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The 27th Legislature
First Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

First Session

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[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 12, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome back.

Let us pray. Guide us in all of our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we'll now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Paul Lorieau, who's in the Speaker's gallery, and I would invite all to join in 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

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I'd like to introduce to you a group of students from the Red Deer-North riding, from Gateway Christian school. They're here today to learn more about how the government works. I would like to say that they're very brilliant and keen students. They're here with their teachers, Mrs. Carolyn Stolte and Mr. Jim Driedger, and parent helpers Mr. Don Cartwright and Mr. John Veuger. I would ask them all to rise – they're in the members' gallery – and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. The first is a mother-daughter team, Cindy and Shawny Adrian. Shawny is a student at west Edmonton Christian school. She wrote me a letter that said: "I have one thing that concerns me: healthcare. People sometimes have to wait for 8 hours just to get some medication or a sling! That's absolutely outrageous!" They are in the members' gallery today, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of all members.

The other introduction through you and to all members of the Assembly is a class of 30 bright and articulate grade 6 students from Belgravia elementary school in Edmonton. I spoke to them and they got the answers to every one of my questions, which was a real treat. This week Belgravia elementary is participating in the School at the Legislature program. I have to admit, Mr. Speaker, I have a soft spot for Belgravia school. Both my sons attended it as did the Member for Edmonton-Centre and as did I. So there we go. They are accompanied by their teacher, Susan Kosanovich, and by parent helpers Debbie Mack and Maria Galpin. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of all members.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly a visiting class from St. Gabriel school in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. St. Gabriel just recently, on Sunday May 4, celebrated their 50th anniversary. It's an exceptional school in the separate school system in the city of Edmonton, and it is my pleasure this afternoon to welcome on behalf of the constituents Mrs. Jackie Flynn, the vice-principal; Mrs. Svetlana Sech, the teacher; and the parent volunteer this afternoon, Mrs. Sandi Rosich. They are accompanied this afternoon by 23 polite and respectful students. They are in the public gallery, and I would now ask them to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We all know what a going economic concern Edmonton is, and I am truly delighted to have resident in my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today Martin Salloum. He is the president and CEO of the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce and also the World Trade Centre, Edmonton. He is here today and joined by staff of the chamber and of the World Trade Centre in both galleries, I think. I would ask them all to please rise and accept a warm welcome.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First of all, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House four members of the Professional Association of Residents of Alberta, resident physicians here in the province of Alberta. They're visiting today, encouraging MLAs to encourage the Alberta government, in turn, to achieve a self-sustained physician workforce through investment both in medical education and residency training. If I could ask Diana Grainger, Kay Laverty, Brock Debenham, and Tehseen Ladha to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the House, please.

My second introduction today is four members of the United Nurses of Alberta on this International Nurses Day and Florence Nightingale's birthday. They have developed a nursing care plan for Alberta nursing, which I will table in the House later at the appropriate time, Mr. Speaker. They are Christine Matthews from Leduc, Judy Brandley from Lethbridge, John Terry from Medicine Hat, and Maxine Braun from Crowsnest Pass. If I could ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

Mr. Liepert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to be able to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly several more representatives than the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie introduced from the Professional Association of Residents of Alberta. I know they've been meeting with members of this Assembly. We hold this professional association in high regard and are delighted to have them as guests today. I'd first like to introduce Dr. Bonnie Dasgupta, Dr. Trevor Chan, Dr. Jarrod Anderson, and Dr. Diana Grainger, who are representing the field of family medicine. From psychiatry is Dr. Reilly Smith, and representing

pediatrics is Dr. Tehseen Ladha. I'd also like to introduce Dr. Kay Laverty from community medicine, Dr. George Zahariadis from medical microbiology, Dr. Erin Brennan from obstetrics and gynecology, Dr. Andrea Macyk-Davey from general pathology, and, finally, Dr. Harvey Quon, Dr. Brock Debenham, and Dr. Robyn Banerjee from radiation oncology. Now, I have apologized in advance to these young ladies and gentlemen for any names that I've mispronounced. I know that these are the folks that we're all going to be relying on as we move up in years. I would ask all of us to give them a welcome to the Assembly this afternoon.

I have a second introduction. I am very pleased today to have one of my constituents who is here visiting the Assembly with his son. His last name is quite familiar in this Assembly. I would ask Elliott Horner and his son Byron to stand and be recognized.

1:40

Mr. Benito: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two very special guests. With us today are Mr. Jose (Jun) Angeles, president of the Council of Edmonton Filipino Associations. Mr. Angeles is considered a pioneer of the Filipino community in Edmonton and has been the strength and force among the 40,000 Filipino citizens in our province.

The second person, Mr. Speaker, is Mr. Rod Cantiveros, a journalist from Winnipeg who has combined public trust and community service to the Filipino community in Manitoba. Mr. Cantiveros was heavily involved in the construction of the Philippine-Canadian Centre of Manitoba, the first of its kind in Canada. Mr. Cantiveros is here in Edmonton to start the first Edmonton edition of the *Filipino Journal* newspaper, the pulse of the Filipinos in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that both of our guests now stand to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a young man: Mr. Josh Traptow. Josh has worked in my office and is in high demand as a volunteer because of his computer and administration skills. He's a Conservative and he's also a monarchist. He's going to be joining the U of C as a political science and economics student in September. I encourage everyone in the House to join me in welcoming Josh.

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

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today marks International Nurses Day and the start of National Nursing Week, which runs May 12 to 18, so it is my honour this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a number of people from Alberta's nursing regulatory bodies. We are working closely with the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta and the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta to address nursing workforce issues in our province. Nurses play a vital role in Alberta's strong health care delivery system, and I thank them for their dedication, especially as we mark Nursing Week.

With us today are Mary-Anne Robinson, executive director, College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta; Barbara Lowe, executive director/ registrar, College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta; and Linda Stanger, executive director/registrar, College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta. I would ask our guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. As has been mentioned by other members, today is International Nurses Day and the start of National Nursing Week in Canada. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly three individuals representing this largest group of health care providers in Canada. They are Joan Lampkin from Fort Saskatchewan, Susan Gallivan from Grande Prairie, and Marie Corns from High River.

Mr. Speaker, the professionalism, dedication, and creativity of all 30,000 registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and registered psychiatric nurses across this province in all settings makes us proud of all these unsung heroes. Our nurses are essential to every aspect of health service delivery, from high-tech to high-touch care. These are the nurses who care for vulnerable Albertans in our hospitals, in clinics, in nursing homes, and in people's own homes right across the province.

I would now ask that Joan, Susan, and Marie rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: I'm going to call on the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, and would you all join with me in wishing her a happy anniversary. It's her birthday today.

Mrs. Leskiw: I see I share a birthday with Florence Nightingale.

National Nursing Week

Mrs. Leskiw: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to rise in the Assembly today to recognize the start of National Nursing Week, which runs May 12 to 18. Special events are being held throughout our province to honour nurses this week, and today, May 12, is International Nurses Day. It's celebrated around the world every May 12, the anniversary of Florence Nightingale's birthday.

This year's theme for Nursing Week is Think You Know Nursing: Take a Closer Look. There are approximately 38,500 nurses who are registered in Alberta. These dedicated health professionals provide care when and where it is needed. Nurses deliver quality health care each and every day by making the safety and well-being of their patients a top priority. They are a key part of the strong health care delivery system we have in our province today.

