip  
Prins, Ray, Lacombe-Ponoka (PC)  
Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)  
Redford, Hon. Alison M., Calgary-Elbow (PC),  
Minister of Justice and Attorney General  
Renner, Hon. Rob, Medicine Hat (PC),  
Minister of Environment, Deputy Government House Leader  
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)  
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)  
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)  
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC),  
Parliamentary Assistant, Education  
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (PC),  
Parliamentary Assistant, Health and Wellness  
Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),  
President of the Treasury Board  
Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC),  
Premier, President of Executive Council  
Stevens, Hon. Ron, QC, Calgary-Glenmore (PC),  
Deputy Premier, Minister of International and  
Intergovernmental Relations  
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (L)  
Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (L)  
Leader of the Official Opposition  
Tarchuk, Hon. Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC),  
Minister of Children and Youth Services  
Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (L),  
Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition  
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)  
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)  
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)  
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC),  
Parliamentary Assistant, Energy  
Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)  
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC),  
Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration  
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),  
Minister of Aboriginal Relations,  
Deputy Government House Leader

### Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Clerk	W.J. David McNeil	Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Shannon Dean
Clerk Assistant/ Director of House Services	Louise J. Kamuchik	Sergeant-at-Arms	Brian G. Hodgson
Clerk of <i>Journals</i> /Table Research	Micheline S. Gravel	Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms	J. Ed Richard
Senior Parliamentary Counsel	Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms	William C. Semple
		Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Liz Sim

[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 28, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Welcome back. Good afternoon.

On this day let each of us pray in our own way for all who have been killed or injured in the workplace. Life is precious. When it is lost, all of us are impacted.

In a moment of silent contemplation may we now allow our thoughts to remember those taken before their time, those who have suffered through tragedies, and reach out to the families, friends, neighbours, and communities most immediately impacted. May God provide them eternal peace. Amen.

Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, and boys and girls, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Paul Lorieau, who is in the Speaker's gallery, and I would invite all to participate in the language of their choice.

### Hon. Members:

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

**The Speaker:** Please be seated.

### Introduction of Guests

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

**Mr. Allred:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the House 76 students from Albert Lacombe school in St. Albert. Accompanying them are three teachers, Mrs. Kim Pilipchuk-Byer, Mrs. Paddi Brown, Mr. Joe Esposito; and five parent helpers, Mrs. Julie Block, Mrs. Kristie Bennett, Mr. Don Smythe, Mrs. Karen Myck, and Mrs. Anne Lehto. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a very talented and successful young Albertan, Jolene Noble, of Manning, Alberta. Jolene was chosen from among 116 candidates to receive the 2007 Premier's award, the highest award in the 4-H program.

Jolene has been a member of 4-H for the past several years, specifically the Three Rivers 4-H Beef Club, where she has held several executive positions. As well, she is known in her community for her exceptional leadership, communication, and personal development skills, and it is these qualities that earn her this great honour.

In addition to her duties as the Premier's award recipient, Jolene along with 27 other exceptional young Albertans is currently serving

as a 4-H ambassador, promoting the opportunities available through 4-H. Highlighting her year as the 2007 Premier's award winner, Jolene is here visiting us today and to meet with the Premier. Mr. Speaker, Jolene is seated in your gallery with her parents, Bob and Nora, her sister, Cara, and brother, Lee. I would ask that they now rise and receive the usual warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a constituent of mine from Red Deer-North, Jestin Lockhart, and his grandmother, Evelyn Lockhart. Jestin is 12 years old. He's from Central Middle school. He enjoys swimming, art, golfing, video games, and field hockey. He is hoping to get a job soon working for his grandfather's business, Home to Home Moving. They're here today to tour the Legislature, and they had lunch in our cafeteria. They're in the members' gallery, and I would like to ask them to rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to introduce to the Assembly two people who are tireless workers in the cause of improved farm worker safety. They live in Bow Island. Their names are Eric Musekamp and Darlene Dunlop. They're in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the welcome of all members.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Angeline Moellmann and her daughters, Pam Moellmann and Christine Yeoman. Angeline has been a tireless advocate for increased workplace safety since she tragically lost her husband, Grant, in a workplace accident in November 1994. Angeline seizes every opportunity to do anything she can and go anywhere she's needed in order to talk about workplace safety and speak about the need for increased safety measures on job sites.

Joining Angeline are her daughters, Pam and Christine. Christine is an advocate for injured workers and operates CHAOS Consulting. Pam is a vice-president with ATCO. Both Pam and Christine believe that employers should improve safety procedures and that government should ensure that our safety laws are strong and that they are enforced properly. I would ask now that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly one Albertan whose life has been forever changed, Lorna Chandler, from Black Diamond, Alberta. On June 18, 2006, her husband, Kevan Chandler, was trying to break up crusted grain when a cascade of grain buried and killed him in a silo. Kevan had not been taught the correct safety guidelines nor provided with equipment such as a safety harness at the Tongue Creek Feeders Limited.

Lorna Chandler and her two children, 10-year-old Joshua and six-year-old Jada, would like all workers, especially farm workers, to

have workplace safety standards in place so that tragedies like this do not happen again. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my constituents and all working Albertans I would like to thank Lorna Chandler for standing up on behalf of unprotected workers and for raising her voice on behalf of all Albertans. I would now ask that Lorna Chandler please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Webber:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three gentlemen I had lunch with today in the cafeteria downstairs. The first two individuals are Mr. Tim Shipton, president of the Alberta Enterprise Group, and Mr. David MacLean, vice-president of communications and policy for the Alberta Enterprise Group. Both Tim and Dave have roots here in the Alberta Legislature, having worked in the building back in the 1990s, I understand, long before my time. They are both now with AEG, which is a leading public policy advocacy group comprised of 70 businesses and community leaders from across Alberta.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce Mr. Paul Michael Wihbey. He is the president of GWEST, a Washington-based consulting firm specializing in the geopolitics of strategic resources such as oil, gas, and water. Mr. Wihbey is a dual American-Canadian citizen, raised in Montreal, visiting with us here today from Washington. He has entered into a strategic relationship with the Edmonton-based Alberta Enterprise Group to further promote Alberta in Washington, DC. If I had known earlier that Mr. Wihbey was once the president of the Canadian federal Liberal Party, I perhaps might not have had lunch with him today, but I did anyway.

I would ask that these three gentlemen please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

### Ministerial Statements

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

#### National Day of Mourning

**Mr. Goudreau:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every year on April 28 we take a moment to remember those who are seriously injured or killed on the job. Every one of these workers has a family, friends, and co-workers. Their lives can be shattered in a split second. On this National Day of Mourning we renew our commitment to making sure Alberta workers come home healthy and safe at the end of their work day.

I am pleased to report, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta's lost-time claim rate is now 2.12 claims per 100 person years, the lowest it's ever been. I can also tell you that the injuries that result in these claims are down in all major industry sectors. However, there were also 154 workplace fatalities in 2007. Of those, 44 were motor vehicle incidents, 47 were workplace incidents, and 63 people succumbed to occupational disease. I know we all agree that these 154 fatalities are 154 too many.

At the end of the day workplace health and safety is a responsibility government shares with employers, unions, safety associations, and workers. As much as we'd like to, we cannot simply legislate away workplace injuries and fatalities. However, we can redouble our efforts to work with our partners and improve health and safety at Alberta workplaces.

On this National Day of Mourning Albertans will note that all flags on our government buildings are at half mast. I know I speak for all my Legislature colleagues when I say that our hearts go out

to those whose lives have been forever changed by workplace injuries and fatalities.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year to commemorate the National Day of Mourning for workers killed or injured on the job, the WCB issued a poster titled *Forget Me Not*. On the poster there is a young girl with her face pressed sadly against a rainy window. Behind her is a grey silhouette of her father, implying that he went to work one day and never came home to her. The poster states, "Each worker's death leaves a void that can never be filled."

Last year 154 Albertans died because of their employment. Some of them and their age at the time of death are: Hong, age 33, fell from a collapsed structure; Colton, 22, caught in a machine; Mohamed, 47, motor vehicle accident; Glenn, 47, asbestos-related illness; Miles, 31, electrocuted; Donna, 51, hit by a truck; Daniel, 35, hit by a log; Graham, 47, motor vehicle accident; Darina, 34, hit by a train; Donald, 51, a propane fire; Bessie, 73, as a result of asbestosis.

All of these tragic accidents were and are preventable, yet these workers somehow lost their lives. We cannot forget them or their loved ones or our responsibility to Alberta's workforce, to help prevent workplace injuries and deaths. All workers, whether on a construction site or on a corporate farm, deserve protection from unsafe work sites and unsafe procedures. Hon. members, now is the time to vigorously enforce our occupational health and safety laws and commit to protecting all Alberta's workers.

Thank you.

**Ms Notley:** Mr. Speaker, I move that the leader of the third party be given the opportunity to respond to the minister's statement.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, in our rules and our traditions when a member of Executive Council provides a ministerial statement, opportunity is provided to a spokesperson from the Official Opposition. For any other member to have an opportunity to participate requires the unanimous consent of the House. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has asked for such. I will ask one question, and the answer to that one question if one is opposed to it is no. Is any member in this Assembly opposed to providing an opportunity for the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to participate?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to the House as well. The increasing number of workplace fatalities in Alberta is part of the dark side of Alberta's overheated economy. It is as sad as it is unnecessary. Employers should place more emphasis on safety procedures, and the government should be strengthening safety regulations and enforcing them. Instead, not enough is being done to make workplaces safer and save lives.

Workplace health and safety needs a significant funding increase, but the recently announced budget for health and safety does not even keep pace with inflation. The government must act now to increase the number of enforcement officers, strengthen the occupational health and safety code, and fund an educational

campaign to inform workers of their safety rights. These are the kinds of steps that would make a real difference in the safety of working people.

While I commend the minister for his expression of concern on this issue and for his commitment to reducing fatalities, actions speak louder than words. Mr. Speaker, Alberta workers have had their fill of this government's words. It is now time for action.

### Members' Statements

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

#### Armenian Genocide

**Mr. Dallas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 24 of each year people around the world, including Canada and the United States, remember the first genocide of the 20th century, the brutal annihilation of over one and a half million Armenian men, women, and children by the Turkish Ottoman Empire.

Genocide is the organized and systematic killing of a people for the expressed purpose of putting an end to their collective existence. Failure to recognize the horrific and systematic Armenian murders has led to the recurrence and denial of other genocides throughout the 20th century.

In 1918 Theodore Roosevelt wrote these prophetic words: "The Armenian massacre was the greatest crime of the war, and the failure to act against Turkey is to condone it . . . the failure to deal radically with the Turkish horror means that all talk of guaranteeing the future peace of the world is mischievous nonsense." In 1939 Adolph Hitler, while persuading his associates that a Jewish Holocaust would be tolerated by the west, said, "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?"

Since the Armenian genocide the world has faced the Russian-engineered Ukrainian famine, the 1937 rape of Nanking by Japan, 30 million people murdered under Mao Zedong, the Cambodian killing fields, the mass killings in Rwanda, the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Kosovo, and the Jewish Holocaust. And as the situation in Darfur worsens, we are reminded of why we must remember the plight of the Armenians a century ago and use the lessons learned from their suffering to spread awareness of genocide.

On this important anniversary it is an urgent message to people everywhere that genocide must not only be opposed by all nations and by all people but that it must be universally recognized as a crime against humanity no matter where it occurs or against whom it is carried out.

### Oral Question Period

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

#### Farm Worker Safety

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today Lorna Chandler sits in the gallery. Lorna was widowed, her two children left fatherless because of an accident on a farm feedlot where her husband was an employee. We believe that this one farm feedlot operation alone has had three workplace fatalities. My question is to the minister of agriculture. Can he rise here today and explain to Lorna Chandler and to the many other families shattered by farm accidents why he and this government refuse to bring in farm safety laws?

1:50

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The tragedy that occurred last week was indeed a tragedy for the community, a community that I myself am part of along with many of my colleagues in this government. I attended the funeral myself on Saturday. Brian Morrison was a neighbour, a constituent, and a friend, and our hearts go out to his immediate family and to their friends. Not taking anything away from that, the key to farm safety is education and training.

**Dr. Taft:** To the same minister: given that even on big industrial farms that employ dozens of people, workers have little or no protection under occupational health and safety laws, under workers' compensation, under the Labour Relations Code, or under employment standards, will the minister make a commitment to bring forward safety laws to protect Alberta's farm workers?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Mr. Speaker, corporate farms or industrial, whatever the hon. member wants to call them, are still managed pretty much by families; in fact, in the feedlot industry pretty much entirely. Safety is a personal commitment between employees and employers. They must agree to work together to create a safe workplace. Employees, indeed, are treated like family. That commitment along with education and training makes a huge difference. Eighty employees lined up for an honour guard for this gentleman. I think probably that speaks for itself.

**Dr. Taft:** That's a shocking response, Mr. Speaker.

To the same minister: given that children of any age can be hired to do any job at an agricultural operation and given that 30 per cent of farm fatalities are children, will this minister ensure that children are protected under the law when they are hired as farm workers?

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Mr. Speaker, I wish it were that simple. I honestly do. I think that when we look at the farm situation, how unique it is and how far removed it is from the regular workforce – when I look back at what happened on the weekend, there were over 1,000 people at this funeral. Many, many people came up to me and said: will you please keep on with the safety and education portion? Legislation won't save us.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta farm workers have no protection regarding hours of work and overtime, no statutory holidays or vacation pay, no right to refuse unsafe work, which Lorna Chandler's husband learned in the worst way possible. They have no compensation if they're injured on the job. Children of any age can be hired to do any job. It's little wonder that on average one or two farm workers are killed on the job in Alberta every month. To the Premier: given that he said over a year ago that his minister of agriculture was working on this issue, will he stand here now and tell Lorna Chandler why nothing was done?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, unless my information is wrong – and this has been talked about in the House for a considerable length of time since the unfortunate incident. As our minister again reiterated, it does hit the whole community in terms of losing any person. It doesn't matter if it's on a farm site or on a provincial highway. It doesn't matter. Life is precious. In this particular case if that hon. member has different information tell me if there was not a safety harness in the silo for that particular worker.

**Dr. Taft:** Mr. Speaker, given that in August 2006 in this Assembly the minister of human resources said that he would make the necessary changes to protect farm workers and that dozens of people have died in the interim while nothing was done, will this Premier commit to this Assembly that this government will bring in full farm worker safety laws by the end of this year?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that when it comes to safety programs, the best program that we could enforce and even actually put more resources into is farm safety education. I learned the hard way on the farm. You know, the ones who kept reminding me not to step over the PTO or to walk in front of moving equipment were my children, who actually got better safety training and education. The other group that provides a tremendous amount of safety education is the 4-H.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of agriculture. Will this minister stand today in this Assembly to apologize to Lorna Chandler and to her children and all the other farm workers and their families who have been victims of farm accidents, because he failed to deliver on his Premier's promise made in this Assembly last March to address the issue of farm worker safety? Stand here and be accountable.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, Mr. Speaker, sensationalizing tragedy like this is reprehensible as far as I'm concerned.

Just to set the record straight, in 2007 the Premier asked me and the minister of employment, immigration and industry to look at farm safety. We did that, and we felt then, as we do now, that the key to farm safety is education. We shared these feelings with our caucus. Perhaps he should share with his rural caucus. Oh, no, he doesn't have one, does he?

**The Speaker:** Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2007, 154 Albertans died on the job. This is up by 24 per cent from 2006, and this does not include any workers that unfortunately were killed on corporate farms or family farms. This is unacceptable, and this idea that education is the way to go is not what needs to be done. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Why does it take the Alberta government so long to investigate and compile a public report on each and every tragic workplace fatality in this province?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

**Mr. Goudreau:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have occupational and safety officials attending all of the accidents and reviewing the fatalities. Because of the seriousness of it, we need to make sure that the information that we are getting is accurate. Specifically, some of those will take the good part of a full year before some of those reports are made available.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: does the hon. minister agree with the Premier that we should rely on the 4-H program to teach farm safety in rural Alberta? What happens if there are workers on one farm where there are no members in the 4-H club?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, again this hon. member is showing tremendous disrespect to an organization that, not only in Alberta but across the country, has done phenomenal work in the area of farm safety in rural Alberta. Again, proven by the numbers across on that bench there, a complete disrespect for rural Alberta. And watch: they'll continue. They'll continue this in the House day in and day out.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Again, Mr. Speaker, and this time to the Premier, who in my opinion is showing disrespect to farm workers: is it fair that construction workers are covered by some forms of occupational health and safety and corporate farm workers are not? What's fair about that?

**Mr. Stelmach:** How many questions are you asking: one or two?

**Dr. Taft:** Just answer the question.

**Mr. Stelmach:** I'll answer all of them if you give me a chance.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Respond to her.