I'm sure I speak for all Albertans when I say thank you to all our nurses here in Alberta. I encourage everyone to salute the nurses in their communities as we give special recognition to the importance of the nursing profession during Nursing Week.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Canada Health Day

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we wish to join all Canadians in celebrating Canada Health Day. May 12 is also a historically significant date. It's the anniversary of the birth of Florence Nightingale, a pioneer in nursing and the development of public health. Canada Health Day is a national day of celebration and recognition of public health and public health workers, who have contributed to the good health of Canadians over the past 100 years.

As a doctor I've seen first-hand how public health initiatives such as vaccination programs, clean water and food sources, pasteuriza-

tion, and better living conditions have resulted in increased life expectancy, overall health, and improvements to the quality of life for all Albertans and Canadians. All of these initiatives were made with relatively small investments and have given us enormous returns.

Public health is about keeping people from getting sick in the first place. A healthy population means a healthy and vibrant economy. In recent years we have seen the emergence of new challenges for public health: new infections – SARS, MRSA, West Nile virus – growing rates of childhood and adult obesity; chronic diseases; mental health issues; and injuries, which are preventable and just happen to be the leading cause of death amongst young people. Simple changes in social behaviour are the solutions to many of these challenges: handwashing, daily exercise and rest, healthy eating, healthy and responsible habits.

In order to look to our future, let us not forget the past, and let us utilize our academic institutions, our practices, and world-class researchers to lead our nation on public health issues. Mr. Speaker, we seek to make our population the healthiest in the world, to improve access to our health care system, and to ensure its sustainability into the future. Public health workers have played and will continue to play a large part. For their efforts on behalf of all Albertans I wish to thank them.

Thank you.

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

Physician Supply

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I had the pleasure of meeting with the Professional Association of Residents of Alberta. They are advocating for increased residency positions within our province. Resident physicians are graduates of medical school undergoing required training in family medicine and speciality programs. These resident physicians reside within hospitals, working on-call shifts that can last up to 26 hours. Resident physicians are often a patient's first medical contact in hospitals and clinics throughout Alberta.

While being the front-line health care worker of today, they are also the future of health care in Alberta. Therefore, it is imperative to increase residency positions in our region. At the end of their training these residents will be licensed to practise in our communities. In order to address difficulties with physician shortages and accessibility, the Professional Association of Residents of Alberta supports building a self-sustained physician workforce. There is currently a move to increase undergraduate medical student training. As such, it is necessary to create more residency positions to ensure flexibility and practice choice. There is also a need to invest in medical educators. This will increase capacity for training and more resident physicians.

In closing, resident physicians encourage the Alberta government to achieve a self-sustained physician workforce through investment in both medical education and residency training. The fact is that we should take their advice and get moving in this direction now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Reclamation of Oil Sands Tailings Ponds

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minable oil sands strategy,

for which the Minister of Energy has lead responsibility, has policy components that say that there will be progressive, timely, and seamless reclamation of oil sands operations to self-sustaining boreal forest. It also says that environmental liabilities will not be passed on to future generations. Suncor's 2007 annual report indicates that Suncor is required by government regulation to set aside 3 cents per barrel for reclamation and cleanup on their main site. Three cents a barrel. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Is 3 cents a barrel enough to restore these mines to self-sustaining boreal forest?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, in response to that question, if we were able to take a look at the number of thousands of hectares that are under reclamation currently, I would suggest that indeed it is. It's working.

With respect to Suncor particularly, you know, on the issue around tailings ponds they have come to a point where they're nearly at closure with the first one, and the reclamation, I think, has been quite successful.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of Environment confirmed the other day, there's been one reclamation certificate issued in 35 years.

Again to the same minister: will the minister provide the government's evidence? Surely there is written evidence somewhere that 3 cents a barrel is enough to return toxic tailings ponds to self-sustaining boreal forest.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I think that the answer to that question was evident in my answer to the first question. If you would care to take a look at what Suncor is doing with their No. 1 pond now, it's coming very close to closure, and the reclamation is nearly complete.

Dr. Taft: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, we're looking for written documents here. To the same minister. Regulatory approval documents show a requirement for annual tailings management plans from oil sands operators. Will the minister table these plans for all Albertans to size up?

Thank you.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the management and ongoing operations of the tailings ponds, they come under the purview of the Energy Resources Conservation Board. We certainly will take into consideration giving the documents necessary with respect to the operations of those particular facilities.

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

Royalty Revenues

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Suncor's 2007 annual report states that potential improvement to the government's collection, verification, and reporting of provincial royalties pose a "material risk" to that company's revenues. The Auditor General, the Royalty Review Panel, and, more recently, Peter Valentine all highlighted serious weaknesses in the government's royalties collection system. There is a considerable risk that because of information gaps and auditing delays Albertans are not and have not been getting their fair share of royalties. To the same minister: does the minister maintain that the government is collecting all it should and has been collecting all it should in royalties?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, we certainly are. There isn't any indication in any of the documents that have been produced by the Auditor General or Mr. Valentine or others, for that matter, that would indicate that under the policies of the day the government is not collecting all of the royalties due to Albertans with respect to our resources.

Dr. Taft: To the same minister: how can this minister be so sure about how well our royalty system was performing when oil sands companies themselves are noting in formal documents that there is room for improvement in our royalty system?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, you've heard me say in this Assembly before that there is always room for improvement. Most certainly, if you look at the work that was done by the Auditor General or, for that matter, by Mr. Valentine, we have agreed that all of the proposed changes that they have brought forward with respect to their reports will be done in due course.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Again to the same minister: doesn't this minister see that the material risk that Suncor reveals in its documents indicates that this government has been running a damaged royalty collection system for years?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again the same answer applies. We have taken the recommendation seriously. We have indicated to this House and publicly that we will comply with the recommendations, both the written recommendations of the Auditor General and the recommendations from Mr. Valentine. Indeed, in due course we will comply with all of those recommendations.

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

Nursing Shortage

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May 12 commemorates International Nurses Day, and we are fortunate to have several nurses with us in the gallery today. The desperate shortage of nurses in this province is what I would like to question the health minister on today. The minister has promised to boost the annual graduation rate of registered nurses up to 2,000 in just four years even though doubt has been raised on all sides about how that can actually be done. Will the minister explain to everyone here today what specific action will be taken to increase the student intake this September to make that goal a reality?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the number of seats for nurses falls under the purview of Advanced Education and Technology. Certainly, the health workforce action plan, that we have developed in consultation not only with the nurses and the health care providers but also Health and Wellness, has identified a number of areas where we will be able to add nursing spaces across the province. Campus Alberta is ready to meet the target of 2,000 graduates by 2012.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How will the health minister be working with the minister of advanced education to increase funding for the province's RN education programs to hire additional faculty and increase capacity by this fall? I wait with interest to see who gets up.

Mr. Horner: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, this falls under the purview of Advanced Education and Technology. Certainly, last week we had my budget estimates in this House, and we debated them thoroughly and had some very good discussions about where the dollars were going and how they were going to achieve the goals which are in our business plan.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pretty sure this question falls under the purview of the health minister and only the health minister, but one never knows. What is the minister doing to help the nurses who want to retire and deserve to retire yet are being asked to work extra shifts because of the desperate need for nurses in hospitals in the province of Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure what this minister or any minister could do to prevent someone from retiring. When someone is at an age that they decide they want to retire and it's in their best interest, that's clearly up to them. However, we should be ensuring that there is an adequate supply of nurses so that when nurses decide that it's time to retire, we have nurses that are prepared to step in.

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

Automobile Insurance

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, next month the toothless industry lapdog known as the Automobile Insurance Rate Board will meet to determine how much Alberta drivers are going to be gouged in the aftermath of the government's failed attempt to cap damages to accident victims. Alberta drivers pay some of the highest premiums in western Canada, and industry experts predict that these premiums will rise by another 25 per cent. Meanwhile, Manitoba's NDP government's public insurance plan is giving their drivers a hundred dollar rebate. My question is to the minister of finance. Will the minister admit that as a result of the province's cap on soft tissue injuries being struck down, Alberta drivers are facing another large rate hike in their insurance rates?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, that's highly speculative. It's advertised that the insurance rate board will meet in Calgary on June 18 and 19. There will be an evaluation of the material that's provided for them at that time, and at that point they will determine it.

But let's reflect back to before 2004, when young drivers couldn't get insurance. Let's reflect that at the height of the premiums at that time how many of us received significant complaints before we put in that soft cap, which, in fact, enabled many of the higher needs, like loss of work and medical injuries, to be accommodated. It's been very satisfactory.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, will the minister admit that the only way a private insurance system could match rates in provinces that have public auto insurance is by limiting the rights of people who have suffered excruciatingly painful soft tissue injuries?

2:00

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, there's a variance between the menus of a variety of companies, a variety of insurance products on the market in every single province. To make that kind of statement would be not only foolish; it might certainly be inaccurate.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister's excuses are getting shorter than the Deputy Premier's hair. I want to ask: when is this minister going to stand up for Alberta drivers and step in and make sure that public auto is put in place in order to provide the lowest possible rates for Alberta drivers?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the public management of auto insurance premiums and auto insurance does not guarantee that it costs the public less. I believe there's significantly more cost in British Columbia. If those costs are borne by the public through the rates or through the public purse, clearly one or the other, it's a cost that the public will bear. In 2007 Alberta Finance and Enterprise reviewed all components of the auto insurance industry. The recommendations will come forward in due course.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Child Care Funding

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the hon. Premier. During the recent election commitments were made to help families. One of the commitments was the creation of a substantial number of new child care spaces. Can you tell us when these will come into effect?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, last week's announcement has initiated the plan to increase child care spaces in the province of Alberta. We're following up at the present time in this House on approval through the budget process for tax credits for families. We will also of course continue looking at very specific legislation to ensure that all of the commitments that we made with respect to families during the recently held election will be adhered to, and we will deliver on our commitments.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. The Premier's target of 14,000 new child care spaces is very ambitious and should be applauded. My question: is this achievable, and how will your plan accomplish this goal?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is right: supporting the creation of 14,000 child care spaces is very ambitious. But I am confident, given the quality of people that we have in the child care sector, that we are going to do it. We're very committed to meeting that objective. We have a three-year investment of \$242 million going towards that target. Our plan is based on parental choice and partnership, and it provides a real range of tools for communities to address staffing and affordability and accessibility. I'm very positive and confident that working with our community partners, we will meet those objectives.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: with the creation of these new 14,000 spaces can you tell us how the province is going to staff these with our current labour shortage?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recruiting and retaining qualified staff is a very important component of making child care more available to Alberta families. We know that, and that's why so much of the plan is based on staffing initiatives. We've increased wage top-ups by 60 per cent and introduced a new wage supplement for out of school staff. We're continuing and expanding the staff attraction incentive allowances and extending that to our out of school programs as well. We also have other initiatives, including bursaries, scholarships, and launching of a marketing campaign. It will all help to attract people to the field.

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

Farm Safety

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. The director of the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research and other injury prevention experts in North America agree: farm legislation works. It reduces injury and deaths in farm workers, including children. The number of fatalities and serious injuries from farm accidents in the province is far too high, and safety legislation would go a long way in reducing that number. The evidence is in. To the minister: given that in British Columbia after the institution of farm safety legislation farm accident rates dropped by almost 50 per cent, including child deaths, will the minister acknowledge that farm safety legislation in other jurisdictions has reduced farm injuries and deaths?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that probably the question was sparked by another tragedy that happened on Saturday. If we can all stop and think just a little bit about what that Mother's Day must have been for that family. This was an accident, I think, that happened on a farm but was not a farm-related accident. My thoughts and prayers go out to the family at this time, and I'm sure I can speak for everyone in this House.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Minister, these accidents are preventable. That is the one thing we do know about any injury accidents. Is it the minister's and his government's opinion that Alberta is unique in Canada and that legislation will not decrease the serious injuries and deaths of farm workers and children?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, just to go back to the original question from the hon. member quoting the B.C. statistics, I would really like to see some written proof or some study, proof that that actually did happen. If you just try and compare Alberta and B.C., most farms in Alberta are one to three people. B.C. has farms with a hundred people, perhaps, in orchards and whatnot. We're comparing apples to oranges.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark said today: injuries are preventable. There's a real opportunity for this government to show leadership, and since provinces across the country have stood up for health and safety for farm workers, when will the Alberta government show the same respect, protection for safety and standards guaranteed under the Constitution? Are you waiting for the Supreme Court of Canada to rule, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, perhaps when I get some indication from the agriculture industry that they want this type of legislation, I might be tempted to respond, but until this time I'm not waiting on the Supreme Court or anyone else. It's when the people that are actually involved want something that I think probably we should look at it. These tragic accidents can happen anywhere. It could be on the farm. It could be on the street. It could be on your lane, on your street, or in your driveway. Can we make legislation that'll stop these? I wish we could.

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

Child Care Funding

(continued)

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recent months we've heard a great deal about out of school care. Concerns have been raised about closure and parents not having anywhere for their children to go to. My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. What are you doing to address this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell everyone in the House that Friday's announcement had all kinds of good news for out of school care programs. Following up on commitments that we've made in the last couple of months, we've extended provincial funding to out of school by introducing wage supplements for the staff, offering subsidies for parents, and making available space creation incentives to increase the number of programs. The feedback has been very positive, and expectations are high that these initiatives will be effective in improving access to out of school programs for our children.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental to the same minister. We've heard a lot about the benefits of having programs close to school sites. Does your plan consider these benefits?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that we have considered those benefits, and I think most people would agree that having child care programs in schools or in close proximity to schools just makes a lot of sense and is a good idea. Our child and family services authorities will be taking the lead on community consultations and exploring options with our school jurisdictions. I think one of the highlights of Friday's announcements was that \$42 million will be available for modulars for communities where that might be a good local solution.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

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

Joint Worksite Health and Safety Committees

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, 154 workers in Alberta died in 2007 from on-the-job incidents. That was a 24 per cent increase from the previous year. Joint health and safety committees are at least one step forward to reduce this terrible death toll. My

first question is to the minister responsible for Alberta labour. Did the government order a joint health and safety committee for the CNRL Horizon oil sands project before the two Chinese temporary foreign workers were tragically killed there last April?

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

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not aware that we have. I would have to find out and report back to the member asking the question.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister: why has the government not designated one single workplace for a joint health and safety committee in over 20 years in this province?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are very, very satisfied generally that what's happening out in the working public is heading in the right direction. Our workforce accidents are dropping. We recognize that this year's numbers in terms of workforce fatalities have gone up over the previous year, but we're still average or slightly below average to what has happened in the past. Having said that, we want to ensure the best in terms of safety for our workers, and we will continue to work with our various stakeholders to ensure that our numbers keep on going down rather than up.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, numbers are going up, not down.