**Mr. Stelmach:** I've responded to her and to you.

With respect to the issue of farm safety this is one area of tremendous concern to our caucus when it comes to not only the number of lives that are lost but also to significant injury, loss of limbs that individuals live with for the rest of their life. Some, of course, end their lives as quadriplegics, and it makes their futures very long. We're going to look at it, again, by increasing education. One thing about putting additional laws and regulations across for farm families – well, there are very many issues, but I can tell you that this is one area of deep concern to the whole caucus.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

2:00

### Electricity Exports

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Some days I just have to shake my head. Officials of TransAlta are proposing large-scale exports of electrical power to the United States, and these will be in part produced through more coal-fired power plants, which have grave environmental impacts and seriously affect our air quality. More than 11 per cent of our children already have asthma, and more coal emissions mean more respiratory problems. My question is to the Premier. How can you justify increasing emissions through more coal-fired production of electricity while decreasing the health of Albertans simply to produce electricity for the U.S. market?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, we have put in place now, I believe, an environmental plan that is far greater than any other province has on the books today, and that is to do cumulative impact assessment studies both in Fort McMurray and in the Industrial Heartland. We're looking at the whole cumulative effect of various pollutants in the air, and this is, really, the first of its kind. We'll continue to do this in other parts of Alberta as industry makes various submissions for increased growth and development.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that there is a serious proposal for building nuclear power projects, which the government has refused to take a position on, will the Premier tell the House whether his government will oppose or support the export to the United States of electricity which is produced by nuclear power?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the member is far ahead of himself. In this jurisdiction the decisions will be made with respect to proposals by quasi-judicial authorities. Government in itself cannot prejudge the decisions. Those decisions are based on the evidence that comes before those committees. They'll look at environmental evidence, social impacts and will make the decisions based on what is right for all Albertans.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that we've seen the example where the Alliance natural gas pipeline created a single market for natural gas with the United States and caused our gas prices to shoot up considerably, will the Premier undertake to ensure that tie line connections to the United States creating a single electricity market will not produce a dramatic jump in our electricity prices?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, a very good question coming from that party. It seems they all want to go out of their way to stop all kind of energy production and at the same time keep prices low. I don't know how you can reduce the supply to the level that they want, actually just stop all supply, have demand increase, and keep the price down. But that's kind of reflective of the party.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

#### Workplace Safety

**Mr. Campbell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is National Day of Mourning, and we were reminded of the importance of workplace safety with this morning's headline that a worker had tragically died after an accident at the Albion Sands site. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. When an incident like this happens, what procedures does your department undertake?

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

**Mr. Goudreau:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I want to express my condolences to the family and the co-workers and friends of the individual that got killed.

When an accident happens, the employer is obligated to report it. We have occupational health and safety officers who are familiar with the mining sector on-site as we speak. The inspector will review the specifics of the work site and the incident, and his first priority will be to ensure that the site is safe for other workers. I understand that an immediate stop-work order was put in place after the incident.

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

**Mr. Campbell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental is to the same minister. What are you doing to ensure that incidents of this nature do not happen on other work sites across the province?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, we are doing both education and enforcement. Our officers conduct random inspections around the province every day. Almost 14,000 were done last year. We also work with safety associations and employers on hands-on educational programs to help workers to learn the risks and to deal with them. These programs have had an impact. As I indicated in my statement earlier, our lost-time claim rates have gone down considerably, to 2.12 claims for 100 person-years.

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

**Mr. Campbell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the same minister. What message are you sending to Alberta employers that worker safety is important to this government and violations are to be taken seriously?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, we take these very, very seriously. We do a lot of enforcement, and we established some fines. I can tell you that the fines for this year are higher than the total of all of last year; so far our fines have surpassed the \$2 million mark. Through creative sentencing, many of those fines are now being redirected to community safety programs, where they can have an impact on future workers.

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

#### Public-private Project Funding

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Out-of-control spending, no savings, and now more debt. Treasury Board documents show that the intent of this government is to put Alberta back into debt using the P3 model. My questions are to the President of the Treasury Board. What concrete proof – reports, analyses – can be offered to support the argument as to why the government is choosing to put current and future Albertans into P3 debt rather than using its own financing?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Mr. Speaker, it's quite simple. History has shown in many, many other areas around the world – particularly Australia, New South Wales, and many of the English counties, where they have developed a P3 model – that it gets people into schools faster. They're maintained for a period of 30 years. They're turned over to the boards in good shape in 30 years. The total cost of both the building and the maintenance is controlled for up to 30 years. One only has to look at the Anthony Henday project to realize what a tremendous savings there is.

**Ms Blakeman:** So no reports and no analyses.

All right, then, President of the Treasury Board, how is it economically feasible to pay higher private-sector borrowing rates, which are longer term and have higher interest rates, than to use our own triple-A credit union to finance projects?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Well, I don't know; my credit union is pretty good, but I'm not sure if it's triple-A.

Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member wishes to have a reasonable discussion about the facts, then she needs to premise her question on something to do with the facts. Very little, if any, of her statement is truthful. If you want to know, the government does cost comparators for every project we do.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, again to the President of the Treasury Board: with declining natural resource revenues, how does the government plan to pay for the longer term and higher interest rate debt that the P3 arrangements are going to hang on all of us?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** There is probably the best advertisement for never voting for them: to ensure that we don't have declining resource revenue, Mr. Speaker.

The prudent management of money both short term and long term is exactly what this government has been very successful with. We have invested very strategically in both financial and infrastructure projects, some in a conventional build, some in a P3, but it's all on behalf of the average Albertan.

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

### School Construction

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was shocked yesterday to learn that the hon. Minister of Education was allegedly lambasting our government, his own government. My Sunday morning coffee was certainly a much more interesting event than it typically is. My question is to the Minister of Education. Why is the minister hoping to radically alter the way government plans new schools? If he's not, he needs to clarify his statements and outline the context in which they were made.

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

2:10

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the only thing that needs to be radically altered is the way that the *Journal* writes headlines.

I would say to the House that I attended a conference on Saturday with the parent councils from across Alberta. Parents' involvement in education is extremely important, and the Minister of Education having a good, frank discussion with parents from across the province about what we need to do to improve our education system, already one of the best in the world, is a very important discussion. In the course of that type of discussion it's absolutely essential that we talk about how we build our schools.

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

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has over 130 school construction or maintenance projects in its capital plan and over 7,000 new student places opening this year. To the same minister. My first supplemental: what problems could the minister possibly have with our school infrastructure planning process? Why does he want to interrupt this good work?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell the hon. member was paying close attention during estimates last Thursday. Yes, we do have a great building program happening now thanks to the good work of my predecessors in this portfolio. We have 132 building and maintenance projects going on and 18 new schools being planned for P3s in the very near future, but we still need to be very cognizant of the planning processes, that when the schools are built, they're the right size for the populations they're going to serve and they have the right resources in them. We still have more work

to do to make sure that that type of alignment happens and that we work collaboratively with our school boards to make sure that it happens.

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

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental to the same minister: if the minister continues to have serious concerns over the way we undertake infrastructure planning for education, what is he going to do to fix our capital planning process?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had conversations with the chairs of the metro boards and with others, including, as I mentioned, on Saturday with parent councils. I think it's incumbent upon us always, even if we have good or great processes, to constantly improve those processes, and that's what we're going to do going forward: work with our school boards to develop a better capital planning process so that when they're working with us on submitting capital plans, we're able to respond to those capital plans on a timely basis, whether it's through P3s or other forms of alternate financing or direct financing, to build the schools where children are and to resource them appropriately.

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

### Deep Well Flooding

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Both the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties have made several resolutions over the last few years for a moratorium on new licences or phasing out of licences to allow deep well flooding. This water, once injected, is gone forever. To the Minister of Environment. Given that Alberta Environment was to review oil companies' voluntary reductions under the 2004 water conservation and allocation guidelines, can the minister tell us: have there been any significant reductions?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, yes, I can. The answer is that, yes, there have been significant reductions. The plan that we put in place in conjunction with industry has had some outstanding successes.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that an application from Penn West to Alberta Environment this year seeks to withdraw almost 200,000 cubic metres of water, shallow groundwater, out of the North Saskatchewan watershed, will the minister explain why this practice is continuing?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, the protocol that's in place is a three-step protocol. First of all, it's necessary for the applicant to show how they have minimized the amount of water to be injected. They have to show why it is not feasible to use saline sources of water for any particular reason, and it's only as a very last resort that we would even contemplate considering whether they would be able to have access to fresh water.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When will the minister listen to cities and towns in Alberta and stop this waste of our lifeblood?



**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I have listened, and we are acting accordingly with appropriate legislation and appropriate policies to ensure that we minimize the impact of the oilfield industry on fresh water.

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

#### Affordable Housing in Edmonton

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs was at a city of Edmonton news conference this morning about an affordable housing project. My questions are for the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. Can the minister tell this Assembly what that housing project is?

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

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did join Mayor Mandel this morning for an announcement of a number of projects under the city's Cornerstones plan, and it's great news for Edmonton. There are 12 projects that are creating 379 affordable housing units around the city of Edmonton. They are for lower to moderate singles, couples, seniors, families. The foundation of Cornerstones, the element that I think will ensure its success, is that it's based on a partnership model, and Cornerstones is relying on community partners to develop the housing units.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member, please.

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is for the same minister. Can the minister tell us how this housing announcement fits into Alberta's commitment to housing?

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

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton's Cornerstones plan is a five-year plan to create 2,500 affordable housing units in the city, and as you know, we have a parallel five-year plan to create 11,000 affordable housing units for the province. Last year we did provide Edmonton with \$45 million for affordable housing under the municipal sustainable housing initiative, and the city of Edmonton is using this funding along with \$33.3 million of their own to develop the Cornerstones project, and I know that that's going to have a real impact on the availability of housing.

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

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is for the same minister. As part of this recent announcement will there be any funding available to help low-income people purchase their own homes?

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

**Mrs. Fritz:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying earlier, the partnerships that are in place include the housing co-operatives, nonprofit corporations, social housing society, and, yes, there is about \$4 million of the Cornerstones funding that will help Habitat for Humanity build 18 homes for Edmonton area families. There'll be three- and four-bedroom units, and that is a home ownership program where mortgage payments will be geared to the families' incomes, and it works well.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

#### Gang-related Violence in Hobbema

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since it appears that the Solicitor General is unwilling to seize gang members' vehicles carrying guns, I would like to know if the minister has followed up on the recommendations contained in the much-ballyhooed safe communities task force, specifically the recommendation to implement a pilot project aimed at curbing gang violence in Hobbema. Can the Solicitor General advise this Assembly what pilot projects have been implemented to stem gang activity and violence in Hobbema?

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

**Mr. Lindsay:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member, there are a number of things that we're doing in Hobbema. Through the community tripartite agreement we have put additional RCMP officers in that community. We also have in place an integrated response team involving all of the detachments in the area so that if a serious incident occurs in any one of those communities, we will have an integrated response to act on that immediately.

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

**Mr. Hehr:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You didn't really inform me of what pilot project was going on. If you haven't established this pilot project, can we be advised as to whether you're going to look at the report and see whether some pilot projects could go into Hobbema to try and help that community?

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

**Mr. Lindsay:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've spoken before in the House on this particular matter. We are prepared to work with that community, and we are working with that community. If a specific pilot project comes up that they would like us to push forward with or one becomes evident, we will certainly work with them to address the situation that's going on in that community.

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

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. But if you read the report, sir, it says that the government was going to implement some pilot projects in that area, so I don't think it's fair to pass it on to the community. Since you're not willing to seize the gang members' cars or put more police officers on the streets of Hobbema, can you tell me if there's anything you will do to support the people of Hobbema?

**Mr. Lindsay:** Just to clarify, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that I have ever said in this House that we're not prepared to confiscate the crime members' vehicles. We have legislation that would allow us to do that, and we will pursue that, depending on the charges being laid.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

2:20

#### Working Alone Regulation

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Employment

and Immigration stated today that workplace safety is the joint responsibility of employers, workers, and government, yet today the NDP opposition has acquired an e-mail from one of the minister's officials killing a proposal crafted jointly by employers and workers designed to make workplaces safer and to reduce the amount of working alone. To the minister: why isn't he listening to the voices of workers and employers who both want better working alone rules?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, this government is absolutely committed to workplace health and safety, including working alone, and any suggestions to the contrary are absurd. I've read the entire e-mail referenced in the news release, and it simply suggests that the revisions proposed by the working group are not necessary. This is because our occupational health and safety officers already have the authority to write orders to correct unsafe working conditions, including working alone conditions.

**Ms Notley:** Mr. Speaker, the officers do not have the authority to prevent employers from having people work alone.

Can the minister explain why, in fact, eight years after Tara McDonald's death and the reforms that were supposed to make workplaces safer, workplace fatalities are at the highest that they have been in 25 years?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, this ministry believes that our officers on the streets are in the best position to determine the most effective control methods appropriate to the specific workplace situation. In fact, in 2007 there were 35 orders that were issued to ensure compliance with working alone regulations, making workplaces safer for employees.

**Ms Notley:** Well, to the minister: would the minister be comfortable if one of his children worked night shift alone at PetroCan in downtown Calgary, and if not, why should anyone else be comfortable working alone there, too?

**Mr. Goudreau:** Mr. Speaker, there are some rules and regulations for individuals working alone or otherwise. Certainly, if somebody is under 15, he or she is not allowed to work after 9 p.m. There are some rules, again, for those that are under 18. We've produced the guide. This guide was circulated to over 140,000 employees in the province of Alberta, and I'll be tabling this. It's a guide for employers and employees on working alone safely.

#### West Nile Virus Larvicide Program

**Mr. Doerksen:** Mr. Speaker, southern Alberta constituents primarily in the Chinook and Palliser health regions are concerned that the government no longer funds the West Nile virus mosquito larviciding program. Albertans are at risk of being infected with West Nile virus and with this a serious health concern. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Is Alberta Health and Wellness going to fund the larviciding program in 2008, and if not, why not?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct that the Department of Health and Wellness will not be funding the larviciding program this year because it has been deemed that the best defence against the infection of West Nile virus is personal protective measures such as mosquito repellent with DEET. The determinant of whether to fund municipalities was based on the fact that there's really no evidence that larviciding actually reduced the West

Nile virus. While it may have reduced some of the mosquito numbers, those communities continue to report cases of West Nile virus.

**Mr. Doerksen:** My second question is also to the Minister of Health and Wellness, Mr. Speaker. How is your department ensuring that this West Nile virus campaign has been effective in Albertans protecting themselves against disease?

**Mr. Liepert:** Mr. Speaker, what the department is embarking on this year is about a million and a half dollar highly publicized public awareness campaign. We want to ensure that the public takes appropriate measures in the areas that are the highest risk. There is a significant amount of advertising that we'll be running in those particular areas, and we will continue to inform Albertans about the possibility of West Nile virus infections. It should be noted that municipalities . . .

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

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

#### Education Property Taxes

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Sometime between the weekend and now the real Minister of Education must have been taken behind the woodshed for his refreshingly free thinking. A hologram has replaced him.

In 1994 this government took control of the education property taxes away from local school boards. The damage done from this move is still being felt today. To the Minister of Education: does the minister agree that returning these taxing powers giving the school boards local autonomy once again is a necessary step to take to better the quality of education for Alberta students?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would commend the hon. member opposite to attend the meetings like we had on Saturday and see what real questions are like and then perhaps model his questions on them.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the school property tax the hon. member was here, I believe, on Thursday when we had estimates. His questions to me today are about government policy. Government policy is that we collect the property tax to equalize the ability to fund education across the province so that every student across the province has equitable access to education. But as we go forward and talk about the financing of education, we should be prepared to talk about all the topics.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Minister of Education said during the estimate debates last week, "I agree that school boards ought to have some of their taxing authority back," will the minister stand by his statement and ensure that this government acts in the best interests of Alberta students and return taxing powers to school boards?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member asked the question on Thursday. I wish he had been at least mentally present for the answer. I did say at the time that I personally supported the concept that for the autonomy of school boards there should be a

methodology for them to tax the public and be accountable to their public, but the government policy is that we collect those taxes. I also indicated that there's an opportunity for discussion going forward. At the time I also indicated that the Learning Commission report pronounced on this, and the AUMA and others were not happy with the concept. So there's lots of discussion to be had.

**Mr. Chase:** I look forward to those discussions progressing, and if the minister will support school boards, I will support him.

Since schools the government builds don't always match up with the ones school boards need as highlighted in their capital plans, including the 32 new schools announced last year, one of which was in the current health minister's constituency of Calgary-West – it magically didn't appear on the board's priority list – does the minister concede that there are problems in the way the ministry has dealt with this issue? I'm looking for an echo.

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do support school boards in doing their work, but if the hon. member wants to cross the floor, that would take a vote of our caucus.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

#### Payday Loans

**Mr. Weadick:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The payday loan industry in Canada is coming under increased scrutiny. We've heard stories of interest rates as high as 20,000 per cent and of businesses taking advantage of the poor, uneducated, and those who can't handle their credit. Many low-income First Nations people in Lethbridge are taken advantage of and fall prey to these companies. My questions are for the Minister of Service Alberta. Can the minister tell us what she is doing to protect Alberta's consumers from being exploited by these companies?

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

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do indeed recognize a need for improvements in how the payday loan industry is regulated. Recent changes to the Criminal Code of Canada have given provinces the option of setting maximum rates of interest. We want to determine the most practical and effective way to protect consumers. We are consulting with payday lending companies, consumer groups, representatives of low-income Albertans, and others who have expressed concerns about the industry's practices.

**Mr. Weadick:** Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental question is for the same minister. Can the minister tell us why we allow the payday loan companies to operate in Alberta if they are using such predatory practices?

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

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are working on a made-in-Alberta solution that will protect Albertans, particularly those whose economic circumstances make them vulnerable. Albertans who require the industry's services would continue to have access to short-term credit while having their interests protected. The Canadian Payday Loan Association represents many outlets operating in Alberta. Working with my department and consumer groups, they developed a code of best interest practices.

It sets rules for companies, their employees, ensures consumer protection, and requires that the consumers be treated fairly.

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

**Mr. Weadick:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is for the same minister. Can the minister tell us who is using the services of payday lenders and what is driving the explosion in the growth in the number of these kinds of companies?

2:30

**Mrs. Klimchuk:** Mr. Speaker, a 2005 Environics study found that half of payday loan users had household incomes of less than \$35,000 a year. But that's changing. Some reports say that nearly a quarter of payday loan customers have incomes of \$70,000 a year and up, and that certainly concerns this minister. This is a complex and important issue. We welcome comments from all Albertans, and as I stated before, I'm looking for a made-in-Alberta solution.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

#### All-terrain Vehicle Safety

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In November we asked the Minister of Transportation why this government had not mandated helmet use for children on ATVs in the province. The University of Alberta School of Public Health has pointed out that the head injury rate on ATVs rapidly increased between 2002 and 2006, and 60 per cent of the children who died in ATV accidents were not wearing a helmet. To the Minister of Transportation: when will this government stop simply consulting and take real action to mandate helmet use for children on off-highway vehicles in this province?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, we're actually looking at that right while she's asking the question. We're working on it. I will say that for all children that ride ATVs, it's against the law on Crown land to ride under 14 years of age without supervision. I don't understand today why any parent would go out with a child and not put a helmet on their head.