Given that all other Canadian jurisdictions make it mandatory for joint health and safety committees, when will this government introduce changes to the Occupational Health and Safety Act to make joint committees mandatory in workplaces of 20 workers or more?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, you know, we need to look at that. We need to look at the impact that that would have. My understanding is that there are a lot of positive things happening out there where we are working with the employers and the employees, and we'll keep on looking at those areas to see where we can make improvements.

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

Child Care Funding

(continued)

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been receiving letters from young moms in Calgary-Bow who want to rejoin the paid workforce, but they've been unable to find daycare or affordable daycare. To the minister of children's services: why has the government decided not to increase income thresholds, which would have made subsidies available to more middle-income people? What do you say to people who believe you haven't addressed the affordability side?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of our initiatives will have an impact, I think, on both accessibility and affordability.

But with respect to subsidies, we decided to continue supporting families that needed our help the most and, as mentioned, to also extend subsidies to parents of children using out of school care. Just to give you an example of the level of subsidies, a two-parent family with one infant and one preschooler with an income of \$39,600 qualifies for a full subsidy of \$1,174 a month. The same family will continue to qualify for a partial subsidy until their income goes to \$79,000. We will continue to monitor our thresholds and make adjustments if they are necessary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: does this mean that parents can expect that the parental fees are going to be going up?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to clarify that we don't set the fees. Rather, they are set by the operators. But I can say that with the new funding we announced, we expect the pressures facing operators to go down. With more spaces created and more tools available for our community partners, we should be addressing the pressures that the sector has identified.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. To the same minister. I've seen studies that show that the number one preferable option for parents is to be a stay-at-home mom. Why does this plan not include an increase in the stay-at-home subsidy?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, our stay-at-home subsidy continues to offer a subsidy of up to a hundred dollars a month to eligible stay-at-home parents, and that is to offset the cost of enrolling their child in a nursery school or in approved early childhood development programs. In most cases that subsidy totally covers the cost of enrolling their child in these programs, and that's why we left the funding at the same level.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Calgary Urban Campus Project

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary urban campus is still waiting on the government's commitment. Meanwhile, a representative for the east village redevelopment project, the site where the urban campus is proposed, has said that if there's no commitment for the urban campus, they will find another use for the land. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Can the minister explain why it has taken so long to make a decision on this?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is no decision yet to be made. In terms of the land with the city of Calgary, as I think I've mentioned in this House before, as far as I know, there are no timelines on the land that was attributed to the urban campus. We're waiting for the programming decisions to come forward from the institutions themselves.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister has said that he is not sure if the urban campus is the right answer for Calgary's

space needs. If that is the case, where else in the city has the minister been looking at adding additional spaces?

Mr. Horner: Oh, excellent question, Mr. Speaker. We've actually been looking at the SAIT campus, where we think we may be looking at an expansion of several thousand spaces. We're currently looking at phase 2 of the Bow Valley expansion, which also is in the thousands. Mount Royal College also has some expansion plans that they need to put in place. The University of Calgary's ISEEE building, which we announced last year, is looking at another thousand spaces for students in Calgary. So we are working on addressing that situation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the University of Calgary has already spent over \$1 million on initial planning for the urban campus project and that the land set aside for the project will be used for something else if no commitment is made, when can Calgarians and all Albertans expect a decision to be made so that more people can access postsecondary education without having to leave the province?

Mr. Horner: Well, as I said just previously, Mr. Speaker, we are working on access in Calgary as we speak. We're working on a number of different areas and a number of different institutions. The only institution that puts the urban campus as its number one priority today is the University of Calgary. There are a number of partners involved in that urban campus concept, and we're talking to all of them. In fact, we're taking a leading role in the planning of the programming and working with the institutions to determine exactly what it is urban campus might be composed of.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Aboriginal Women's Issues

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday 200 people participated in the Stolen Sisters walk in Edmonton to raise awareness of the fact that more than 500 western Canadian aboriginal women have been murdered or gone missing in recent decades. Provincial and national aboriginal women's summits have made recommendations that governments do more to assist aboriginal women to participate in the economy and to practise and preserve their cultures. At the national summit the Member for Lesser Slave Lake declared that the government supported those recommendations, but nearly a year later no action has been taken. My question is to the minister of aboriginal affairs. Why has this government done nothing to implement these recommendations to improve the status of aboriginal women after promising to do so?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we have done quite a bit. It should be a reminder to all here that we did provide a grant of \$15,000 last year to the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women and also to the same group about another \$50,000 in January of this year to work on these very issues, and we are doing that in tandem with them now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, that's great, but given that there's still no mention of women in the government's aboriginal policy, will the minister admit that this absence represents his government's negligence and neglect of this important group of Albertans?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there's no negligence whatsoever. In fact, I was just at the special Esquao awards. I don't recall if the member asking the question was there as well, but we saluted aboriginal women for what they were doing, and we tried to give them the hope and the encouragement to continue in that vein. We as a government are also working on that, but the issues, I am finding, are extremely complex, and that's one reason we'll be addressing them at the conference at the end of July with other ministers from across Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this member has been at the Esquao awards, presenting awards, for nine consecutive years, just so the minister knows.

I want to know if the minister will commit to implementing these recommendations and give the House a clear timetable for doing so.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, as soon as we have them all formulated and the proper consultations have been taken, Mr. Speaker, I'll be happy to specifically answer those that we're able to act on immediately and those that might require some further study. But rest assured that we are supportive of aboriginal women, and I as minister will do everything I can to help them along the way.

Thank you.

World Trade Organization Negotiations

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, the importance of agriculture in this province cannot be overstated. Without agriculture Alberta would be a very different place both economically and socially. One key to Alberta's agricultural success is the global market, and that success is heavily dependent on the trade environment shaped by the World Trade Organization. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. What's the government of Alberta doing to ensure our province is well represented during the current WTO negotiations on agriculture?

2:20

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again the WTO negotiations have reached a critical stage. Throughout these negotiations Alberta has been there every step of the way to advocate for the Alberta producers. I just returned from a series of meetings in Geneva, which were, to my point of view, extremely successful and very productive.

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: what was accomplished at these meetings?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Among others, I was able to meet with the ambassadors of Canada, the United States, Australia, Indonesia, China, Brazil, the European Union, and Argentina. With the U.S. ambassador, for instance, we talked about the importance of reducing domestic subsidies and our concerns about the U.S. farm bill. With our own ambassador I pushed for

Canada to get substantial agreement on market access for our products, including beef, pork, canola, wheat, and barley.

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: what will the successful WTO negotiations mean for Alberta producers, and when can we expect the negotiations to conclude?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, a favourable WTO outcome could mean an increase of \$3 billion in exports annually for Alberta, so it's not any small potatoes. Enormous progress has been made on the agricultural file in the last year, and decisions on agriculture and industrial tariffs will be concluded at the end of this year. This will certainly pave the way for all other aspects of the negotiations to be concluded in a due and timely fashion.

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

Unified Family Court

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although unified family courts exist in most other Canadian jurisdictions, Alberta has not yet implemented the recommendations of the Graham report. Despite the fact that an implementation committee was implemented in 2003, five years later there has been no progress on a unified family court. To the Minister of Justice. Unified family courts are endorsed by academics, practitioners, and, most importantly, litigants across Canada. When will Alberta create an integrated, single-forum court for those dealing with family breakdown?