**Ms Pastoor:** To the same minister: given that mandatory helmet usage on bicycles had to wait until it was finally put through as a private member's bill, are Albertans facing a similarly unnecessary delay, or will the minister act now and quit consulting? Act now.

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, I told her just before that we are acting on it now. We're working towards it. We're just looking into all of the different issues that it addresses. Safety, as I've always said, is one of the most important things to this ministry and to this PC government.

**Ms Pastoor:** Well, I'm not sure how that answered my question, so I'll try the Minister of Health and Wellness. The list of nonfatal but incredibly costly and often life-crippling injuries that are sustained in crashes without helmets places a serious and unnecessary strain on our health system. Why is he not pushing for ATV helmet law for Alberta's youth?

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises a good point. I think that all ATV users should be wearing helmets. I don't think it should be up to government to always legislate what people do for their own safety.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

#### Centralized Learning Assessment

**Mr. Horne:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We hear much these days about how well Alberta's students do in provincial, national, and international testing, yet groups like the Alberta Teachers' Association say that such centralized assessment does little to improve students' learning and outcomes. My question is for the Minister of Education. If front-line teachers think that assessments are a bad idea, can the minister tell this House what purpose this testing serves and what, if any, benefits accrue to the students of Alberta?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, there are two modalities of assessment, assessment for learning and assessment of learning, and both of them are important. Assessment for learning is the teachers in the classroom not just with tests but looking at projects, looking at how children co-operate with each other and many other ways of determining whether children are achieving the knowledge, skills, and attributes that they need. Assessment of learning is also important so that we can understand how well the system is doing with respect to the implementation of our curriculum and with respect to the standards that Albertans want for their system.

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

**Mr. Horne:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, that's all well and good, but isn't all the assessment we are doing just an additional burden on teachers that takes away from their ability to teach?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, Mr. Speaker, learning has a number of components, and one of those components that's very valuable is the assessment component. It's valuable for teachers in classrooms to be able to assess what their students are doing and to use that assessment with their specific students to improve their learning opportunities. I think everyone in the education system would grant that that's the most important form of assessment. It's also important to know that we're reaching the benchmarks. It's important to know how we're doing compared to other jurisdictions in the country and across the world and to be able to refine our system with that knowledge.

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

**Mr. Horne:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The final question, again to the Minister of Education: what role do teachers play in provincial achievement tests and similar types of assessment?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, the most important role that teachers play, for example, is with respect to the grade 12 departmental examinations. As you will know and others will know, every year teachers come to this building – actually, to the Annex building – to mark departmentals. That has been held up both as an opportunity to make sure that teachers across the province, working with each other, understand the standards to which their students are achieving and a form of professional development for teachers, which they take back into their classrooms and their jurisdictions. That role of teachers' involvement, 7,600 teachers involved in the process, is very important.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

#### Drayton Valley OSB Mill

**Mrs. McQueen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the oriented strandboard mill in Drayton Valley was closed, resulting in job losses, assessment loss, and other financial hardships to my community. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is his department doing to encourage the mill to reopen?

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The unfortunate closure of the OSB mill in Drayton Valley is an indicator of the economic slump that's hit the entire industry in western Canada and in the United States. The U.S. housing slump, the high Canadian dollar, transportation energy costs, the softwood lumber agreement, the export duties are hitting all of our lumber companies very, very hard. We're working closely with the forestry sector. We have a set of recommendations that came out of our sustainability committee just before Christmas. We're reviewing those now, and I'll be meeting with the Alberta Forest Products Association next week to discuss the steps we're taking.

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

**Mrs. McQueen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. With the mill now closed, when will the community of Drayton Valley have access to that fibre to pursue other economic opportunities such as the bioenergy project we are now pursuing, using fibre as a feedstock?

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government of Alberta strongly supports the kind of innovative bioenergy and bioeconomy projects that the hon. member refers to. I recognize and congratulate her for her efforts on behalf of this project in her previous political capacity as the mayor of Drayton Valley. However, the forest management agreement does set forth a very specific set of procedures that must be followed when a mill closes. We do have the opportunity on an interim basis to allocate some fibre, but that's for a very short – for example, one-year – period, and in the end it's a three-year period before we get the final.

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

**Mrs. McQueen:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is also to the same minister. What is or what can SRD do to encourage the exploration of other uses for the Drayton Valley facility?

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

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Our department has in fact undertaken discussions with the mill owner about the possibility of other users using the plant. We have indicated that we're open to other possibilities and have looked at research and development opportunities. I cannot provide the details of these discussions since they concern business and investment decisions; however, I can say that the company involved wants to stay in business in Drayton

Valley. It has invested over \$19 million in capital upgrades over the last five or six years, and I'm optimistic this company will weather the storm and reopen.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

#### School Board Jurisdiction

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last spring an Alberta Court of Appeal judge ruled that the School Act lacked clarity regarding school boards operating schools inside the geographical boundaries of other school jurisdictions. The judge stated:

At the end of the day this is an issue of legislative intention . . . The Legislature could have either expressly permitted or prohibited the operation of schools outside the district of the operating board, and indeed could clarify its intentions at any time.

My question is to the Minister of Education. Will the minister address this issue by amending the School Act and provide clarity to school boards?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a very fortunate time frame now in Education. With the settling of the unfunded liability and the settling between school boards and their employees of the teacher contracts, giving us a five-year window, we have an opportunity to really look at the issues of quality and how education is delivered in the province. I would suggest that a review of that nature would be appropriate, and once having done that review, if there are changes that need to be made to the School Act, we certainly should be prepared to do it.

2:40

**The Speaker:** The hon. member will continue.

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Last week the minister made several statements reaffirming his commitment to the role and importance of locally elected school boards. Given that these issues seriously question the ability of school boards to govern and set policy in their own jurisdiction, will the minister commit to reinforcing the value of locally elected school boards through changes to the School Act?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the local autonomy of the school boards is important, and setting the policy and framework within the provincial policy framework for education in their jurisdictions is important. But choice is also important. The way the system has been set up is that if someone wants to set up a charter school, they first have to approach the local school board and can proceed only if the school board doesn't wish to proceed. Private schools, again, can operate in that manner. They can offer their services in an area if they don't feel that the school board is offering those services. So it's a broader discussion that needs to happen.

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

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the same minister. The long-term implications of this issue are fundamental to how we deliver public education in this province. With that in mind, does the minister see value in allowing school boards to operate in other jurisdictions where it undermines the policies of the locally elected school board?

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

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, this has much larger and broader policy implications. As we go to distributed learning processes and online learning processes, we have students all across the province who are registered in school boards other than the one where they are local electors. We can look at it from the perspective of the private school in Calgary joining a public school board outside of that jurisdiction, but I think we also need to look at it in the context of how education is going to be delivered in the 21st century and what frameworks we need to do that appropriately.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now we'll resume with the Routine where we left off, and that is with members' statements. In the interim, happy birthday to the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

#### Members' Statements

*(continued)*

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

#### Pan-Canadian Assessment Test Results

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to say that today marks the start of Education Week 2008 in Alberta. It also marks an exciting day for our students as I stand here to congratulate them on their outstanding performance on national testing.

The pan-Canadian assessment program, or PCAP, is a national standardized test that is conducted every three years. Today we learned the results of the 2007 test. National testing is an important component of Alberta's learning system and gives Albertans the chance to see how well our students are doing compared to other students around Canada.

National and international testing provides independent, objective evaluations of how Albertans are performing academically. These assessments are designed to recognize the strengths and weaknesses in our system and produce the continuous improvement needed to ensure that our education system enables young Albertans to succeed in a highly competitive global economy. Alberta's students are among the best in the country and are developing skills that will serve them well throughout life.

PCAP tests 13-year-old students in reading, math, and science. In Alberta more than 2,800 students from nearly 188 schools participated in the tests and performed very well overall. Alberta students achieved the highest science marks in the country and took second place in math, a tie with Ontario. In reading, the focus for this round of testing, Alberta ranked third when compared to other provinces.

This student success is due largely in part to excellent teachers, high-quality curriculum, outstanding resources, and a high-quality assessment program. Without this combination I would not be able to stand here and offer congratulations to all involved.

Thank you.

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

#### National Volunteer Week

**Ms Woo-Paw:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to recognize National Volunteer Week, which started April 27 and runs through May 3 this year.

National Volunteer Week is a special time to honour the people who donate their time, talent, and energy to their communities and fellow citizens. It is also meant to raise awareness of the vital contribution volunteers make to our communities and to the identity

and values of our country. I'm also pleased to inform members of the House that in Alberta the National Volunteer Week initiative has grown from 35 participating communities in 1994 to 150 communities in 2005. Here in Alberta the government of Alberta through the Wild Rose Foundation has a unique partnership with Volunteer Alberta to encourage communities to celebrate National Volunteer Week and to provide support to participants.

I would also take this opportunity to recognize special achievements by residents of the constituency of Calgary-Mackay. Stephen Sgarbossa is currently representing Calgary, Alberta, at the Interchange on Canadian Studies, an annual conference and exchange opportunity for secondary school-aged students from across Canada. Students at this conference will increase their understanding, knowledge, and appreciation of Canada and engage in discussions on issues that are important to our country and our people.

Another wonderful item to share today is that 10-year-old Shane Verklund together with his team of four other Calgary boys and coach Marilyn Paxton, also a resident of Calgary-Mackay, will be in Edmonton from May 2 to 6 for the national five-pin bantam bowling championship.

I appreciate this opportunity to recognize the efforts and achievements of these young people from Calgary-Mackay.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### Education Property Taxes

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Educational enlightenment. Sometime between the Education budget debate last Thursday afternoon and the parent councils association meetings this weekend the Minister of Education had his Damascus moment. I do not know whether the vision came in the form of a blinding light, as was the case with Saul of Tarsus, or whether the minister's revelation, his embracing of long-term Alberta Liberal policy, had been percolating for some time in the enlightened regions of his cerebellum. However the transformation took place, the minister felt compelled to confess that his government had erred in judgment when back in 1994 they took away the autonomy of school boards to collect and control the 50 per cent of their budget which arrived in the form of the education portion of their local property taxes. Prior to 1994 Alberta education taxes actually went to education rather than disappearing along with health care premium taxes, which have nothing to do with health care funding or delivery, into the unaccountable black hole of general revenue.

It is indeed intriguing that the simple trading of ministerial responsibilities has had such an enlightening, liberalizing effect on these two gentlemen. First, the Liberal proposal to do away with health care taxes was finally embraced by the former Education minister, and short weeks later the important financial decision-making role of local school boards was recognized by the former health minister. Miracles never cease; the new Education minister, true to his name, confronted his government Goliath a second time when he noted the disconnect between the three-, five-, and 10-year plans of the local school boards and the government's capital plan.

While it took 15 years of wandering in the wilderness and trading ministries to bring the Alberta Liberal light of day to these ministers, it does give hope that other Liberal policies, including saving for the future and paying as you go rather than through 30 years of P3 debt, will also be embraced. Will Alberta wonders never cease?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

#### Promoting Active Living and Healthy Eating

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today an exciting project was launched in Edmonton, and I'm very proud to say that one of the schools from my constituency, Landing Trail intermediate school in Athabasca, is part of that project. Due to a very generous anonymous donor the University of Alberta School of Public Health along with 10 schools from five school divisions – Aspen View, Edmonton Catholic, Edmonton public, Elk Island Catholic, and Elk Island public – are participating in an initiative called the APPLE project. APPLE stands for Alberta project promoting active living and healthy eating.

As part of this, there'll be a three and a half year research project providing among other things a full-time facilitator for each of the 10 schools that are participating. The facilitators and the project team will facilitate and track changes in health, nutrition, and physical activity of the students annually over the term of the project.

I think this is a great initiative, and we wish them much success.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

#### 2:50 Lethbridge Hurricanes Hockey Team

**Mr. Weadick:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to give a bit of a shout-out for my hometown Lethbridge Hurricanes, who last week won the WHL eastern conference title after what can only be described as a Cinderella season. It has been 11 very long years since the Canes have gotten past the first round of the WHL playoffs, and this year it's almost as if the team is trying to make up for lost time. After a hard-fought victory over the Brandon Wheat Kings in round 1 the Canes went on to dispatch the Kootenay Ice and then sweep the top-seeded Calgary Hitmen to take the eastern conference title last week.

Mr. Speaker, the Hurricanes are not just in the hunt for the Memorial Cup; they're going into the next series with a record of eight straight playoff wins. Thanks to those wins the boys are getting plenty of rest while they wait to see who will take the WHL western conference this week. Whether it's the Spokane Chiefs or the Tri-City Americans, I can guarantee that they're in for an incredibly tough fight with Alberta's Hurricanes.

At the risk of sounding oversentimental, Mr. Speaker, I really believe that there's something a bit magical about what a season like this can do for community spirit. The city of Lethbridge has waited a very long time for the opportunity to watch their Hurricanes go all the way in the playoffs, and it shows in their games and all across the city. The fans are out there making noise in the stands, and you can't sit down in a coffee shop or stand at a water cooler without the conversation turning to the Canes.

Mr. Speaker, regardless of what happens next in the playoffs, I would like to go on record as saying that the Hurricanes have electrified the city of Lethbridge in a way we haven't seen for a very long time, and we're all incredibly proud of what they've accomplished this year. I believe they have what it takes to go all the way, and I hope very much to be able to stand in this Chamber in about a month's time and congratulate them on bringing the Memorial Cup back to Alberta.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Well, if the hon. member chooses to table in the House a jersey from the Lethbridge Hurricanes, the appropriate size would be extra large.

**Mr. Weadick:** Duly noted, Mr. Speaker.

## Presenting Petitions

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition with 406 signatures of Albertans urging the Legislative Assembly and the government to “take measures to ensure that annual PSA screening tests for men over 40 years of age are covered by Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan.” These signatures were collected by the Prostate Cancer Institute and the Calgary Prostate Cancer Foundation.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to present a petition signed by a number of individuals but including those living in Edmonton-Meadowlark, Edmonton-Whitemud, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, and Edmonton-Manning. They are all asking that we

commission an independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government’s administration of or involvement with the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers’ Retirement Fund.

I’d also like to present a petition on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview, the Leader of the Official Opposition, an identical petition which is signed by constituents of Calgary-Foothills, Calgary-Elbow, and a number of other Calgary citizens, again urging an inquiry into the LAPP, the public service pension plan, and the Alberta teachers’ retirement fund.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one petition today to present to the Legislature. It reads:

To the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, in Legislature Assembled:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to commission an independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government’s administration of or involvement with the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers’ Retirement Fund.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Hehr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition I’d like to table this afternoon. It is signed by a number of Alberta citizens, urging the government to

commission an independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government’s administration of or involvement with the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers’ Retirement Fund.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by members of the public from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Wainwright, and Calgary petitioning the government of Alberta to have an “independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government’s administration of . . . the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers’ Retirement Fund.”

## Tabling Returns and Reports

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

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of documents today. First, I’d like to table the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail from an Employment and Immigration official dated April 22, 2008, concerning changes to the occupational health and safety code.

Secondly, I’d like to table the appropriate number of copies of an article from the *Edmonton Journal* from April 25, 2008, concerning comments by the president of TransAlta encouraging the province to make Alberta consumers more vulnerable to U.S. electricity price fluctuations.

Thank you.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m tabling the required five copies of my letter and receipt dated November 21 of ’07 regarding my donation to the Claresholm food bank. As per my pledge in the Assembly on April 2 of ’07, half of my MLA indexed pay raise is donated monthly to a food bank until AISH is similarly indexed.

My second tabling is five copies of the report All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) Injuries in Alberta, prepared by the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research, to which I had referred in my questions.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is the poster that I mentioned earlier in the orders of the Assembly. It is a Day of Mourning poster and the list of individuals who unfortunately lost their lives in 2007.

I also have a number of letters today from constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar. These constituents are all advocating that Alberta’s labour laws require at least five significant changes. These constituents are Terry Stachniak, Chris Gessner, Cheryl Christensen, Jeff Riddle, and Linda Witwicki.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m tabling the five required copies of a letter that was written by Kelly Juhaszi, an Edmonton parent of a special-needs child. The letter was written to the Minister of Education and copied to me. In it Kelly asks the minister to “consult the psychiatric community and the schools the children attend to ensure that all of the needs of these children while being transported are identified and met.” She also asks that the funding required be made available to “include aides on these buses to ensure proper supervision is in place.”

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

**Mr. Goudreau:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I alluded to a guide called Working Alone Safely: A Guide for Employers and Employees. This little booklet represents the final recommendations of the committee on best practices for people working alone in different situations. I’ve got the required copies of the guide.

## Orders of the Day

### Written Questions

**The Clerk:** Pursuant to temporary Standing Order 34(3.1) written questions are deemed to stand and retain their places.

### Motions for Returns

**The Clerk:** Pursuant to temporary Standing Order 34(3.1) motions for returns are deemed to stand and retain their places.

## Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

### Bill 202

#### Alberta Volunteer Service Medal Act

[Adjourned debate April 21: Mr. Marz]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West. There remain 67 minutes of time for this debate.

**Mr. Weadick:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today and speak to Bill 202, the Alberta Volunteer Service Medal Act, as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. Do we truly understand the capacity of volunteerism? I believe the hon. member who proposed this bill does, and I support him in his belief that we should reward outstanding volunteers here in Alberta. This is because I've seen the impact of volunteer-based organizations within our communities, cities, province, and nation.

In light of my support for the Volunteer Service Medal Act I'm going to harness this opportunity to speak of the Canadian Cancer Society. The Alberta-Northwest Territories division of the Canadian Cancer Society, or CCS, was founded in 1938 with a mission of eliminating cancer and enhancing the quality of life of people living with cancer. Throughout the years the means they have used to achieve their goal have grown such that individuals battling cancer and their caregivers can find at least some peace of mind during their struggle. One service they provide is called CancerConnection, which is a peer support program that is designed to connect individuals facing cancer as well as their caregivers with someone who has had a similar experience.

3:00

In talking to someone who has been through the roller coaster of cancer, individuals find not only comfort but information and hope. In the 2006 and 2007 years the CCS division for Alberta and the Northwest Territories matched 573 cancer patients with caregivers and individuals who had similar experiences. Ninety-seven per cent of them said the program met their emotional needs. That's a lot of people and a lot of emotional needs.

If an individual's needs extend beyond emotional and into financial, CCS also has the volunteer driver program. This involves volunteers assisting cancer patients undergoing treatment in Edmonton and Calgary with rides to and from their appointments. There's also the transportation subsidy program, which is designed to aid individuals with the cost of transportation when undergoing treatment. In addition, CCS has a partnership with Westin hotels. If individuals are commuting from out of town, they're eligible for a free night stay in the Edmonton or Calgary Westin if they are unable to afford accommodations of their own. Last year the volunteer driver program gave 943 rides. The transportation subsidy program subsidized 403 trips to treatment facilities, and the Westin hotel program gave away 323 nights of stay.

Programs and services, however, are not where the list ends regarding what CCS does. They are equally if not more involved in prevention. This is done by raising funds for research. Fundraising events include those such as the Relay for Life, which is CCS's largest fundraiser. Across Alberta and the Northwest Territories more than 3 and a half million dollars were raised in 2006 and 2007 alone. Throughout the year a total of more than \$18 million was raised by CCS in this division. This year the Relay for Life in Lethbridge will be held on June 6 and in the same month throughout the province. Nearly \$5 million was distributed in the form of research grants.

Mr. Speaker, in 1960 only 33 per cent of people diagnosed with cancer survived. Now approximately 60 per cent of those diagnosed will survive, and in fact 86 per cent of breast cancer victims and 92 per cent of prostate cancer victims are now surviving these diseases. I wonder if these statistics would be the same in the absence of the Canadian Cancer Society. I don't believe so. I am sure that the Canadian Cancer Society volunteers across Canada don't think so either, all 220,000 of them.

Mr. Speaker, the government is trying to promote Alberta as a knowledge-based economy. In fact, the recently released budget is providing a new provincial credit for scientific research and experimental development. Organizations like the Canadian Cancer Society help us in achieving such a goal. Furthermore, the Canadian Cancer Society encourages individuals to create and host their own events as part of their program Reach for a Cure. This along with their own events promotes a sense of unity, as individuals convene with a common goal. This is part of community development. Also, they encourage many of the same messages this government promotes with respect to healthy lifestyles, including nutrition, exercise, and the reduction of tobacco use. In addition, their work substantially improves the quality of life of individuals battling cancer as well as their caregivers. With approximately 14,500 new cases of cancer in Alberta every year this organization has the potential to affect a tremendous number of people.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Cancer Society is a community-based organization for volunteers. There are people within this organization that deserve to be honoured at the highest possible levels. A volunteer service medal would reward an individual who contributes more than their share and who truly makes a difference. It would raise awareness, ultimately inspiring more people to get involved and volunteer in their community. It is for these reasons that I speak out to this House in support of Bill 202.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While I support the intention of Bill 202, the Alberta Volunteer Service Medal Act, I would rather deal with the recognition of volunteers in a more proactive manner than just simply after-the-fact acknowledgement through a medal. The medal is a form of thank you, but it's also a one-time, one-shot ceremonial exercise where the person who presents the medal is in the position of almost having the person receiving it being beholden to them for their recognition, and that's not what volunteers do. That's not what motivates them.

If volunteers ceased to give over the hours of assistance that they provide, this province, this country, and, to take it globally, this world would come to a screeching halt because so much that volunteers do goes beyond any sort of metallic recognition.

For example, if Habitat for Humanity didn't have the volunteer network that it has, the small amount of funding that the government provides could not be leveraged, tripled and quadrupled, by the free



labour provided. There are many companies that pay for their employees to spend a day at Habitat for Humanity in the construction of much-needed affordable housing. Simply providing either the company or one representative of that company with a medal saying thank you for volunteering in no way can recognize the hours and basically millions of dollars' worth of service provision.

There are so many volunteer groups. For example, this weekend my father was having surgery at the Foothills hospital, and I'm pleased to say that he's recovering well, but the ladies of the Foothills auxiliary came by on the floor with a variety of gifts for purchasing purposes to support the Foothills hospital. Over the last number of years the donations they've received from their daily volunteering have bought significantly important pieces of equipment and allowed for research to take place. Again, these volunteers give up their time. While a medal would be one form of recognition, funding and ongoing support would be even more appreciated.

When you look at, for example, parent councils and the amount of fundraising they do beyond what is provided for them through education grants, obviously they recognize that volunteering is an absolutely essential requirement if their school is going to have the programs and the equipment that they feel is necessary. Groups that work directly with people on the street, poverty individuals, such as Dermot Baldwin's drop-in centre rely very heavily on extra volunteers and philanthropic support for the meals that are provided and for the delivery of those meals. What is encouraging is that a number of members from the drop-in centre itself help with the serving of the meals. Through Alderman Joe Ceci and a program that he's initiated, these individuals from the drop-in centre help in terms of going around the area wearing T-shirts indicating they're volunteering and cleaning up the area, so providing very direct support to the community, which, again, has provided support for them.

So volunteering and recognition of volunteers is extremely important, but again I don't believe it can simply be melted down, so to speak, to a medal. If the Mustard Seed didn't have the volunteers who assist with the preparation of food and the delivery of that food to the individuals, the thousands of philanthropic volunteers who not only help with the meal preparation but with the financial support that allows the organizations like the Mustard Seed and the drop-in centre to continue to do their good work – organizations such as Alpha House, which deals with individuals facing addictions, rely on volunteers and support to help them through the night to manage and support their clients who are pleased to have a mat on a concrete floor. It beats sleeping out in the cold. I had an opportunity to visit Alpha House when I was with the paramedics of downtown station 3 when they were out and about looking after our most vulnerable individuals.

**3:10**

We have to congratulate organizations such as the food bank. The unfortunate part of it is that when these organizations reach out, the need continues to grow and becomes greater, and rather than receiving a medal, further financial assistance in recognition of the problem by the government would go a much longer way than simply a medal, either in a frame or hanging in an auspicious place in a backroom.

The food bank relies on volunteers not only to donate the food but to sort the food, to box it, and to deliver it. But the food bank also faces shortcomings in that it can only provide five or six hampers to a particular family throughout the year. Organizations like the new storage warehouse in the northeast, based on a verse from Malachi – I think it's 33:3:11 – offer not only food and clothing but furniture as well. I apologize if I've got the verses incorrectly ordered.

Without groups like Meals on Wheels, that last year celebrated its 41st anniversary, the people who are attempting to remain in their homes and live independent, meaningful lives would be forced to be in institutional care.

Medals don't recognize this type of work, but additional government support – and I will note, Mr. Speaker, the government did cut two significant cheques most recently to Meals on Wheels that helped them to establish a new warehouse and create a new kitchen, which will serve a number of members. Those cheques were considerably more important than any medal could have been.

There are all kinds of friends-of groups that I belong to like Friends of Medicare, for example, who work to improve and maintain health care delivery in this province, to lobby the government, and to educate individuals. A main volunteer who is a very good friend of mine, Ted Woynillowicz, has passed along the message of the importance of maintaining public health care.

The council of Canadians, another volunteer group that talks about the message of responsible governance, whether it's at the federal or at the provincial level, discusses global issues and meets once a month in a church off 16th Avenue where they hold their meetings.

Friends of Fish Creek, Friends of Kananaskis, friends-of groups maintain parks. This weekend a group of individuals from Calgary-Varsity will be part of the Bow River cleanup. Without those volunteers it would be absolutely impossible for the city to clean up the river and the parks.

So volunteers are absolutely essential. Recognizing them can be done in a variety of ways, most importantly by funding and supporting their organizations. But simply saying thank you with a medal doesn't accomplish the reward.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Volunteerism and philanthropy are vital to the well-being of our citizens and lay the foundation for a well-functioning community. Bill 202, the Alberta Volunteer Service Medal Act, seeks to establish a way of recognizing the many Albertans who continually donate their time and effort to help the less fortunate. Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort for sponsoring this bill.

While I support the bill's intent, I would like to talk today about some local examples of volunteerism and what it inspires. The United Way is one such organization that is active internationally but operates at a community level. They seek to build community capital, as they call it, by starting at the grassroot levels with comprehensive aid, not simply an oversized plastic cheque. They invest in local service agencies, talk to local leaders, learn the cultural issues, and provide leadership and support to get people involved. Ultimately, the United Way seeks to provide support and promote a united community in its truest sense.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, allow me to read a brief excerpt from the history of the United Way from its beginning in 1887 which illustrates their model of volunteerism.

The winter of 1887 was particularly cold and hard in Denver, Colorado. The silver mines had closed and people wandered the streets hungry and homeless. Clergy from the four largest parishes responded to the plight of the needy by seeking help from merchants and businesses. They discovered very quickly that the men of the cloth were in competition with each other as they made their calls. So they decided to join forces and make a united request to anyone who might be in a position to offer some assistance to the less fortunate. Together they would seek what aid they could and

together they would share it amongst their parishioners. In those humble beginnings in Denver, Colorado in 1887, the first United Way was born.

The movement then spread to Canada, in Montreal and Toronto, around 1920, and it has been growing since this day.

In our busy lives we sometimes forget that we are called upon to be communitarians, helping those around us and thereby investing in the future of our communities. By winding our circle of care to include the community as a whole, even though that seems so distant from us, we can build more than we know. The United Way operates in a manner that's fraternal and reciprocal rather than distant. From its humble beginnings their mandate was really to get everyone on board. They promote a spirit of giving rather than simply facilitating this action. In this we find true volunteerism, Mr. Speaker, and it is tremendously valuable in any city, town, or province. By focusing on the fundamentals and operating at a microlevel, so to speak, there is a tremendous amount of learning that happens.

Volunteers learn the nuances of the community needs, the cultural challenges, and the unique perceptions of those that they are helping. With such a special learning process much more can be done to achieve an actual solution, a comprehensive solution. Such a level of learning, where one can actually identify with those they help, is hardly attainable any other way. True compassion arises when the connection is that close, which is why the United Way approach is so successful.

Seventeen million dollars have been raised since 1965 from the United Way of central Alberta, being one example. Their jurisdiction stretches from Ponoka to Olds to Sundre and from Nordegg to Stettler. This reflects a truly big responsibility and a commitment that is unpassable. The people of the United Way ensure that this money is spent effectively, and in many ways the money is secondary. It supports their community building initiatives and provides funding to programs, but real solutions are attained with the respect and compassion that is embodied by their mandate.

Looking onward, Mr. Speaker, the compassion demonstrated by groups, or should I say movements, like the United Way will become increasingly important as we welcome newcomers and help each other in times of need. True volunteerism is a virtue in all regards. To have the communities we strive for, volunteerism must be given its proper place.

Mr. Speaker, the intent of this bill as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort is to be commended, but the bureaucracy required to implement this bill is not at its best, and I want to make sure that we recognize the enormous contributions of Alberta's volunteers. With that, Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this bill as it is written currently.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the discussion this afternoon on Bill 202, the Alberta Volunteer Service Medal Act. I would be quite willing to support this bill. There have been no constituents from Edmonton-Gold Bar advocating for such a volunteer service medal – they have talked about other things that we need to do in this Assembly but not promote and encourage and establish an award in recognition of volunteer service – but certainly it is important. Just because we haven't had a discussion at the constituency office regarding this doesn't mean that one could not support it.

3:20

I can only look at our own community, Mr. Speaker. There are

many organizations that certainly should be awarded such a medal if this bill becomes law. I can think of the Ottewell community patrol, where in some cases we have volunteers who have been donating their own time and money to make our communities safer and more secure for the last 15 years, and there are many volunteers who year in and year out organize our minor soccer programs, our minor hockey programs. They go about their business in a quiet, efficient, determined way.

If this bill was to become law and was to recognize some of these individuals for their volunteer service – certainly, I would encourage all hon. members to reconsider. Let's make this bill a law, and let's establish a committee to nominate recipients for the medal. Let's get on with the design of this medal and proceed.

Now, you know, we all have this idea of what a medal should be. I think we're talking about this, and I can't find which section deals specifically with this, Mr. Speaker. The design of this medal could be a little different. In section 4 the committee that is to be struck is going to "conduct a public competition for the design of the medal and recommend a design to the Minister within one year of the appointment of the first members of the Committee."

Well, this medal wouldn't necessarily have to be circular. It wouldn't have to be the size of a loonie. We all think of a conventional medal. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort is reading the bill, and I would encourage the hon. member to consider maybe, as he himself on occasion has said in this Assembly, to think outside the box. Maybe instead of a round design, if this bill becomes law, we could look at a V, V for volunteer. We could really recognize many people.

In conclusion, before I cede the floor to another hon. member, I would remind the House that there are many, many different organizations involved in the voluntary sector in Alberta. There are 19,000 charities and nonprofit organizations that work in each and every one of our constituencies. The volunteer sector in Alberta is quite significant and does a lot of work, as I said before.

It's something that hasn't been discussed, but a medal to recognize the volunteers and their efforts I don't think will be that expensive. Perhaps the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort can explain what costs are to be involved in this, if he hasn't already done so. I think it would be a good step in recognizing the voluntary sector in this province, and I would encourage all hon. members to pass this bill.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and speak on Bill 202, as well, the Alberta Volunteer Service Medal Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. Bill 202 aims to increase the recognition of dedicated volunteers in Alberta by promoting the critical role they play within our society and recognizing them for it. I support the intent of the bill, but I do have some concerns.

Alberta's volunteers exist in all capacities within our society and contribute in many ways to form strong and vibrant communities in our province. Alberta's volunteers help those in need. They aid our seniors. They coach our children. They are tireless, have endless determination, and don't ask for anything in return for their service. Volunteers are absolutely essential to enable society to function at its most basic human level. The volunteers' gratification comes from knowing that their work somehow has made a difference in the life of another person.

Many of the hon. members here today have in fact devoted much of their time to various causes both in Alberta and around the world, and for many of us volunteering is what led us to politics to begin with. All of the hon. members in this Assembly who have volun-

teered in some capacity – I believe that would be every one of us – over the years well understand the gratification of giving something back to one's community.

You see, Mr. Speaker, when we contribute time and effort for something we believe in, it doesn't matter how much work we put in or if we receive any praise for our work. Rather, it is the possibility of success that drives us and the possibility that our work can help another. When the task is extremely challenging, it merely drives us further, hoping to succeed beyond all expectation. Really, the most important driving motivator for volunteering is one's desire to improve the quality of life for someone else, whether that is for an individual or for a group or for society at large.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's volunteers deserve all the credit we can give them. My problem, though, is that I find it hard to award a select few when the scope of volunteer workers in Alberta is so large. That's not to say that this idea lacks merit. I will concede that it could serve as a valuable promoter for community spirit. However, there are many, many hard-working people who deserve this level of recognition, and quite frankly this is something that could go way beyond the mechanics of this bill.

Bill 202 proposes that a commission would eventually choose candidates with an exemplary record of altruism and dedication to others. Another concern I have is that this is a hard thing to measure. How are one's benevolent achievements different from another's? This is particularly difficult when we consider there are thousands of people across our province which contribute to various causes in various capacities. In fact, I believe that we may actually have hundreds of thousands of volunteers, maybe millions, who may get into a very long short list of contenders for such an award.

For example, Mr. Speaker, minor hockey in Alberta is an institution of our society. There are a multitude of volunteers involved with minor hockey alone, and they help provide experiences for Alberta's youth, moulding them into young adults. Hockey Alberta prides itself on recognizing individuals who have contributed countless hours of volunteer work, supplying our children with a great outlet for physical activity and personal development. The centennial awards, for example, were awarded in the 100th year of Hockey Alberta's existence, recognizing individuals who have contributed a lifetime of volunteer work for the betterment of hockey in our province. I would like to remind the hon. members today that a former member of this Assembly, Mr. LeRoy Johnson, received this award for his service. This award was given by Hockey Alberta. They would clearly know who would deserve this recognition within their own organization.

This obviously already reflects an acknowledgement of volunteerism. It attempts to raise the question of whether Bill 202 has a superfluous element to it, although I will admit that the award proposed by the Member for Calgary-Fort is recognized as an official honour of the Crown and is therefore a slightly different form of recognition. Some may compare the work of minor hockey coaches to the work of Habitat for Humanity, for example, and ask whether their work is as fundamental to the lives of Albertans. Habitat for Humanity's movement developed from the concept of partnership housing, where those in need of adequate shelter work side by side with volunteers from all walks of life to build simple, decent houses. All Habitat for Humanity volunteers are bound by the desire to make a difference in their communities. They accomplish this by putting hammer to nail and by giving their time and their skill to help families get the opportunity to break the cycle of poverty and begin building equity in a new home.

3:30

The reality, Mr. Speaker, is that all volunteers provide essential service to Alberta's communities, and they all deserve medals. The

fear I have with Bill 202 is that awards could repetitiously recognize those individuals whose contributions are deemed to be most important to the prospective members of this commission. There are already numerous volunteer organizations in Alberta who recognize the service of volunteers within their communities. In my opinion, the concept of one award honouring all areas of volunteerism has the potential to be somewhat divisive and could actually affect the spirit of volunteerism in a negative way in our province.