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I enjoyed the discussion that we had in the Legislature last week with respect to our approach to family law. The Department of Justice has been doing a lot of work to develop a very comprehensive set of services that are available to people that are dealing with very difficult family breakups, and we continue to take that path.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the central roles of this ministry is to create access to courts for ordinary Albertans. Despite her answer why, then, are we currently denying litigants a more appropriate forum for their family disputes?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that unified family courts are one approach that can be taken on this matter. I think there are also a number of other avenues that can be taken. We are pursuing those. I don't believe that people are denied legal services in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As was brought up, we did have a discussion on unified family courts; nonetheless, why does it appear that this legal model has been put on the shelf despite your comments here today?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe that I said it had been put on the shelf. I think it's one alternative. We have a lot of confidence that the courts in Alberta are able to deal with the issues that come before the courts with respect to family breakup.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Fire Prevention

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Springtime brings with it increased fire hazards, which can pose a risk to our family's homes and communities. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Can the minister tell us what is being done to educate Albertans on the importance of fire safety?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Fires can cause serious injury and millions of dollars' worth of damage. Even the smallest fire can spread into an uncontrollable or unmanageable fire. Most fires are preventable, and education is the key in that prevention. My department, all firefighters are working hard to educate individuals, to educate Albertans about fire safety, about camping, about using barbeques, about working in their yards. I urge Albertans to check our website and to get the critical information necessary to help keep our families and communities safe.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Fire safety is a concern for the summer months, whether you are at home or on a vacation in the great Canadian outdoors. With the May long weekend rapidly approaching, can the minister explain what this government is doing to minimize the human cost of wildfires in Alberta that can threaten towns and our communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for that important question. With the May long weekend approaching – you're absolutely right – prevention of wildfires is a high priority. Forty per cent of all the forest fires in Alberta have a human cause. Our department, Sustainable Resource Development, has developed a group of educational materials called FireSmart. They're available on our website. They're for cottages, homes, and also campers. They're also on the new respect the land web page that we've talked about before, and also they'll be handed out by our staff at the various entrances to parks and campgrounds this long weekend.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Mr. Xiao: No further supplemental.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Contracted Human Service Agencies

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again human services agencies are being forced to bring their plight to the public. The discrepancies in wages have not been sufficiently addressed by this government despite vows to do so, and this is worsening the staffing situation by the day. The Minister of Children and Youth Services said on November 6 that she was working with the contracted agencies and that their needs would be addressed in this year's budget. To the minister: why was the result of these consultations, which no doubt stressed the dire need for more funding immediately, not reflected in this year's budget?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, they were. Those consultations led to a \$10 million investment in the fall, which was rolled out in January and February, and then as well \$11 million in this year's budget and the commitment to have another \$11 million next year. But I just want to reiterate – I know I told this House last week – that I do have a meeting set up with the contracted agencies, our authorities who contract with them, and we will thoroughly go through their issues and put together an action plan for both short-term solutions and long-term solutions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Just this past week we heard of the Catholic youth services having a 200 per cent turnover and an inability like so many other organizations to keep staff. Why is this government continuing the practice of paying its own staff upwards of double the wages of the nonprofits that it contracts out?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, we are aware that there is a gap, and we have made a commitment to take a look at that gap and narrow it. But, again, I would just reiterate that I am spending a day with them, and we will take a serious look at these issues. I've mentioned this before, too, that I continue to meet with them on a regular basis, and I'm very committed to helping find solutions with them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. It is a very large gap; for example, social workers contracted directly by the government out of university, \$55,000. Contracted-out agencies can only afford \$35,000. The minister has of her own admission been in consultation with these agencies for months now. How many more months will it take before this crisis is resolved?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am a person of action; I'll say that. I don't generally just consult and consult and consult. Like you said, I consulted with those groups back in November, and it was within weeks that we had the announcement that we would have an injection, and we did follow through on that. So again I would just say that I'm dead serious about getting together for a day on May 27 and taking a serious look at their issues and seeing what we can come up with for concrete plans for short-term and long-term solutions.

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

Municipal Elections

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been talking to municipal councillors and constituents who have indicated they want four-year terms for the municipal elections. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What can be done?

2:30

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, after each municipal election we review the Local Authorities Election Act, and that review will take place this year. There are challenges in the election process, and we will be examining those challenges that may have occurred. But this is also an opportunity to look at new ideas such as the change in the term from three to four years. That may be looked at at the same time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. What will be the focus of this review?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we look at all the elements of the act. We look at the integrity of the act, the process, also the accountability, that the people that can vote are voting, that those who are voting are voting in the right place. This is an opportunity to listen to Albertans, address local needs, and, most importantly, improve the act so that people are confident in local elections.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. When will this review be completed?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, my parliamentary assistant will review the act. We will also have a committee, and that committee will be in place some time very soon. Also, we are going to hold public meetings. In the last round I believe there were 19 public meetings that were held throughout the province. This gives an opportunity for Albertans to be heard. I'm expecting that that report will be on my desk by the end of the year.

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

Financial Investment and Planning Advisory Commission

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Last August the government set up the Financial Investment and Planning Advisory Commission to recommend new and better ways to invest and save our money. This report has not been made public, and looking at the finance minister's budget, it doesn't seem as if the report was even looked at. Instead, we have more promises for more committees to do more reviews. My question is to the minister of finance. When will the minister release and implement the recommendations made by this advisory committee?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On at least one previous occasion in this House I've indicated that Jack Mintz, who was part of leading this and authoring the report, has met with me on a couple of occasions. We've talked about the report. We've been looking at some of the options contained within the report. When we have an opportunity to take it through the process here, then undoubtedly it will be released. Our government has to give very fair consideration to it. Part of my mandate letter, that was released earlier, talks about an investment and savings strategy this year. That will be presented.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: is this minister hesitating on taking the advice of this blue-ribbon panel because the committee chairman has stated publicly that the government is not managing its money properly and has openly criticized the rampant spending in this year's budget?

Ms Evans: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. I have the utmost confidence in this particular gentleman. His report was done with a number of well-selected and well-experienced people. Clearly, the reason for the delay has nothing to do with either the quality of the report or the people that were part of authoring it.

Ms Blakeman: I look forward to seeing it, then.

Again to the same minister: given that Alberta has seen \$106 billion in resource revenue in the last 20 years but has invested less than half of that amount, does this minister agree that we need a savings plan in this province?

Ms Evans: Well, given that my Premier has asked me for a savings plan, no doubt I agree. Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. In the last few years we've put significant monies into savings: in the last three and a half years, \$7 billion. There's a budgeted amount for inflation this year in the heritage fund of \$279 million. We realize that that will just, in fact, inflation-proof the heritage fund, but we will look at all of the options. Our own surplus dollars, higher than expected, give at least a third to savings every year. We have been making a contribution to savings as well as building an unprecedented amount of infrastructure.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Sustainable Resource Development Innovations

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When our new government was sworn in, the Premier stated that one of the priorities of this new government was to increase innovation in Alberta. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. As his mandate letter from the Premier includes a directive to increase innovation, can he show us where his ministry is showing innovation in information management and new communications tools to better serve his diverse clients, especially Albertans from small communities and rural areas?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member for Lethbridge-West for such a timely question. By complete coincidence I'm sure, today, May 12, is the first time in the history of Canada that anglers can actually purchase their licences online at a website. Alberta's 220,000 anglers can go on their computer and on the website 24/7. No virtual fish yet, Brian, but we'll work on it. In June the 75,000 hunters can get their hunting draws there, and in August the hunting licences will be available. We have a saying that a stream without a fisherman is a stream without a friend, and we're in the business of creating more friends.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. The online fishing initiative is commendable and will serve fish and wildlife well, but what is his department doing with respect to forestry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, another timely question. Just this month our forestry division has completed a

three-year project field testing new software that will improve the identification and mapping of wetlands. By identifying wetlands for planners, the tool will protect the integrity of our watersheds. It'll help us achieve our goals under the Water for Life strategy. Work is proceeding to use this software in all of the foothills area, and our intention is that these maps will be available for anybody working in the foothills area before they go out there so that they'll know in advance where the wetlands are.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: what kind of innovative efforts is his department making to communicate to Albertans about public lands policy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another amazingly timely question. Just last week we launched our new respect the land Facebook page. In less than two weeks we've had over 300 people sign up for it. It'll allow younger people to share their experiences when they're in our backcountry and forests and parklands. Also, of course, it allows us to get safety messages out and important messages about conservation and stewardship of resources.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Crime in First Nations Communities