I think the Member for Calgary-Fort has his heart in the right place, but my concerns still stand. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I will not be voting in favour of this bill. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in the House today to speak on Bill 202. It is about time that we recognized all the work volunteers do. To be a volunteer is a great, great personal satisfaction. Volunteers don't want anything in return. They just want to give, give, give.

You know, I used to volunteer myself as well, and I still do whenever I have time. I volunteer for the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Alberta, and I volunteered on the committee raising money for the Alberta Children's hospital. Like I said before, we raised over a million dollars for the Children's hospital. It was to make this society a better place to live, so I think it was my obligation, literally, to come out and volunteer.

Look at what society would be like if there were no volunteers doing all the volunteer work. You know, there are hundreds of thousands of volunteers doing work nation-wide, province-wide, and there are millions doing volunteer work world-wide. Without volunteers there would be no Christmas dinners, and Meals on Wheels wouldn't be successful. There's lots of money being raised, too, for the organizations. All the volunteers work hard to make the world a better place to live.

I'm willing to support the bill because volunteers are doing lots of work in Calgary-McCall as well. There is an Indian ex-servicemen's society that does lots of volunteer work in the community. There's a Council of Sikh Organizations. They do lots of volunteer work in the community. There's the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Alberta. They have lots of volunteers in the community too. Then there's the Northeast Centre of Community Society, which is bringing a big rec centre to Calgary-McCall. They have been working for years with all the ethnic communities to make their project a success. They are bringing all the ethnic communities in Calgary-McCall together, which will promote harmony and diversity.

There will be a library in the northeast centre. There will be a college later on. There will be a health clinic, and there will be something for seniors. There will be a basketball court, I believe, that will help to keep lots of youth occupied and to keep them away from, maybe, drugs and crime. That's the volunteer work that was done by the Northeast Centre of Community Society. My congratulations to all the volunteers who worked hard to make their project a success. It was supposed to be a \$38 million, \$40 million project, but it ended up being maybe a \$150 million project. There is lots of money that will be raised in the community. I don't know the figure. Maybe \$20 million, \$25 million is being raised by the volunteers for that project.

It's great, you know. It's about time that we recognize the volunteers. I think that we the government should do our part to recognize volunteers. There should be some financial help, too, for those organizations because volunteers can't do it alone.

I support this bill. Thanks to the hon. Mr. Cao for bringing forward this bill.

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

**Dr. Sherman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 202, the Alberta Volunteer Service Medal Act. I would like to begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort for bringing forward this bill.

Bill 202 provides us with a chance to highlight the importance of volunteerism in Alberta. The efforts of the not-for-profit sector should be acknowledged as they are vital to many of the day-to-day operations in this great province. This bill comes in an interesting week, National Volunteer Week, from April 27 to May 3. We have celebrated this week each and every year for greater than 50 years. The Wild Rose Foundation and Volunteer Alberta enhance Alberta's community celebrations this week when communities acknowledge that volunteers are a core, vital component in Albertans' quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, did you know that 48 per cent of Albertans volunteer? Let's stop and think what our world would be without volunteers. Volunteers are the backbone of our great society. Their contributions are evident everywhere. A few examples that we see daily are the coaches and volunteers for our children's sports, the volunteers in our community leagues, the volunteers in our hospitals and social agencies, the countless volunteers who put on community events that enrich the world in which we live.

For all of us in this hallowed chamber it would not have been possible to converse about important issues had it not been for the efforts of hundreds and thousands of volunteers. This is a large group of extraordinary individuals who take time away from their already very busy lives so that they can contribute to make this a better place. These are good people who continually ask themselves what more they can do for their province, for their country, and for mankind.

Through co-operation, determination, and education many groups and organizations have enriched the lives of Albertans. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to draw your attention to some of these organizations that represent the spirit of volunteerism, the spirit of what it means to be an Albertan. They dedicate themselves each and every day to serving the province of Alberta. One such organization is Volunteer Alberta.

The challenge to volunteer centres lies in engaging new Albertans, many of whom are from other nations, as well as Albertans such as baby boomers. Volunteer Alberta reflects a network of over 25 volunteer centres and over 1,000 organizations. Volunteer Alberta creates possibilities in Alberta's nonprofit voluntary sector by strategically connecting leaders, members, organizations, and networks. Volunteer Alberta works to raise awareness of the issues facing volunteers in the over 19,000 organizations they work in and strives to find support to remove those barriers, working together with rural and urban organizations to ensure that the values and benefits of volunteerism in Alberta continue to grow and be recognized as a powerful social investment.

Another organization is Volunteer Calgary. It provides superior customer service to its members. This organization is a link between communities and nonprofit organizations throughout the city. It maintains up-to-date services for its members to engage and retain the staff that is required. Their resources and programs that enable personnel issues are second to none. Over the past year Volunteer Calgary has worked along with a variety of organizations, including Child Find Alberta, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the International Association of Business Communicators, just to name a few.

In order to bulk up membership among their various organizations, this group creates a vital point for interaction and provides an

accessible database for individuals to become involved. The database becomes a veritable treasure chest of information on what the prospective volunteer is inquiring about and how to contact the association of choice. While direct one-to-one contact is a preferred way for some, other interaction is encouraged by Volunteer Calgary. For example, if one would like to see a number of different groups in a room and make their comparative choice that way, orientation meetings are an excellent venue. Events such as these are important to both organization and individual as they look to make the proper fit. In order to properly understand the fundamental aspects of volunteerism, members have the choice to attend one of the many training workshops held each year. Understanding volunteerism management, the Canadian code of volunteer involvement, and the theoretical position behind volunteering can further advance the quality of help provided.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, organizations such as these are vital to the education and co-operation of volunteers and the community. Each example encourages people to consider giving more to others. This dedication is recognized by the government of Alberta. There are many other groups and agencies who work tirelessly to help others in all walks of life and in doing so help to positively shape this province. I certainly recognize that this government has worked hard to give them their due, but I must admit that I found the prospect of a volunteer medal an interesting one. The most important discussion about this medal, really, is the opportunity to highlight the importance of volunteerism, to acknowledge that this is a great resource to our society, to thank all of those who contribute in this way, and to encourage others to engage in the act of giving of oneself for the sake of others: the act of volunteerism.

I look forward to hearing the rest of this debate. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Griffiths:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to rise and speak on Bill 202, the Alberta Volunteer Service Medal Act of 2008, sponsored by the very hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. Alberta's volunteers are an incredibly integral part of our community. Our volunteers drive our economy forward. They coach our local sports teams. They work with those that are less fortunate. They help our seniors with tasks they're often presented with that are difficult in their old age. In short, they represent the fabric of our communities and what has built and made this province so great.

The best thing about volunteers, though, Mr. Speaker, is that they offer their skills, their time, and their dedication on a completely voluntary basis, and they don't ask for anything in return. That's what makes them such a critical part of this province. They hope only that their cause is fulfilled – the reason why they act is complete – not worrying about praise or compensation or rewards to justify their work. Rather, they receive their praise from knowing that their hard work has made a difference and that in some way their hard work has made our province a better place for all of us to live in.

This, Mr. Speaker, is why I have questions about this bill. In providing this level of medal for volunteer services, how can we possibly decide the effectiveness or dedication of one volunteer over another? Volunteers collaborate all their efforts towards a common goal. Their roles may differ, their abilities may differ, but their effort and contribution, their cause are the same. In other words, one volunteer's contribution compared to another's is immeasurable and incomparable. It's like comparing apples to oranges. How can you

compare one volunteer that assists one person, dedicates so much time to one person and makes their world an immeasurably better place, to one that volunteers with dozens or perhaps hundreds of other people, making each of their worlds better a little bit at a time?

Mr. Speaker, how can you compare volunteers who work directly with individuals that need assistance to some volunteer individuals that would prefer to work behind the scenes and never get face to face with those they try and help? For instance, the time I volunteered at the Christmas Bureau here in Edmonton, I never once saw one of the clients that received the donations or the gifts. I spent all of my time sorting the toys from the Christmas Bureau.

**Mr. Mason:** We'll still give you a medal.

**Mr. Griffiths:** Thank you very much. I don't need a medal.

Mr. Speaker, volunteerism is a group effort, and groups of various sizes perform various functions. There are groups which comprise literally hundreds of part-time volunteers which come from various backgrounds and numerous connections in all realms of our society. There are others, though, that utilize a small contingent of very determined individuals that still create small impacts on the lives of Albertans. Then, of course, there are those that spend a lot of time volunteering to make the world a better place through Habitat for Humanity globally, and there are those that volunteer to make the local community or their province better; for instance, Habitat for Humanity in Camrose. How do you compare the contributions those individuals make and select which ones get the medal and which ones don't? You have to see, Mr. Speaker, that a committee in charge of deciding which of Alberta's many and very worthy volunteers actually get an award and, consequently, then, those that don't get an award would prove to have a very difficult mandate.

Another concern I have with Bill 202 is regarding the administrative burden it could potentially create. Bill 202 advocates for a committee which renders the responsibility of both deciding the design of the Alberta volunteer service medal and the selection of the recipients from those nominated by their peers. This obviously places a great emphasis on the importance of this committee. Consequently, its decisions may greatly impact the gratitude we express to volunteers.

For example, Mr. Speaker, many of our volunteer organizations operate almost entirely on donations and in a public fashion. This type of service award, therefore, could become a form of advertisement, so to speak, for these organizations. As a result, the decisions regarding the winners of the medal and the members of the committee itself could become politically motivated and counterproductive to the entire spirit of volunteerism.

This committee could create an area of unnecessary competition among the voluntary sector. For instance, large organizations competing because it presents some advertising and media publicity, Mr. Speaker, could create competition between voluntary organizations as they try and compete for nominations against each other. Sometimes these types of awards tend to favour larger organizations, and being a rural MLA from a very small rural community, I know that many of our rural volunteers don't get recognition in any newspapers, especially the *Edmonton Sun* or the *Journal* or the *Calgary Sun* or the *Calgary Herald*, and they don't get provincial recognition. They get community recognition and often very little.

Sometimes these types of awards tend to favour the larger organizations. It could actually skew the values that people like to associate with those types of volunteer organizations. I also worry, Mr. Speaker, that members from the same organization could wind up continually winning these awards because they are the larger organizations; they get all the publicity and all the advertising. If

proper representation from all parts of Alberta's communities isn't incorporated into the committee – I believe it's almost impossible given the number of communities and the number of service organizations we have in this province – then certain volunteer sectors and organizations could be more favoured over others.

My last point is that Bill 202 would create a structure that already exists in similar capacities in Alberta. The Wild Rose Foundation, for example, was created by the ministries of tourism, parks and recreation, and culture in 1984 and has been fostering and promoting the use of volunteers as well as assisting those who already volunteer ever since that time. It honours individuals who have been nominated by community organizations and members within the community who have exhibited a lifetime – not a year, not a week, not a project but a lifetime, Mr. Speaker – of volunteerism by awarding them the Stars of Alberta volunteer award.

This is also an example of an organization which prides itself on distributing awards to those who have been nominated by their community, not by a committee but by the community, in the voluntary organization and represent strong determination for their cause and a lifetime contribution to that cause. Alberta's volunteers are very much appreciated, but I don't think that creating another system of providing our volunteers with awards of a similar nature to the one that already exists is needed.

Mr. Speaker, it saddens me to some extent because I worry collectively for members of this House that any expression that we should not support this award would be taken that we don't support our volunteers, but that's not true. Every member of this House, every politician in this province, every member of every community knows the contributions volunteers make and knows that we always try and find new ways to show appreciation, even if it's just a card or a note or a letter that says: thank you for what you've done.

Mr. Speaker, for the reasons that I've outlined, I can't support Bill 202 as it's presented. I'm very interested in listening to the rest of the debate and the argument on this issue, and I may change my mind, but from what I've heard so far, I don't believe I will. Although I respect and admire the member's attempt to find some way to honour volunteers and their importance to this province, I can't support this bill.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Horne:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege along with my other colleagues this afternoon to rise to address Bill 202, the Alberta Volunteer Service Medal Act. As we've heard in the Assembly today, this act would create a committee with the directive of exploring a public medal design competition over the span of a year. The intent of the bill is that this contest would act as a means to promote philanthropy, volunteerism, and civic pride. When the competition concludes, a medal will be chosen and the committee under the guidance of the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit will then begin to nominate deserving volunteers, who will be recognized with an official honour of the Crown in right of Alberta.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, we've heard a lot on this issue today. As my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark pointed out, this is National Volunteer Week. One of the interesting facts that I read in preparation for today's debate is that the monetary contribution of Alberta volunteers is valued at \$1 billion per year, truly a tremendous contribution and enhancement of quality of life for Albertans. I believe that all members assembled in this Legislature would agree that the act of volunteering is a positive expression of

character, integrity, and self-sacrifice. As some of my colleagues have alluded to, none of the elected representatives would be standing on this floor if it were not for the tireless efforts of a large, large number of very fine people.

Alberta is a province that enjoys a status of incredible affluence. We often speak about this in terms of economics, agriculture, and environmental sustainability. But as we all know, this also strongly applies to the people of Alberta, and I'm proud that I can count myself as a citizen of a province that is home to some of the world's most decent, kind-hearted, and selfless individuals. This is the foundation of the prosperity that all Albertans enjoy. We all know this, Mr. Speaker, and I believe it's why this bill has inspired the debate we see today.

Mr. Speaker, other members have asked the question: how do we weigh the contributions of one person against another? I recognize that when we speak of awards, we engage in a process of selection. This becomes an especially delicate situation when the accomplishments we weigh against each other are not achievements in athletics or in academia but, rather, the merits of one good Samaritan in comparison to another. I would argue that this would be the explicit reason for the creation of the committee that this bill calls for. I believe that we can find people within the volunteer community who would be capable of selecting good and humane volunteers who are deserving of so high a recognition.

Some may say that this is a process that can become subject to internal politics. I can acknowledge that this is a possibility inherent to any committee or commission charged with the duties of awarding some and not others. However, Mr. Speaker, I believe that it is a very unlikely possibility. History has shown that representatives of this Assembly, committee members, and indeed the citizens of this province respect the oaths and the positions they undertake. Where would this province be if we suddenly became too hesitant to trust our fellow Albertans? We'd be deluded by conspiracy theories and marginalized to the point of becoming irrelevant.

Mr. Speaker, we've heard other members of the Assembly address this House and speak about administrative and regulatory burdens, and I would be the last to suggest that this process would be free of such burdens. Far from it. Creating a new award that comes with such high prestige would bring with it a plethora of paperwork and bureaucracy. But the introduction of the Alberta centennial medal was a wonderful concept, and it gave the government a fantastic opportunity to say thank you to so many citizens that have helped to shape the character of this beautiful province. I can only imagine that behind the scenes this process also had a cost measured in logistical dilemmas, but as I said earlier, we cannot shy away from the burdens of our responsibility simply because at times they seem overwhelming.

Some members of the House have spoken to the possibility that this idea may have the unintended effect of dividing our communities, and I must admit this gives me some pause, so let's consider why we are so passionate about this issue. As I stated before, Mr. Speaker, all members of this Assembly owe a tremendous debt to volunteers. We all know people who have given up time with their family and friends in order to assist noble causes and charities. Equally, we are acquainted with some other people from different walks of life whose actions have contributed to our provincial and our national identity and arguably our way of life. Are we to argue that these Albertans, Mr. Speaker, are not equally deserving of such elevated recognition from their own government?

This is a concept that I must admit could indeed divide our communities rather than unite them. I recognize that this is not the intention of the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. He is, Mr. Speaker, a man who is recognized by all of us and many, many other people

for his own selfless dedication to the communities and citizens of Alberta. I can only speak for myself, Mr. Speaker, but I am certain I am not alone in stating that I'm very proud to serve alongside him in the Legislature, and I do not believe his intention is to use Bill 202 to divide opinions regarding the worth of our citizenry's civic and charitable actions. It would indeed be an unintended consequence.

His idea is to recognize volunteerism, and I believe that is a good one and the most important idea that we need to consider today, but Bill 202 requires more time to develop. It does need further input from the volunteer sector, and in my humble opinion, Mr. Speaker, it also needs to be considered in the broader context of a policy framework for the voluntary sector across the province. In this regard the establishment of a committee made up of these individuals is a very welcome component of the bill, but equally I think that we should allow the government to have an opportunity to consider its merits and see if it can become an integral part of a policy to enhance volunteerism across the province.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 202, Alberta Volunteer Service Medal Act, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 202, Alberta Volunteer Service Medal Act, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** We will ask the pages to distribute the amendment.

Hon. members, those new to the Assembly here may be unfamiliar with the form of the amendment that has just been moved. The amendment to the motion for second reading as opposed to to the bill itself, which can only be moved in committee, is called the hoist, and it's usually for six months.

The hoist amendment is a traditional way of opposing a bill. Members should be aware that although the wording implies that the bill reappears in six months, the bill is not automatically revived on the Order Paper. As stated on page 583 of *Erskine May*, 23rd edition,

the acceptance by the House of such an amendment being tantamount to the rejection of the bill, if the session extended beyond the period of postponement, a bill which had been ordered to be read a second time upon that day "six months" was not replaced upon the notice paper of the House.

One other feature of Alberta's proceedings is that when a hoist amendment is defeated, the vote proceeds to be taken immediately on the bill itself.

Does anyone wish to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

**Mr. Chase:** I want to begin by thanking the hon. Speaker for the explanation because a number of the new members might not realize that when we talk about a bill reappearing in six months, quite often that means that it's gone; it's not going to happen. But from a calendar point of view it is actually possible in that the government has indicated – and I'm extremely pleased that they have done so – that our fall session will begin on October 14. So there is a realm of possibility. In other words, there is the potential for a second life for this bill, and potentially it could come, I suppose, before the standing policy committees for another look. That, I know, isn't in the amendment, but that might be one way of recognizing volunteers but not necessarily through the medal program as this Alberta Volunteer Service Medal Act, Bill 202, suggests.