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two of the four First Nations communities at Hobbema are in my constituency, and as we all know, there have been some problems with drug and alcohol abuse and gang violence there recently. My question is for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. The minister may know that I'm planning on meeting down there with some of the people in the community and also the Safe Communities Secretariat. My concern is that once these issues kind of fall off the front page, we tend to slack off a little bit. I'm just wondering if she can advise as to what specific actions her department is taking to deal with these issues at Hobbema.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to share some information with this House today with respect to progress that we've been making in Hobbema and would like to take this opportunity to celebrate the work that the safe communities task force is doing because we're not only involved when it is on the front page. There is going to be a meeting between the RCMP, all four of the First Nations, and the crime prevention and safe communities secretariat on Wednesday and on Thursday to begin to deal with identifying, at the community's behest, what their needs are to make their community safer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Well, thank you. My first supplemental is for the same minister. Of course, there are issues in other communities as well, so I'm wondering in more general terms what initiatives are being considered province-wide to deal with crime in First Nations communities.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the discussions that has been very important around some of these issues with respect to not only First Nations communities but other communities in Alberta as well is that we need to be looking at the children. We need to talk to children about the risks in their communities, try to deal with drug addiction, try to deal with criminal behaviour, and create a community where people feel safe enough to discuss this. So we're very pleased that we're going to be able to work on a pilot project in Hobbema. We're also going to be able to work on pilot projects in other parts of the province to achieve the same thing.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, sir. I have a second supplemental for the Solicitor General. I'm aware that we have some extra resources going into policing in First Nations communities, but I would like to be reassured that he feels that these are sufficient, and I'd like to know exactly what those resources are.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, I visited the Hobbema community today and met with the local RCMP detachment members and some elders to discuss their issues. It's our intention to continue to support that community on a number of fronts. Recently we put 12 additional RCMP members in the local detachment, which brings that total complement to 42. We've also established an integrated policing model for the area, and we continue to fund the Hobbema cadet corps, which now has close to a thousand members, for the four nations at Hobbema. The cadet corps gives youth an alternative to gangs and a criminal lifestyle. We continue to fund local crime prevention programs, such as the local victims' services unit.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 110 questions and responses.

In 30 seconds from now I'll call on the additional members to participate in Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

David Thompson Brigade

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today to advise the Assembly about the David Thompson bicentennial canoe brigade. The brigade, consisting of some 16 voyageur canoes with crews of six to 10 paddlers in each canoe, left Rocky Mountain House on Saturday morning destined for Thunder Bay. They anticipate arriving at the historic Fort William on Lake Superior on July 12 after travelling over 2,000 miles in 63 days.

The canoe brigade will commemorate the 1808 voyage of David Thompson, his Métis wife, Charlotte Small, and their two children returning from the historic crossing of the Continental Divide over the Howse Pass to establish Kootenae House on the Columbia River the previous year.

David Thompson as a fur trader, surveyor, and map maker with the North West Company travelled over 50,000 miles charting the northern half of the North American continent from Churchill Factory on Hudson's Bay to Lake Athabasca, the headwaters of the Mississippi River to the mouth of the Columbia River over the 28-year period from 1784 to 1912. David Thompson was known to the

natives whom he had befriended as Koo Koo Sint, the man who looks at the stars.

The canoe brigade stopped in Drayton Valley on Sunday, will stop in Devon on Tuesday, and will travel through Edmonton on Wednesday, overnighing in Fort Saskatchewan that evening. They will then travel on to Victoria Settlement on May 15 and Elk Point, stopping at Fort George and Buckingham House for a rest stop on the long weekend, where more festivities are planned.

I know that several of my colleagues in the House have already participated or plan to participate in the festivities commemorating 200 years of exploration throughout what was then the uncharted Rupert's Land and is now the province of Alberta, western Canada, and the northwest United States. Had Thompson been a few months earlier in arriving at the confluence of the Columbia River with the Pacific Ocean, the political geography of North America might have been quite different than it is today.

Colleagues in the Assembly, please join me in a salute to this historic pathfinder, surveyor, and explorer of our great nation.

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

Corporal Michael Starker

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is with deepest sympathy that I rise to honour the life of Corporal Michael Starker, a reservist with the 15 Field Ambulance Regiment. Like so many others in the armed services whom we mourn, Corporal Starker died while serving our country at the young age of 36. He was a paramedic with the city of Calgary Emergency Medical Services and, before that, an EMT with Kananaskis Emergency Services. To Corporal Starker's wife, Nicole, their family, and the countless friends he leaves behind I offer my condolences and sympathy. Alberta and Canada have truly lost a young man of courage and honour.

Corporal Starker is described as a man with a heart of gold. He made the ultimate sacrifice while working to create a better life for others. Let us never forget him or the other courageous men and women of the Canadian Forces who risk their lives every day to defend freedom and to honour Canadian values.

Our prayers and thoughts go out to those Corporal Starker leaves behind. He will be sadly missed, but his memory and his life will not be forgotten.

Mr. Speaker and members of this Assembly, please join me in expressing our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Corporal Starker.

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

Child Care Awards of Excellence

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday I attended the 2008 Alberta child care professional awards of excellence event. The recipients of these provincial awards are recognized for their professionalism and personal dedication to the development of Alberta children in their early ages. The award recipients are nominated and selected from various communities across our province. They are Jennifer Bly of Edmonton, Patricia Young of Pincher Creek, Robin Matrai of Calgary, Tracy Davis-McMillan of Innisfail, Lynne Ings of Rimbey, Lynette Bowers of Grande Prairie, Shirley Webster of Beaumont, Jan Wregget of Airdire, Malgorzata Lawicka of Edmonton, and Rose Maynard of Calgary, who works at the Alexandra playschool in my constituency. Congratulations and thank you to all recipients for their outstanding contributions to our great Alberta. An investment in child care is one of the high priorities for our hard-working constituents.

Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to say that last week was truly a great week for child care in the province of Alberta. First, we recognized some outstanding professionals who have made a significant contribution to the learning and development of Alberta children. Secondly, the government announced an exciting plan, creating child care choices, with \$242 million of social investment, which will see the creation of 14,000 child care spaces by 2011. These spaces will fall within a number of different settings, such as family day homes, nursery schools, daycares, and out-of-school programs.

Mr. Speaker, our government has always believed that parenting plays a vital role in the creation of a vibrant and strong society, one that we have strongly supported with excellent and reliable child care choices. I am proud to belong to a team that takes the interests of Albertans to the heart.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions today. The first one reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Edmonton, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to take immediate steps to prevent the 43-hectare Qualico gravel pit operation proposed for southwest Edmonton from going ahead as it will have significant adverse effects, such as lower property values and a decline in quality of life due to noise, pollution and heavy truck traffic.

My second petition this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, is from citizens from all over the province. There are at least 100 of them here, and this adds to the thousands that are signing this petition. This petition reads:

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-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here signed by a number of concerned citizens from Stony Plain, Blackfoot, Edmonton, Onoway, Spruce Grove, Lethbridge, and Grande Prairie who also are calling for an independent public inquiry into the government's involvement with the LAPP, the public service pension plan, and the Alberta teachers' retirement fund.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I actually have three different petitions, but they're all on the same subject, and that is, like my colleagues', on behalf of a number of individuals throughout Alberta: Calgary, Cold Lake, Bonnyville, Edmonton, Morinville, a number of places. All of them are interested in the government commissioning an independent inquiry into the LAPP, the public service pension plan, and the Alberta teachers' retirement fund.

My second petition is signed by residents from Sherwood Park, Edmonton, Calgary, St. Albert, Stony Plain, and a number of other locations, asking the government to "introduce legislation to have

midwife-attended homebirths funded by Alberta Health Care.” It sounds like that might actually be in the works.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by Albertans from Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Sherwood Park. It reads:

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.

Thanks.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a number of signatures from throughout central and northern Alberta calling upon 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.

I have a second petition signed by primarily Calgarians calling upon the Legislative Assembly to “pass legislation that will prohibit emotional bullying and psychological harassment in the workplace.” Thirty-six more signatures.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by Albertans, predominantly from Edmonton and St. Albert, also calling for a public inquiry into the Alberta government’s administration of or involvement with the LAPP, the public service pension plan, and the Alberta teachers’ retirement fund.

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 30 and after having provided your office with the appropriate notice, I wish to inform you and the House that upon the completion of the daily Routine, I’ll move to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to hold an emergency debate on a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the tailings ponds created by the tar sands industry and the potential for an environmental disaster due to them.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First, I’d like to table the appropriate number of copies of a booklet from Total E&P Canada providing details of its Joslyn mine project in the tar sands. I’m tabling a page of this which details the technology Total will use to limit the project’s environmental impact with respect to tailings ponds.

The second document describes a dry tailings process which is developed by bitumen resources incorporated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings today, but the first one is a very important tabling. I’m extremely proud of it. I’m tabling the appropriate number of copies of the pin and award banquet for the Ironworkers local 720 in which my uncle Jack Blakeman received his 50-year pin. My cousin Jack Jr. and my brothers Robert and Richard all received their 25-year pins for working as ironworkers. I’m very proud of that.

My second tabling is a series of tablings that have been off-requested by the Premier. I did try to do this in the fall but was prohibited because the government adjourned and I wasn’t able to table them. So here we go. We have the appropriate number of copies of the media releases that the Official Opposition did on promoting the importance of strong environmental law. I have the appropriate number of copies of the approval from the LAO on the content and the script that was used in the radio ads and the actual bill for \$11,720, which compares in an interesting way to the \$25 million that the government is spending for ostensibly the same thing.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three sets of tablings in order of attendance over the weekend. The first is from the Canadian Parks for Tomorrow 40th anniversary conference program. The theme was Assessing Change, Accomplishment, and Challenge in Canadian Parks and Protected Areas. This took place over the weekend at the University of Calgary in Calgary-Varsity.

The second tabling has to do with the CNIB Visions Luncheon 2008 at which we were the guests of Glen and Rita Popowich, whose daughter Rhonda has a young child with vision difficulties. It was our pleasure to attend and support the CNIB.

My third and final tabling for today is a program sponsored by the First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Calgary. The topic of a panel discussion was spiritual solutions to ending homelessness. The panelists were Wayne Stewart, Reverend Helen Smith, and David Stevens. It was a very enlightening presentation.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today, if I may. First of all, the appropriate number of copies of How to Fill in the Blanks: A Nursing Care Plan for Nursing in Alberta, developed by the United Nurses of Alberta. It acknowledges our need to educate more nurses for the future in the province of Alberta but also notes that that is a long-term solution and proposes some short- and mid-term solutions to get us to the point where we’re actually graduating more nurses in the province.

I also have here the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Bob McDonough of Calgary requesting another PET scan in Calgary. PET scans are performed to detect cancer, determine how much cancer has spread in the body, assess the effectiveness of treatment plans, determine if the cancer has returned, et cetera, et cetera. He notes that Edmonton has two of these machines while Calgary has only one and says, “With a greater population, it is only right that Calgary receive more of these machines,” that the usual

wait time to get a PET test in Calgary is six weeks, “a long time if you’re waiting to find out about your cancer.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings this afternoon. The first is on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton–Riverview regarding his questions in question period today. The first one would be pages 20, 25, and 26 of the 2007 annual report from Suncor Energy.

My second series of tablings this afternoon are letters from constituents. These constituents include Lawrence Kaban, Donald Fred Sandberg, Glen Fargey, Robert Daum, Frank Leszczynski, Miyo Bly, Jeff Pearson, Maxine Mayer, Justin Hackenschmidt, and Angela Muir. All of these constituents of Edmonton–Gold Bar would like to see changes to the labour laws to make them fairer for working people.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m tabling these on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition. I’m tabling five copies of a letter from a student at west Edmonton Christian school, Shawny Adrian. As he mentioned in the introduction, she writes:

I have one thing that concerns me: healthcare. People sometimes have to wait for 8 hours just to get some medication or a sling! That is absolutely outrageous!

Request for Emergency Debate

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton–Highlands–Norwood on a Standing Order 30 application.

Safety of Oil Sands Tailings Ponds

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to hold an emergency debate on a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the tailings ponds created by the oil sands industry and the potential for an environmental disaster due to them.

Do you want me to speak now to the urgency, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Absolutely.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thank you. Then I’ll do that. Mr. Speaker, I’d like to indicate that Standing Order 30(7)(a) states that motions under this standing order “must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration.”

Mr. Speaker, I would argue that the existence of large tailings ponds containing very large volumes of toxic material, some of them directly adjacent to the Athabasca River, has the potential for creating a disastrous situation and constitutes a genuine emergency which requires immediate and urgent consideration. I would argue that the recent deaths of 500 ducks on the Syncrude tailings ponds points to the government’s failure to prevent significant environmental damage to wildlife due to oil sands tailings ponds. These ponds represent an enormous risk to the environment and to public health. A breach of the walls of the dikes, whether by accident or design, would result in an environmental catastrophe previously unheard of in Alberta, polluting the Athabasca River and all of the ecosystems downstream, including very sensitive marshes and other wetland areas around Fort Chipewyan and right on through to the Arctic Ocean.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, every day the tar sands create enough tailings to fill 720 Olympic-sized swimming pools. With projections for increased development this number will only continue to grow and far faster than the decommissioning of existing wet tailings ponds. The government does continue to approve projects. It will create additional liquid tailings that are already contaminating our environment at an uncontrolled pace. There does not exist a realistic plan to clean up the existing wet tailings or an aggressive commitment to develop technologies to make this feasible.

Beauchesne section 390 states that a motion for emergency debate must meet the test of urgency, meaning urgency of debate; that is, “when the ordinary opportunities provided by the rules of the House do not permit the subject to be brought on early enough and the public interest demands that discussion take place immediately.” Mr. Speaker, I’m not aware of anything on the Order Paper, of any pending legislation or other motion, that would allow the House an opportunity to debate this issue.