I do appreciate the Speaker clarifying the process. It remains to be seen whether this bill will live to see another day, but from a calendar standpoint, it is entirely possible.

Thank you.

**The Acting Speaker:** Does anyone else wish to speak?

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 202 carried]

4:00

**Bill 203**  
**Election Statutes (Fixed Election Dates)**  
**Amendment Act, 2008**

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

**Mr. Allred:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Election Statutes (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2008.

This bill really has three heads. Firstly, it establishes the principle of fixed election dates. Secondly, it establishes that the fixed election date be on the third Monday in October. Thirdly, it extends the term of municipal councillors from three years to four years.

Speaking firstly on the concept of fixed election dates. There is a perception that being able to set election dates is an advantage for the governing party. In fact, it's parliamentary tradition that's gone back for many centuries. I would suggest, however, that the perception is largely overblown that it can be argued as being undemocratic. Despite the fact that parliamentary tradition favours the governing party with the right to set the election date, of course in consultation with the royal representative, I don't see that this right has given governing parties any particular advantage in recent elections in a number of jurisdictions.

The main thrust of this bill is to establish some form of efficiency in conducting elections: efficiency for candidates, efficiency for the electoral offices, and efficiency for the voting public. Candidates can plan and organize their office space, their phones, their advertising, and their volunteers, saving dollars and managing more efficient and effective campaigns. The same applies to the electoral office. They can have their offices staffed and ready to go at the required time rather than having to guess and reserve space in advance. Electors will be able to plan and co-ordinate vacations, travel, and business activities around the election date. This is bound to increase electoral turnout. I think it is significant that British Columbia, Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador, and more recently Saskatchewan have established fixed election dates. Also, the federal government has established a fixed election date.

Why have I chosen the third Monday of October? The third Monday of October is already the election date for municipal elections, so establishing it for provincial elections establishes a made-in-Alberta election date. We have 25 years of tradition of holding municipal elections after the harvest season, and it's proven to work very well. Just coincidentally, the next date for a federal election is scheduled for the third Monday of October 2009. That may or may not happen, depending on the circumstances in Ottawa. The third Monday of October will most definitely increase voter turnout. Most snowbirds don't fly south until after the end of October.

Speaking to the municipal term of office, both the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties have proposed a four-year term on several occasions, most recently in 2005, when the AUMA proposed that date and submitted their resolution to the government.

Elections would be predictable for alternate years: October 2010 we'd have a municipal election date, October 2012 we'd have a provincial election date, October 2014 we'd again have a municipal election date, and so on. I would suggest that having a fixed election date every two years – municipal, provincial, municipal – would

eliminate voter fatigue that's caused by several elections in a short period of time, a situation we've seen several times in the last number of years.

In conclusion, I think it's timely to introduce this bill now, while the recent provincial election is still on everyone's mind. The Chief Electoral Officer will soon be tabling his report on the recent election, and among the multitude of recommendations a fixed election date is bound to be at the top of his list again this time. We need to act now in order to synchronize this with the next municipal election, which is scheduled for October 2010. It will be essential to confirm the four-year term of office prior to that date if we're to go with this electoral scheme. We also need to leave time for some public feedback on this issue, although my feeling is that the public is generally supportive of fixed election dates.

I don't see that this is an issue that crosses political boundaries between left and right philosophies. It is a rational move towards democratic reform. It also has the potential of raising interest in the electoral process and removing some barriers that make it difficult for voters to attend at the polls. The greatest reason, however, to support Bill 203 is to increase the predictability of election timing and to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the democratic process, efficiency that should reduce the cost of elections for candidates, for the electoral office, and even for voters themselves.

I recognize that Bill 203 has the potential to arouse an enthusiastic discussion within this Assembly today. That is my intention, Mr. Speaker. I also recognize that some members publicly campaigned on promises of electoral reform. I did not, although I swore that I would never again campaign in minus 37 degree weather in near blizzard conditions.

I've intentionally limited this bill to three simple concepts: the concept of a fixed election date, setting a fixed election date on the third Monday of October to co-ordinate with the municipal election date, and the consequential item of changing the municipal term of office from three years to four years. I have avoided the larger issues of proportional representation or preferential balloting specifically because those issues are much more complex and have hidden side effects.

To wind up, I encourage a lively debate on Bill 203. I look forward to the opinions of all my colleagues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. I'd like to begin by commending the Member for St. Albert for proposing Bill 203, which among other aspects provides a fixed election date. I don't want to repeat what the hon. member mentioned, but I do agree with a number of the goals that he was trying to achieve through this bill. As a member of the opposition, going into the last election, there was tremendous speculation as to whether that election would occur in October, whether it would occur in November. The elimination of sort of the lack of ability to prepare will be a major improvement in leveling the electoral playing field. I'm very pleased to see that a member from the government brought this forward because it does indicate that Alberta, at a snail's pace, is potentially moving towards democratic reform.

I look at the Member for Calgary-North Hill. He knew I couldn't just give an open sanction for the bill; there had to be reservations. But this is a first step. Actually, maybe we can look at it as a second step because we now know that we're going to have a fall session that starts mid-October, and we can prepare for that. We can arrange our constituency affairs such that we know that we'll be in full

legislative mode as of the middle of October. That will benefit our constituents. It's obviously going to benefit our families.

**4:10**

Likewise, we know what term we've signed up for as MLAs. We know that by fixing the election date, our time of service will be thus far, and we can concentrate all our energies and our efforts and bring forward the motions and the bills within that time period. It gives a beginning and a closing to it, and that is extremely important for elections and for moving towards a more democratic situation in this province.

Now, I talked about a snail's pace because I'm hoping that someone – and I would like it to come as a government bill as opposed to a private member's bill – would recommend the approach that B.C. took towards a greater type of democratization, and that's a citizens' assembly. One of the things that the citizens' assembly would do, which a fixed election date moves toward, is provide a greater grassroots' sense of connection to the electoral process. The voters don't have an opportunity, as the Member for St. Albert pointed out, to necessarily participate directly in the election if they don't know when it's going to take place. It's not just the snowbirds going away and enjoying those opportunities. It's people who can plan not only those kinds of trips, but they can plan their business around it.

I know I'd be hard pressed to say that the world would stop and business would come to a grinding halt so that everyone could go out and vote. I mean, that would be the utopia that I would love to realize, but there is a reality here: 41 per cent of Albertans chose to vote, and that is the lowest record we've ever had in Canada in terms of voter turnout. Anything that goes towards stabilizing the process, creating a level playing field is going to be welcomed by all Albertans regardless of their political partisanship connection or lack thereof. It provides a sense of concreteness to the whole program.

Now, as I said, what I would like to see as a potential next step to this bill, which I will be voting for and supporting, is the establishment of a citizens' assembly, with a look towards the various types of proportional representation that work in other parts of the world. In the past election the reality is that only 21 per cent of eligible voters voted for this government. Having said that, half of that amount voted for the Liberal Party, and a still smaller fraction voted for the ND Party. The government can say, "Well, yes, we received a majority," but I would question whether they had actually received a mandate when three times as many Albertans didn't participate in the process and almost four times as many Albertans did not vote for the government. At least this is a start in terms of the process.

Another step that proportional representation would add to the strength of this particular bill is that you would have people elected by the percentage of support that they received. Had that been the case, we would have had approximately 23 Liberal members sitting in this House.

To the hon. leader of the New Democratic Party: how does that percentage translate for NDP members?

**Mr. Mason:** More.

**Mr. Chase:** Beyond a doubt, more.

The point that I'm trying to make here is that no single party has all the answers. It's the combined wisdom of everyone in attendance. On days like today it's an honour to stand up and be supportive of a bill that comes from a private member of the government. It gives me hope that this government is approaching that 21st century reality. After 37 years of consecutive victories it's not too much of a give in the name of democracy to provide a fixed election date. It will improve the process.

Another area along with Bill 203 that would improve the process is having the polling stations open for a longer period of time. I mentioned in my Antidotes to Apathy member's statement that having them open as the States do, from 6 a.m. and going through till 8 in the evening, would provide an opportunity for more people to vote, especially when they know that there's a particular date. They can arrange their appointments and work schedules around that specific date and hopefully be more encouraged to participate in the process of electing a government.

Something else that would be helpful along with Bill 203 would be the idea of looking at a Saturday or a Sunday or two days in which individuals could vote. Again, with Bill 203 providing a fixed date, people who wish to absent themselves from the province because of various activities, whether recreational or required, would have the opportunity to have their special ballots recognized in their absence, so their vote would still count whether they were over in Australia or just down in the States. So the fixed election would involve more people, as is the intent of the Member for St. Albert, as he pointed out in his introduction.

Another advantage that I would like to see in terms of encouraging more Albertans to participate is the idea of an electronically secure voter ID card. I believe this could be accomplished by updating our current health card. It would have a picture. It could, or not, depending on discussion, have electronic access capabilities, because we are working towards electronic health records. It obviously would have to be a secure piece of ID, and it could potentially eliminate, if it was controlled and printed by the government, what has happened previously with health cards, our little sort of pieces of paper that at times were triple the actual number of Albertans who were receiving the health services.

So Bill 203 to establish a fixed election date, along with the ideas of a citizens' assembly, proportional representation, the longer opening, is a good step.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. leader of the NDP opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 203, the Election Statutes (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2008. I would like to express my appreciation and my admiration to the hon. Member for St. Albert for bringing this forward. He and I, like a number of other members in this House, have served on municipal councils, where fixed election dates have been part of the scenery going back as far as you can go. I believe that it has served municipal government well and has not created any problems. In fact, it has provided more certainty with respect to the electoral process but also more certainty with respect to the governance of municipalities.

As other members have pointed out, this is a trend across the country that has taken root in the last number of years, where quite a number of provinces have moved in this direction, as has the federal government. It is something whose time has come, in my view. I often was asked about the present system we have, where the hon. Premier can go to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor at any time and request a dissolution of the House. It's a bit like everybody lining up for a foot race, and one guy gets to yell go when he or she is ready irrespective of whether or not other people are ready to go. I think that it does confer an unfair advantage on the governing party.

**4:20**

I think that there are many other aspects where this is a very positive thing for government. It will save money. I would note,



Mr. Speaker, that the last two periods between elections in Alberta have been about three and a half years, and this is three and a half years out of what is officially a potential term of five years. Now, tradition has it in Canada that elections are under normal circumstances about four years apart even though the official term is five years and governments can go as long as five. But here in Alberta we've gone more quickly, so we've had elections more often. Of course, that increases costs to the taxpayer. I believe that setting it at four years is about right and will result in greater certainty for everyone involved.

Mr. Speaker, having been in municipal government, where the term is three years, I never had reason to feel that that was an insufficient amount of time to get done what you needed to do on municipal council, but I see the logic of extending the term for municipal governments so that it is in keeping with the term of the provincial government. Four-year terms for municipal government will not create any difficulties, as far as I'm concerned, and it has the advantage of allowing the offset of elections two years apart: municipal elections every four years; two years later on an offset four-year cycle is the provincial election. I think that it makes a great deal of sense.

One of the difficulties that we've seen historically in this province is sometimes you have municipal, provincial, and federal elections all piled one on top of each other. You really run into voter fatigue. You run into volunteer fatigue. You run into financial fatigue, particularly in our case, maybe not so much on the government side, but I'm sure that it represents challenges for the government party as well. Trying to nail down the election dates so that there's a reasonable amount of spacing I think will serve to increase interest and participation in the electoral process, which I think is sometimes negatively affected when you have elections falling on top of each other. So I think that the proposals of the hon. Member for St. Albert make a great deal of sense.

Of course, one of the arguments that is made against this, I think, is that knowing the election date, you're perpetually in election mode because you know when the election is. I'm not sure that that is a legitimate concern, but I do think it could be mitigated if we had limits on when election spending can take place. Perhaps that's something that could be considered should this bill pass. Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that we should also have limitations on when political spending can take place so that it doesn't take place around the calendar but would be limited to a period, say a month or six weeks, prior to the actual election date.

There are many other reforms, Mr. Speaker, that we would like to see. Certainly, proportional representation is one of them, and it's been alluded to by one of the Liberal members. There have been times in this place when with less than a majority of votes cast the governing party has had up to 80 per cent of the seats. That is not reflective of the will of the people, so that's something I think we should be moving towards.

Certainly, how elections are financed, Mr. Speaker, is a critical factor as well. We continue to believe that there should be limits on who can contribute towards elections and that it should be legal for individual citizens to make election contributions but not legal for other organizations such as corporations or unions.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that in light of recent experience we also ought to take a look at the financing of third-party campaigns; that is, campaigns designed to affect the election's outcome that do not come from a political party. There is, I think, reason to take a look at whether or not that kind of third-party financing ought to be allowed.

Mr. Speaker, I think we need to look at that, and we need to look at spending limits. I think this is very important. I think citizens

would all benefit if there were limitations placed on spending and restrictions on where the money can come from, restrictions on when the money can be spent. All of these things would have the effect of increasing voter participation and creating a more vibrant and functional democracy in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I see this bill as a small first step towards tackling the broader issue that many hon. members have talked about since the election, which is the increasing disengagement of Alberta voters and Alberta citizens from the electoral process. This is very much something that should concern all of us regardless of our political persuasions or political parties, and I think that this bill will be a step towards that. As I mentioned, there are other reforms that I think are overdue in this province, but this is one I hope that we can find a greater consensus on.

I do hope that the hon. member's private member's bill is in fact approved. I hope that it is not hoisted. I think it's a reform whose time has come, and we ought to take this step together as a first of a number of steps that we can take to revitalize the democratic process in this province. I think that that's a high priority for all people who believe in the value of public life and who believe in a democratic political system and want to see that democratic system strengthened and energized and made something that is strong and robust. I think that we can do that in Alberta, and I would urge all hon. members to support this bill in order to take a step towards doing that.

Thank you very much.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

**Dr. Brown:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to speak on Bill 203, the Election Statutes (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2008, proposed by the hon. Member for St. Albert. I'm speaking against the bill.

The idea of fixed election dates is not new, but for some reason it keeps re-emerging, often as the panacea of so-called democratic reform which is going to re-engage the disengaged, restore our faith in our system, and make everything right. The inherent assumption, of course, behind this is that the system is somehow broken and that it requires some sort of a magic bullet solution to fix it. The best way, I suppose, to gain support for a solution is to create a problem. Whether one really existed in the first place doesn't seem to be that important.

When we talk about the idea of fixed election dates, we often get mired down in the debate of who benefits and the motivations behind the type of reform. While the idea of fixed election dates and proportional representation and all these other ideas of so-called democratic reform seem to originate from those that think they have something to gain from those measures, I can assure the hon. members that my own views are certainly not motivated by opposition to the measures on the grounds of partisan self-interest, but they're based on my conviction that they're not in the interest of good governance.

There are some who see the American republican system as the superior form of politics, in which fixed election dates are the order of the day. However, I would point out that our system varies – thank goodness – in a number of respects from the American republican system of politics. We do not have three separate legislative branches, which are present in the American republic or in many of the states, consisting of a House of Representatives, a Senate, and a separately elected executive in the form of either a President or a Governor. Thank goodness we don't have the gridlock, the paralysis, the budgetary earmarks which are characteristic of that form of government.

4:30

What this bill purports to do is to apply a key component of one political system to another, assuming that the differences in the system are irrelevant. The problem is that they're not. The American republican model of a political system is based on a separation of powers between the legislative and the executive branches. For the United States the creation of a republican system of governance was based largely on American opposition to the British monarchy, and its system is a reflection of these anti-monarchical sentiments of cynicism about the exercise of government powers and the perceived need for a system of checks and balances.

Canada and its provinces are parliamentary democracies, which are actually based on the tenets of a constitutional monarchy, which is a form of government established under a constitutional system that acknowledges a monarchical head of state, the Governor General and the Lieutenant Governor, whereby Parliament acts to exercise the powers of the Crown through the democratic actions of individual elected members. It is also predicated on the Westminster model, which is the democratic parliamentary system based on that of the United Kingdom, which outlines a series of procedures for operating a Legislature.

The powers of the government, while nominally flowing through the Crown, are exercised in the case of our province through the Lieutenant Governor in Council, sometimes referred to as the Executive Council or the cabinet, led by the leader of the party commanding the largest number of seats in the Assembly. In the event that at any time during its mandate the leader should lose the confidence of the House, then the government must fall, and the Lieutenant Governor would either call on someone else to form a government or dissolve the Assembly and precipitate a general election.

In short, the Canadian model flows from the monarchy, while the American one is fundamentally opposed to it. Indeed, much of the American identity is based on the country's independence from the United Kingdom.

Unlike a presidential, or republican, form of government with its distinction between the legislative and executive branches and its checks and balances, in a parliamentary system the executive and the Legislature are fused. The ministers of cabinet are responsible for their actions collectively or individually as members of the Legislature, the body to which they ultimately must answer. It is this accountability principle that lies at the heart of the Canadian electoral system, Mr. Speaker.

Fixed election dates would remove accountability from the operation of the mechanisms of government, ultimately watering down the significance of government presenting a mandate to the people. I submit that fixed election dates would lead to campaigning over prolonged periods prior to the chosen dates, detracting from the governance of the province or from making tough decisions.

There are many valid reasons upon which an election could be called in the parliamentary system. It might be the inability of the leader of the largest party to command the confidence of the House on an issue of importance, such as a budget or a throne speech, or on an actual motion of nonconfidence. It could be because of an important policy initiative upon which a renewed mandate from the public is sought. One might think of the free trade election in the federal system. Sometimes it could be calls by the opposition based upon the perception of misdeeds or scandal where a general election is needed to clear the air.

In short, fixed election dates are inconsistent with the parliamentary system of government, Mr. Speaker. Enacting fixed election dates would be a cosmetic adjustment, one that gives the political

impression that something is being done to fix a problem that may or may not exist.

Mr. Speaker, our system of Parliament is our history. Our heritage is rooted in our principles, and it has stood us well in Canada for over 130 years. I ask all hon. members to join me in defeating this measure.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to participate this afternoon in the debate on Bill 203. I would like to express my gratitude to the hon. Member for St. Albert for bringing this forward. Certainly, it is the first of many steps that we need to take in this province to reform our democracy.

I listened with interest to the previous speakers; all have made significant, valid points. But when I look at other provinces, British Columbia for instance, life seems to be going on there very well after they decided that they would have fixed election dates for their province. I really don't think that we need to be worried in this province that democracy as we know it would be somehow jeopardized if we were to have fixed election dates for the provincial election.

When we look at this bill to amend the Election Act to enshrine in legislation a fixed date for the next provincial election and all provincial elections thereafter, I think we all should support this proposed legislation, Mr. Speaker. The next provincial election, if we were to vote this bill into law, would be on or around October 15, 2012. I know there's some leeway for the Chief Electoral Officer, and I think that's a good thing.

Hopefully, we'll get an opportunity in committee to hear the hon. Member for St. Albert, but I'd be interested to know which municipalities he has consulted with to go to the four-year term. I had not thought about that, and I would like to hear from the hon. member just exactly what some of the other officials from the municipal level thought of that.

Certainly, the role of the Chief Electoral Officer to make recommendations, as we talked about, for an alternate polling day: I see no harm in that. The Local Authorities Election Act, of course, will have to be amended to provide for those individuals to go to the polls every four years as well. That will alternate, as I understand it, between 2010 and then the provincial election would be held two years later. Now, a fall election for the province, if that's what it is, in October, well, that's fine with me.

There were many speakers earlier talking about the role seniors have, the interest seniors have in the elections. Sometimes I think that when we have these elections in the middle of the winter, whenever the government issues the writ, they're not interested in having a lot of people participate in the election because they know that a lower voter turnout rate is more advantageous to them than it is to any of the opposition parties.

In the last provincial election, the runup to that, Mr. Speaker, the conduct of the election was a mess. We had some but not all returning officers appointed before Christmas. Some returning officers that were appointed before Christmas were unappointed, if I can use that word, in January. One, in particular, comes to mind, and that's the returning officer in Edmonton-Castle Downs. Then whenever the next list of orders in council was presented before the election, there was another returning officer appointed for that constituency along with – I think that there were about 17 or 18 of them. Now, I'm not sure, but it was quite a lot. Those returning officers had to get ready very quickly for the election, which in some cases followed nine days after the order in council to appoint those

folks. So they really didn't have that much time to get ready, and that's why fixed election dates would be to our advantage.

4:40

Now, we talked about fixed election dates. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was talking about proportional representation. I would remind all members present that when we voted for Speaker and Deputy Speaker, it wasn't first past the post. There was a runoff ballot involved in this. That's not the traditional winner-take-all attitude that is currently applied to provincial politics. It's a different form of election.

Not only that, but when the Conservative Party decided that they were going to arrange or organize a leadership contest and conduct a vote, it wasn't first past the post. If it had been first past the post, Jim Dinning I think would have won that race, not the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. It would have been Mr. Dinning, the favourite from Calgary. He would have won that if it had been a winner-take-all election, but it wasn't. So if those sorts of reforms are good enough for the Progressive Conservative Party, surely we can consider a reform like this one, as proposed in Bill 203, for the province. The current Premier was in third place after the first round of balloting, and with the preferential selection he went to first place and won the Premier's office.

With that system, certainly, the New Democrats, the Greens, the Alberta Alliance, and the Alberta Liberals would have significantly more representation in this Assembly. I think that would be a good thing for the government because the more views and discussions you have, the wider the range in discussions I think the better government we have.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Alliance supports fixed election dates. I can't say for sure how they feel about this bill, but they have certainly discussed it in their election platforms. The Alberta Liberals certainly have. The time has come. This may not be a perfect legislative initiative, but it certainly is the best that we have seen here. I would encourage all members to support this. We will have greater certainty of the voting process for parties, for candidates, and certainly for the voters. Women's groups, in particular, have indicated that this could help more women candidates who are interested in running for office. This gives us a greater ability to plan, and a certainty around what is in a four-year term I think would be to the benefit of all of us and our families and our constituency associations. I think this bill would reduce the cynicism related to partisan timing of elections.

Fixed dates are part of a broader way to reduce voter apathy and also, in my opinion, increase voter turnout. Fixed election dates can be co-ordinated with greater nonpartisan public information campaigns, particularly for first-time voters. Fixed election dates would improve accountability, and we certainly need to improve our voting process in this province. Fixed election dates, in my view, would help that. We would have better electoral planning by elections authorities, including ensuring up-to-date voters lists for each election. They would have lots of time to work at that, of course. Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, with that confusion there was around the orders in council which appointed the returning officers, many of them did not have the proper time to organize the election, and there was confusion and chaos as a result of that.

Now, fixed election dates can provide for co-ordination without otherwise having to go through costly by-elections. A certain set deadline to achieve things would focus the minds of the sitting government.

I'm sorry; my time has run out, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of Bill 203 and congratulate the hon. Member for St. Albert for bringing this to the floor. I'd like to preface my remarks with a caveat that it's a rather unusual situation for me to suddenly find myself in very rare agreement – I'd like the record to show: very rare agreement – with the Member for Calgary-Varsity and the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and even a rarer occasion for me to agree with the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I'm very happy to get up and speak in favour of just how important a healthy and strong democracy is to our prosperity and quality of life in Alberta and in Canada. Marx and occasionally members of his party hold that economics dictate politics, and the founders of modern liberalism – great British thinkers like Locke and Burke, French thinkers like Montesquieu, and the American founders Madison, Hamilton – understood that good, healthy, well-constructed democratic political institutions foster prosperity and economic growth. Both the Westminster model, which the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill waxed eloquently about, and also the American republican model are two different means to the same ends of accountable government, governments that are accountable to the people. These political institutions are important not just to our politics but to our economics and our economic prosperity.

Having acknowledged and being grateful for the extent to which our parliamentary system has served us well both in Alberta and in Canada, I think it's also time to note that there are problems, that not everything is perfect. That's hardly surprising. Institutions change. Society changes. Voter apathy and cynicism are becoming more common at both the federal and provincial levels. Two years ago I stood in this Chamber and spoke on behalf of a private member's motion, Motion 508, for fixed election dates, and I talked about voter cynicism and voter apathy and declining participation and said that this is a problem. We witnessed just in the last election the participation rate in our Alberta election hitting an all-time low. This is not a good sign for any province, any society that takes its democracy seriously.

The causes, of course, for low participation rate are varied, but it does have something to do with the electoral process and how we organize our elections. Essentially, the system we have now – I won't go through the formal mechanics of it. The basic, bottom-line, simple English version of it is that the current practice allows the government of the day to call an election when it best serves the immediate, short-term interest of that government. Of course, that's the reason why most governments are so reluctant to propose any change to a system. If you look out just for the next five years, the short interest of the government in power, this kind of amendment makes no sense whatsoever. So, again, I congratulate the Member for St. Albert for taking a longer view, looking at not just what's good for the short-term and immediate interest of the government of the day but what's good for the long-term best interest of the province.

This practice, of course, fuels the inevitable perception that the governing party has the ability to manipulate election dates to its own advantage, and getting rid of this is one of the advantages that Bill 203 would bring. I would note also that as the federal government and several of the other provinces have done, there's not a requirement to abandon completely the parliamentary practice, the Westminster practice, of a government losing a confidence vote and being brought down prior to the four-year proposed fixed term. In other words, there's an in-between model, the flexible fixed model, that would give us the advantages of the parliamentary tradition but also the advantages of fixed election dates.

Most of the advantages of fixed election dates have already been well addressed by other proponents. Administrative efficiency in running the elections – and the last election here certainly was no model of administrative efficiency – would also extend to greater efficiency in the government. I'm thinking particularly of the time frames involved with the planning and budgeting process, some of the time we'll spend here in the next month dealing with interim supply. Interim supply is not parliamentary democracy at its best – we're passing interim legislation to pay for government when we haven't gotten the budget through yet – and fixed election dates would eliminate in almost all cases the need for interim supply, which is not a very accountable and good way to run the fiscal side of government.

**4:50**

I think perhaps one of the best advantages that fixed election dates would bring, Mr. Speaker, one of the ones that is most overlooked – this is of course not meant to reflect personally on anybody, including myself – is that it would actually allow us to attract more high-calibre candidates to seek public office. This is the reason why: when you don't know when the election date is, it is particularly difficult for people in small business, partnerships, entrepreneurs to at the spur of the moment tell their partners, their business partners, the people in the law firm, not to mention their families or spouses: oh, I'm going to throw everything over and run to be a member of the Legislature of Alberta. This type of predictability and time, I strongly believe, would allow us to attract more mid-career professional people from partnerships, small business, and so forth in all the parties, which represents, I think, the heart and soul of Alberta, more people from that group, and that would be a positive gain for all parties in the Legislature.

The high-sounding defence of the parliamentary Westminster model by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill has to be responded to. He would have us believe that fixed election dates would be an attack on the Westminster model and unparliamentary. I think this is simple balderdash. I would point out that the genius of the Westminster model has been its ability to evolve over time to changing circumstances. The model defended by my hon. colleague across the way was the model that evolved in the late 19th, early 20th century, in which party discipline basically corrupted the separation of powers that was achieved in the British parliamentary system in the mid-19th century, the great heyday of the parliamentary system.

There is the possibility of adaptation and flexibility. Other members have already pointed out that British Columbia, Newfoundland, Ontario, Saskatchewan, plus the federal government have all grafted this republican institution, if you want to call it, onto the parliamentary tree. This hybrid works, and it's working there. I'd say that when you have four provinces and the federal government all embracing this reform, it simply doesn't wash to call it unparliamentary. So practice supports this.

Mr. Speaker, I don't pretend for a moment that fixed election dates would be a cure-all, but I do think it's a step in the right direction. Again, I thank the Member for St. Albert for taking a long view of this and would ask the rest of the House, the rest of the Assembly, to think about not just what's in the immediate self-interest of the government of the day for the next four years but what's good for all Albertans for the next hundred years. I urge support for this motion.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

**Mr. Kang:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to

support Bill 203, sponsored by the hon. Member for St. Albert. Fixed election dates will bring greater certainty to the voting process for parties, candidates, and voters.

It will encourage more women's groups, who have particularly indicated that, you know, they will run more women candidates, so they can prepare for elections. It will bring greater ability to plan certainty about the term and could well attract greater quality of candidates. It will reduce cynicism related to the partisan timing of elections. Fixed dates are part of a broader attack on voter apathy and declining voter turnout. Fixed dates can be co-ordinated with great nonpartisan public information campaigns, particularly for the first-time voters. It will improve accountability, judgment of voter, based strictly on record over a set period of time, not after economic upturn or politically motivated spending. It will deter the government in power to influence the vote by throwing around goodies just before the election time. It will make the voting process more accessible to certain voters – students, seniors – based on seasonal ease and availability.

It will provide for better planning by election authorities, including ensuring up-to-date voter lists for each election. In my constituency of Calgary-McCall there was 28 per cent growth. We didn't even have the voters list a week before the voting day, and those lists were not up to date. The writ was dropped, and our returning officer was still running around looking for a place to lease for her office. So the fixed election dates will provide for better planning.

It will provide for co-ordination with otherwise costly by-elections. A certain, set deadline to achieve things would focus the minds of the sitting government. Fixed dates could support better enforcement of campaign finance and spending rules. Fixed election dates support more efficient parliamentary practice since legislative committee and constituency work can be better planned. An absence of media speculation over the when of an election may support increased focus on the what of an election, or more substance. Fixed election dates may decrease the power of the Premier relative to other members of the caucus since the threat of forcing an election is one stick the leader can use to increase discipline.

I think there should be more voting dates, should take away the special ballot, should take away the advanced poll. Maybe, you know, we should have one week of voting. It will encourage more people to come out and vote because lots of voters are working two, three jobs. Then, you know, it will encourage them to come out to vote on the weekends or whenever they have spare time between jobs. Hopefully, the opposition's support for improving election transparency and the democratic process in Alberta by fixing the election date won't ultimately lead to the Member for St. Albert's government, please, voting Bill 203 down.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and join the lively debate on Bill 203, Election Statutes (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2008. I think all the members of this Assembly have a sense of familiarity with this issue. We've certainly heard some very interesting comments this afternoon. We all recognize it as being a component of, I would suggest, a much, much larger concept of democratic reform.

Mr. Speaker, when the Member for St. Albert speaks about fixed election dates, he states that it is a matter that surpasses the restrictions of political philosophy, and I would agree with him. I believe that he's absolutely right. Democracy belongs to all Albertans, and changes to our system of governance should, I would suggest, at the

very least involve a public dialogue between the citizenry and our government. I believe that this topic of debate has a far greater reach than can be contained, with all due respect to the hon. member, within the limitations of a private member's bill.

5:00

The Member for St. Albert has stated that fixed election dates have been integrated into many other jurisdictions. For example, Mr. Speaker, the Parliament of Canada formally ratified this idea in Bill C-16, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act, which received royal assent on May 3 of last year. British Columbia, Ontario, Newfoundland, Labrador, and as of last week our neighbour the province of Saskatchewan have also adopted fixed election dates into their election systems.

Now, one would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that this means we should follow suit. I would offer a caveat that just because others choose to do something doesn't necessarily make it right for this province and for the people of Alberta. There's no established long-term precedent for fixed election dates within our parliamentary legacy. This is not to suggest that this idea is not worth considering. Far be it from that. I would say, though, that it is unproven in relation to matters of increased voter participation.

Another concern I have, Mr. Speaker, relates to the concept of efficiency and the suggestion that this would automatically bring more efficiency to our democratic system. Now, undoubtedly, having a predictable time period for elections could allow for more organization and potentially better preparation. In this province we have considerations, particularly with the fact that we have a large agriculture sector. We tend to make an effort in scheduling our elections so that they don't conflict with seeding in the springtime or the harvest in the fall. I guess the potential, if we were more organized, is that it might save some money.

Now, there may be many people, Mr. Speaker, who would take advantage of the timing to arrange their plans around election time. It's been suggested by other members previous to me that we have a large contingent of snowbirds in this province. The hon. member across the way may become a snowbird himself at some time and may want to take advantage of something like this, to plan his trip around an election. However, we must weigh the factor of convenience against the principle of a parliamentary government's prerogative to drop the writ, as we term it in our system, at a time when it is vital to seek a fresh mandate from the people.

The British parliamentary model, Mr. Speaker, has served democracies across our globe very well over its inception. One of the central tenets of this system, Mr. Speaker, is that a government serves with the confidence of its elected members. Now, this gives it the right to seek a new mandate as it sees fit. It is up to the electorate to give the government that mandate. Although a fixed election date still maintains the notion of serving with the confidence of the House, it still strips the government of its responsibility to be more organic and flexible as opposed to governments found within a republican system, Mr. Speaker. In fact, fixed election dates are a more naturally occurring feature of the republican principle that commanders-in-chief have a limited and defined rotation in office.

Now, republicanism was established in the world's first large-scale experimentation, Mr. Speaker, with the formation of our neighbours to the south, the United States of America. America's first President, George Washington, enshrined fixed election dates within the elemental precept that the American presidency was fundamentally different from a European monarchy. As I'm sure my fellow members will reiterate, we are a constitutional monarchy derived from long-standing English traditions.

Mr. Speaker, there is no evidence to suggest that fixed-term

elections in the United States have resulted in better government or comparably better voter participation. We are bombarded constantly with coverage of the American election process. I refer to the current process where they've been working towards electing a president for the last two years, I would suggest, and probably more than that. We have one particular individual who is running for President of the United States who has spent most of his first term in office, his current term as a U.S. Senator, running to be the President of the United States under this fixed system.

Any efforts at grafting elements of an American mode of governance onto our own challenges our underlying democratic heritage. Is it also realistic to believe that the re-engagement of Alberta's entire electorate resides on such a simple cure-all? I doubt that, Mr. Speaker.

Despite the intentions of the sponsoring member – and I tip my hat to the member for bringing this forward. I know that his intentions were good. Even though he's advocating change, I would say, Mr. Speaker, that any attempt at change for the sake of change – and I'm not suggesting that that is the intention of this member – is just not the Alberta way.

Mr. Speaker, I think that the prospect of election fatigue could very well happen if we adopt Bill 203. At the rate we're going, it seems that potentially we could have an election year after year after year: provincial, federal, and municipal. Frankly, I'm not looking forward to it.

I remember just around the time of the 26th Legislature, we went through a provincial election, a municipal election, and I believe it was the spring of that very year that we had a federal election as well, Mr. Speaker. I can assure you that I'm not looking forward to that malaise: elections rolling together, pounding the pavement, as it were, year after year on behalf of myself or any others that I might choose to support.

Not only are we talking about eventually synchronizing provincial, federal, and municipal elections, but assuming that they all go to their term limits, we would also have to consider that fixed election dates would open the door to much longer campaign periods. Again, I refer to my comments earlier about our neighbours to the south. God help us to go through that kind of forever ongoing election process.

Mr. Speaker, this would give citizens and political parties more time to prepare, I would suggest, and I suppose that probably wouldn't hurt. But the reverse side of that particular coin means that there is a strong possibility of the public being inundated with a greater degree of electoral initiatives. An excessive amount of this could leach the public's attention and sabotage any momentum that this bill and the hon. member hopes to gain in re-engaging voter interest.

I do agree with the Member for St. Albert when he says that channels of communication are essential when we discuss ideas such as these. I find some value in this discussion, and I think we can all acknowledge his intentions in this regard. I would reiterate, Mr. Speaker, that I believe this is a very valuable debate to have. I'm glad that we're having it in this House, but I would suggest that it should not be confined to this House. This debate should engage our greater public.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today to speak to Bill 203, Election Statutes (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2008, as proposed by the hon. Member for St.

Albert. I respectfully speak against the bill. I believe that the issues predicated in Bill 203 are substantial ones. As such it's imperative that these issues receive the well-needed attention they deserve.

Canada's Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, has said that fixed election dates prevent governments from calling snap elections for short-term political advantage. They level the playing field for all parties. Idealistically, this will result in a more accountable and democratic government. It's for these reasons that this issue has surfaced several times recently not only in our province but in other provinces and on a federal level as well.

Mr. Speaker, these matters are idealistic and not necessarily realistic. The reality is that the topics of fixed election dates and democratic reform are exceptionally complex, and a private member's bill is not the appropriate device with which to analyze our electoral system and propose solutions, especially as the underlying theme goes beyond a political consideration, especially as a large majority of this governing body was elected via a campaign platform that did not include fixed election dates.

5:10

There is no doubt, however, that the concerns with the electoral system merit attention. It may well be time for Alberta to consider the appropriate way to approach electoral reform. Electoral reform has been addressed in both British Columbia and Ontario. Both provinces formed a citizens' assembly in order to evaluate the first past the post electoral system. Both assemblies were responsible for investigating how the first past the post system failed to embrace the values and principles of electors and to design and propose an electoral system that focused more on proportional representation.

In B.C. the assembly consisted of 161 members. There was one man and one woman from each of B.C.'s 79 electoral districts, one male and one female member representing the aboriginal community, and one chair. Once selected, these individuals were educated on the legislative system in British Columbia before venturing into their own communities to hold public hearings. Finally, the citizens deliberated their findings and formulated an alternative. Despite the fact that the assembly vote showed a large majority of the assembly to be in favour of the alternative, the results of the provincial referendum were not sufficient to change the current system. It was stipulated that 60 per cent of the vote had to be positive for the system to change, and only 57.7 per cent of the population voted in favour.

These results are disconcerting because this process was exceptionally involved and costly, being that these individuals had to convene in the province's capital several times over the 10-month period that this process took. Additionally, while attempting to select randomly, it was, in fact, the invitation that was randomly distributed. A minimum of 200 names were randomly drawn from each electoral district, and each of these individuals received an invitation. If they could commit to the entire process and were prepared to volunteer their time, their name was placed back into a draw from which the representatives were selected. Mr. Speaker, a total of 2,300 invitations to participate in the citizens' assembly were sent out in order to form the 161-person assembly. It's obvious that this was not a random sample of the population. The very fact that the individual's consent is required precludes this type of selection.

In addition to this complication, the Canadian council of policy awareness reported that the Ontario citizens' assembly was an unelected and unaccountable, hence, unrepresentative group. Like B.C. the Ontario citizens' assembly vote showed a large majority vote in support of a change in the electoral system; however, 63 per cent of Ontario's population voted to preserve the first past the post system.

The reality is that the analysis and reformation of the electoral system is very complex. It requires individuals who are not only intelligent and insightful but interested in committing to finding a real and tangible solution to our electoral issues. An assembly convening to make such decisions should certainly include members from the general public but in addition members of the government, political experts, and elections officials. Perhaps the concern here is that these people will be party affiliated. I ask this question, Mr. Speaker: is it possible to form an assembly of interested, insightful, and fundamentally democratic individuals, all of whom are nonpartisan? If it were, the issues that Alberta is facing would be far more severe than any hon. member should care to imagine.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the reformation of our electoral system to include fixed election dates is an issue that is multifaceted and complex. Additionally, the intent of Bill 203 exceeds the scope of a private member's bill. This is not to be construed as a lack of support for the suggestion that our electoral system requires re-evaluation and reformation. Not only is this sort of reassessment progressive; it's fair, and Albertans, above all things, have been provided with fairness through decisions of this government.

However, I believe the citizens' assembly as used by other provinces in an attempt to analyze potential changes in election procedures is insufficient. Although the ideals are admirable, the flaws are undeniable. I would suggest a more appropriate forum in which to discuss these matters would include citizens, government, elected officials, and political experts. With this suggestion we must also consider that nonpartisanship does not inherently imply more democratic, nor does it equate to realistic expectation. It is for these reasons, Mr. Speaker, that I stand in opposition to Bill 203.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

**Mr. Elniski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join the discussion on Bill 203, the Election Statutes (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2008, which proposes to amend the Election Act and the Local Authorities Election Act by requiring fixed election dates every four years for both provincial and municipal elections. Such profound change to our elections format must undergo a consultation process with parliamentary experts and Albertans when considering the proper format and possible ramifications of this dramatic change.

Fixed elections dates are thought to make an Assembly more accountable and democratic and counteract the pervasive cynicism that voters have regarding the opportunistic nature of calling an election. On these grounds the House of Commons passed a very similar piece of legislation with Bill C-16. Receiving royal assent on May 3, 2007, Bill C-16 amended the Canada Elections Act so that a federal general election would have to be held on the third Monday in October in the fourth calendar year following the polling day for the last general election. Mr. Speaker, it was intended that Bill C-16 would curb a perceived democratic deficit, revitalize Canadian voters' confidence in the democratic system, and bring about stability and predictability to the electoral system.

As good as this is, fixed election dates are problematic in a minority government, Mr. Speaker. Now, as unlikely as a minority is in Alberta, there is the possibility that a paralysis of the Assembly could occur. With no party holding a strategic advantage over another, the government's legislative agenda could be destroyed and the government's ability to function hampered. In a system of fixed election dates there is only one option that would allow the governing party to go to the polls at a chosen time before the fixed date. In

order to make this happen, a government would have to engineer its own demise, so to speak, by getting defeated in a motion of nonconfidence.

This raises the question, then, as to whether setting fixed election dates is actually effective or if it is the illusion of becoming more democratically inclined.

Currently our federal government's minority situation has arguably hindered the legislative agenda. Votes on motions of confidence, such as the budget, are introduced only when the government knows the opposition's resolve towards election possibility.

In our system, Mr. Speaker, an election is called and is followed by a monthlong election campaign. This way voters can be kept up to date on the issues that matter the most. If Bill 203 were to be implemented, it is very possible that the entire landscape of Alberta politics would change. Instead of the announcement of an election followed by a relatively quick campaign, the campaign could last months, even years. This, of course, bears a striking resemblance to the American electoral system. One only has to look at the current American Democratic primaries to wonder whether this type of long and expensive drawn-out campaign is what voters really want. This type of election could actually intensify any sense of voter apathy felt within our province, something no hon. member of this Assembly wants, I'm sure.

Bill 203 represents a unique attempt at improving our democratic system. On the surface it sounds like an effective and democratic method of electoral reform. However, once one delves beneath the surface, one realizes that this type of reform challenges accountability and democratic efficiency and may actually increase voter apathy. Careful consideration is now required.

I will yield the floor to someone else wishing to speak to this bill and look forward to hearing the rest of the debate. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Webber:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join the discussion on Bill 203, the Election Statutes (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2008, which currently proposes amendments to the Election Act, requiring fixed provincial election dates every four years. It also seeks to amend the Local Authorities Election Act to require fixed municipal elections every four years. In principle I agree with the sponsor that this is a very important issue. I also believe that there will need to be a lot of discussion on this issue and that the input of Albertans must be considered to allow the government to assess a proper course of action.

Mr. Speaker, it's not the first time that we have heard about fixed election dates. As you may know, it found its way into the last election campaign. Again, let me reiterate that it is not entirely a bad idea but one that deserves a fair amount of consultation and consideration. Democratic reforms cannot be taken lightly. I also believe that our current single-member plurality system creates clear lines for constituents regarding who their MLA is in the event they wish to access government for their various needs.

5:20

I'd like to talk a little bit about our first past the post system, which was brought up earlier by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. This system is used in 43 countries who belong to the United Nations. Ours happens to be one of them. Mr. Speaker, some believe that the system results in stable government, but it can elect a candidate who is opposed by a majority of voters. The first past the post system allows for an area or a constituency to be represented based on the wishes of those who live there. Every area

has individual concerns, challenges, prospects, and opportunities. These specific attributes are what the people who live in the area are basing their choice on when selecting their Member of the Legislative Assembly. They are choosing representation based on important criteria, and those criteria are unique to each constituency. For instance, in rural constituencies their pressures and concerns may be more focused on agriculture, access to schools, and improving transportation by paving secondary highways. In an urban constituency the pressures may be more about child care, affordable housing, or how to keep our neighbourhoods safe.

Mr. Speaker, constituents vote based on these issues, and the candidate who is viewed as the best person for the job wins. Sometimes the voting margin is close, but a campaign is a race, and the winner is the person who is able to connect with the most voters within a constituency. A close margin can be misinterpreted as a reflection that some of the population is underrepresented. For example, let's say that a constituency was won by a candidate with just over 6,000 votes, and the losing candidate received, let's say, 4,700 votes. This is what occurred in my constituency of Calgary-Foothills. Some may misconstrue this plus-40 per cent of voters as not being represented simply because their candidate failed to win.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't have to tell you that all voters count. They all have individual concerns, challenges, prospects, and opportunities. Most importantly, they voted. The electors that cast ballots for other candidates are still entitled to representation from their MLA, and I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that I can and have provided the best representation for my constituents, better than any opposition ever could.

Mr. Speaker, there are many reasons why people don't vote. There is no doubt that this reflects a disengagement from politics, but before we start changing bits and pieces of the electoral system, such as creating fixed election dates, we need to consider the big picture. I'd like to talk about the complexities of change in regard to voting systems.

One voting system that has been highly debated in the past is proportional representation, not to be confused with representation by population, which would potentially alienate the rural areas. Proportional representation is where parties win seats according to the percentage of the total votes cast in their favour. One problem with this system is that it's complicated. When voter apathy is attributed to the belief that one person's vote cannot make a difference, why would we choose a system that is more complicated and may leave Albertans feeling that they have no idea what their vote may accomplish? If we were to consider proportional representation through a single, transferable vote system, we have to allow for the potential to elect more than one representative per constituency.

I would like to touch on engaging other electors. All of us as MLAs play our part in promoting a sense of civic engagement. The dynamics of this province have changed dramatically over the past few years. We've had a lot of new people move to Alberta. The number of young families, high-paying jobs, and opportunities in general have increased, and so have the challenges associated with our continued successes. The wants and needs of the public we serve have evolved in lockstep with the province. As representatives of Albertans we need to continually understand their needs, increase responsiveness, find better ways to connect, and engage people in a new and innovative way.

I see this in a generation of younger and diverse Albertans, some of whom are proud members of this Assembly here, Mr. Speaker, including myself, who is young at heart. This will surely lend itself to better understanding the larger segment of Alberta. Being able to identify with politicians, dare I say, helps, but connecting with

Albertans is something every MLA should work hard at both during and after an election.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. Albert brings up a very important issue. Unfortunately, I don't believe that this is the appropriate medium by which to accomplish the goal of this bill, and for that reason I do not support it. Thank you.

**Mr. Liepert:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to make a few brief comments on this topic. First of all, I would like to commend the Member for St. Albert for bringing this forward. You know, I sit here and listen to this debate in this Assembly, and it seems to me that a fixed election date is somehow going to be the panacea for all of the ills that plague our voting system today. I listened to my friend the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: somehow a fixed election date is going to encourage more people to seek office. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that all of the people that I've talked to that have said they don't want to seek public office say that they can't afford it and they don't want to take all the crap from the media. Not one of them has told me that they don't want to run because they don't know when the election is going to be.

I listened to my friend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. This member is the epitome of the guy who says: whenever it works in my favour, then it's good; and when it doesn't work in my favour, it's bad. Now he's talking that fixed election dates somehow are going to deal with third-party financing. Well, he liked third-party financing until it didn't work in his favour.

Now our friends in the opposition, the Liberals over here. I listened to them. They called fixed election dates as the demise of their party. Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, what the demise of their party is. What my constituents told me was: if they would present something positive once in a while, maybe I would vote for them. Not fixed election dates, Mr. Member.

Mr. Speaker, I will just conclude very quickly by saying that this Legislature is just a little over 100 years old. This is the 27th sitting of the Legislature. My math isn't good, but if you divide 27 into 100, I'd say that's just about once every four years.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Peace River.

**Mr. Oberle:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me in this brief time. I just have a couple of comments. My hon. friend from Vermilion-Lloydminster, who is never short of a quote, says something along the lines of: this Legislature is good at finding solutions in search of a problem. I would suggest that's what we're doing here. We have a poorly defined problem, yet we're crafting solutions for it.

The stated problem supposedly is low voter turnout. The bill proposes fixed election dates. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity proposes leaving polling stations open longer, Saturday and Sunday polls, voter ID cards. Then Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood talked about limits on expenditure. There is absolutely no empirical evidence whatsoever that any of those are going to fix the problem of low voter turnout, which is, supposedly, the stated problem.

Mr. Speaker, the one model quoted often is municipal elections. Well, how long have we had fixed dates in municipal elections? How is the voter turnout doing there? Not so good.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that it's early for us to draw conclusions about the last election. We have a boundary review and an electoral officer's report coming. There are a number of issues that we have to deal with. I'm not at all opposed to fixed election dates if they solve a problem. It's incumbent on us here to link solutions with empirical evidence rather than running lemminglike over the edge.

I thank you for this opportunity to comment. I would move that we adjourn debate now.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we've had some good discussion on a couple of issues that are of importance to Albertans. I know that there are other members who wish to participate in this debate, so I would suggest that we adjourn the House until 7:30 tonight, at which time we'll move on to other private members' business.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:28 p.m.]





## Table of Contents

Monday, April 28, 2008

Introduction of Guests .....	245
Ministerial Statements	
National Day of Mourning .....	246
Members' Statements	
Armenian Genocide .....	247
Pan-Canadian Assessment Test Results .....	255
National Volunteer Week .....	255
Education Property Taxes .....	256
Promoting Active Living and Healthy Eating .....	256
Lethbridge Hurricanes Hockey Team .....	256
Oral Question Period	
Farm Worker Safety .....	247
Electricity Exports .....	248
Workplace Safety .....	249
Public-private Project Funding .....	249
School Construction .....	250
Deep Well Flooding .....	250
Affordable Housing in Edmonton .....	251
Gang-related Violence in Hobbema .....	251
Working Alone Regulation .....	251
West Nile Virus Larvicide Program .....	252
Education Property Taxes .....	252
Payday Loans .....	253
All-terrain Vehicle Safety .....	253
Centralized Learning Assessment .....	254
Drayton Valley OSB Mill .....	254
School Board Jurisdiction .....	255
Presenting Petitions .....	257
Tabling Returns and Reports .....	257
Written Questions .....	258
Motions for Returns .....	258
Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 202 Alberta Volunteer Service Medal Act .....	258
Bill 203 Election Statutes (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2008 .....	265

## STANDING COMMITTEES

### Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rogers

Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski

Amery  
Blakeman

DeLong  
Kang

McFarland  
McQueen

Olson

### Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Prins

Deputy Chair: Mr. McFarland

Blakeman  
Campbell  
Horne

Lund  
MacDonald

Marz  
Mitzel

Notley  
Webber

### Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Kowalski

Deputy Chair: Mr. Oberle

Elniski  
Hehr  
Leskiw

Mason  
Rodney

Snelgrove  
Taylor

VanderBurg  
Weadick

### Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Dr. Brown

Deputy Chair: Ms Woo-Paw

Allred  
Amery  
Anderson  
Benito  
Boutilier

Calahasen  
Campbell  
Doerksen  
Elniski  
Fawcett

Forsyth  
Jacobs  
MacDonald  
McQueen  
Olson

Quest  
Sandhu  
Sarich  
Swann

### Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Prins

Deputy Chair: Mr. Hancock

Bhardwaj  
Boutilier  
Calahasen  
Doerksen  
Griffiths

Johnson  
Leskiw  
Liepert  
Marz  
Mitzel

Notley  
Oberle  
Pastoor  
Rogers  
Stevens

Taylor  
Vandermeer  
Weadick  
Zwozdesky

### Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. MacDonald

Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund

Benito  
Bhardwaj  
Chase  
Dallas

Denis  
Drysdale  
Fawcett  
Griffiths

Jacobs  
Johnson  
Kang  
Mason

Quest  
Vandermeer  
Woo-Paw

If your address is incorrect, please clip on the dotted line, make any changes, and return to the address listed below. To facilitate the update, please attach the last mailing label along with your account number.

Subscriptions  
Legislative Assembly Office  
1001 Legislature Annex  
9718 - 107 Street  
EDMONTON AB T5K 1E4

---

Last mailing label:

Account # \_\_\_\_\_

New information:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

---

Subscription information:

Annual subscriptions to the paper copy of *Alberta Hansard* (including annual index) are \$127.50 including GST if mailed once a week or \$94.92 including GST if picked up at the subscription address below or if mailed through the provincial government interdepartmental mail system. Bound volumes are \$121.70 including GST if mailed. Cheques should be made payable to the Minister of Finance.

Price per issue is \$0.75 including GST.

On-line access to *Alberta Hansard* is available through the Internet at [www.assembly.ab.ca](http://www.assembly.ab.ca)

Address subscription inquiries to Subscriptions, Legislative Assembly Office, 1001 Legislature Annex, 9718 - 107 St., EDMONTON AB T5K 1E4, telephone 427-1302.

Address other inquiries to Managing Editor, *Alberta Hansard*, 1001 Legislature Annex, 9718 - 107 St., EDMONTON AB T5K 1E4, telephone 427-1875.