I believe this is a most urgent matter which requires the full attention of the Assembly, and we should be debating this issue of the oil sands tailings ponds today in the House so that all Albertans can see where we stand on the matter in the hope that we may avert an environmental catastrophe for which Albertans and many beyond our borders would continue to pay for generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there additional members who would like to participate? Remember: dealing with urgency. The hon. Member for Edmonton–Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to support my colleague the Member for Edmonton–Highlands–Norwood in his Standing Order 30 application to the Speaker. I believe that this is a matter of urgency. Time has moved on, and it’s certainly matching the requirements under *Marleau and Montpetit* 584 and 585, particularly around relevance and need of “attention and concern throughout the nation.” We know that this has received international coverage. While the tailings ponds are certainly a chronic issue, the particular issue that has arisen more recently could not be considered chronic.

In referring to the parameters set out in *Beauchesne* 387 to 398 on emergency debate, I believe the tests have been met. There has not been opportunity for a debate under the other areas that I’ve looked at. It’s not before the courts. The idea of trying to mitigate environmental disaster was not in the throne speech. There’s no government order paper, media release, or private member’s bill that is up on this. The Environment budget has passed, and I see no notice on the Order Paper for anything else that might address this issue specifically.

The opportunity for debate is nonexistent, as far as I can see. We have had a number of questions asked in the House around this, but the answer is not about our environmental disaster but simply around reclamation, which is not the issue that is pressing us at the moment. I’ve looked through the written questions and motions for returns, and again no opportunity presents itself there. I think that under *Beauchesne* 389 it is argued that it’s “so pressing that the public interest will suffer if it is not given immediate attention” and that debate do take place on it according to *Beauchesne* 390.

I do support my colleague the leader of the ND opposition in his application to the Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: Others that would like to participate? The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, if I might. Certainly, the situation with respect to tailings ponds is something that we take extremely seriously, but in light of the standing order and the matter that would bring it to an urgent debate, I just don't think that we're in a situation where that is at all relevant. We've had operations in the oil sands development area for better than 30 years. Mining operations and upgrading operations of this nature necessarily constitute a requirement to have tailings ponds. They have been managed in accordance with all of the regulations that are in place currently, and I will say that there is no environmental disaster at this point in time.

All of the tailings ponds facilities that are being operated currently are being managed and operated under the current rules and regulations. We continue to work as a government with industry, with other organizations, with the environmental community to look at how we can do a better job on any of these types of processes. Mr. Speaker, that work is ongoing. When opportunities arise for us to do a better job, we continue to press industry, and they respond, I think, in a very responsible manner. We do have, you know, a relatively good relationship there, and as I say, the tailings ponds at this point in time are being managed according to the regulations that we have currently in place.

Mr. Speaker, the more recent situations around a tailings pond incident are extremely unfortunate, and all of us would agree with that. However, a debate such as this seems to me to be nothing more than a bit of grandstanding and political expedience on the part of some members of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. Minister of Energy just indicated, tailings ponds have been around for as long as the oil sands developments have been around, so nothing about that makes it urgent. I'm sure you would want me to address the question of urgency and whether or not there's been an opportunity to deal with this matter.

Well, on the 15th of April we had the privilege of having His Honour the Lieutenant Governor address us, and then for the following 10 days the House had open to it the widest latitude of debate possible in the House in terms of responding to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. The question essentially is: is the plan that the government is undertaking the appropriate plan? If there was something urgent, of the nature that we're talking about today, surely it would have come up in the 10 days in which the most open debate is available in terms of: what are the most essential things for us to be doing in this province at this time, and what are the things the government should be doing? That would have been a perfect opportunity for discussion.

Supplemental estimates, of course, were up, and one might have taken under supplemental estimates, again, wide latitude available for debate on whether or not the government is applying the resources that are available in the right places. Interim supply was up. Then we've been discussing the budget for the last number of days. In fact, it's occupied almost all the time in the House. But there were two opportunities – Committee of Supply with the estimates of the Department of Energy on April 29 in the evening for three hours and Committee of Supply on the evening of April 30 on the Department of Environment for three hours – two places where this type of a discussion would have been most appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, the issue is not urgent. Tailings ponds in and of themselves, as the hon. Minister of Energy said, have been an issue that has been around for some 30 years. There is nothing that's happened that makes them more urgent today than they were

yesterday. We have had the discussion over the last week of the unfortunate incident that's being investigated by the Department of Environment, and we've had questions over the last few weeks relative to that particular issue, but it doesn't make the issue of tailings ponds urgent, necessary to the state of adjourning debate. I would argue that with general debate over the issues around the importance of the environment and specifically the importance of the issues around the oil sands, which are obviously very important to Alberta's economic future, and particularly the issues with respect to the environmental impacts of that, there have been plenty of opportunities over the course of the last month to raise those issues if they're urgent and important to Albertans.

3:10

The Speaker: The chair is prepared to rule with respect to this matter. After listening to the arguments put forward, Standing Order 30(2) is the appropriate one. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood did advise my office this morning at 11:28. With respect to the two hours' notice, that's been met.

The motion reads:

Be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the tailings ponds created by the oil sands industry and the potential for an environmental disaster due to them.

The key thing about the application under Standing Order 30(7): it "must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration." Members can look to pages 586, 588 of *Marleau and Montpetit, House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, and *Beauchesne's* paragraph 390. The key phrase or the key words: "must relate to a genuine emergency." This means that the matter should be brought at the earliest opportunity.

Hon. members, we assembled here on April 15, and in a review of the debates that existed and the *Hansard* and everything else, it really wasn't until April 29 and April 30 before "tailings pond" was even used in this Assembly. On April 30 during question period and in the Minister of Environment's estimates the matter did come up. We were here for literally 15 days before that, and it's been very correctly pointed out that there had been much opportunity to have had this matter discussed.

Related to "urgent public importance," tailings ponds have been in existence in this province way before even 30 years, as pointed out by the Government House Leader. The other phrase in the question says "potential." Well, okay. We can speculate all we want. This is an issue that has drawn some attention. It's not the first time. It's existed before in the province of Alberta with respect to other ponds. The chair simply cannot find the request to be in order under the Assembly's rules, and the question will not be put.

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 with the exception of Written Question 1.

[Pursuant to temporary Standing Order 34(3.2) the Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

interRAI MDS Assessment System

Q2. Ms Pastoor:
What was the total cost of implementing the interRAI MDS, minimum data set, system for continuing care facilities and home care, including hardware, software, technical installa-

tion, and staff training between January 1, 2002, and December 31, 2007, broken down annually and by health region?

Victims of Crime Fund Surcharge

- Q3. Mr. Hehr:
What percentage of the 15 per cent surcharge collected from provincial statutory offences has the victims of crime fund received from the Ministry of Solicitor General and Public Security since its inception to February 4, 2008?

Victims of Crime Fund Compensation

- Q4. Mr. Hehr:
What is the total number of successful claimants who requested compensation through the victims of crime fund since its inception to February 4, 2008?

Victims of Crime Fund Overpayments

- Q5. Mr. Hehr:
What is the total number and value of any overpayments made by the Ministry of Solicitor General and Public Security from the victims of crime fund from its inception to February 4, 2008?

Calgary Mental Health Diversion Project

- Q6. Mr. Hehr:
What is the total number of litigants broken down by year dealt with by the Calgary mental health diversion project since its inception in April 2001 to February 4, 2008, and what is the total amount of annual funding provided to the Calgary mental health diversion project by the Alberta Health and Wellness health innovation fund from April 1, 2004, to February 4, 2008?

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

Seniors and Community Supports Salaries

- Q1. Ms Blakeman asked on behalf of Ms Pastoor that the following question be accepted.
What were the salaries of contracted employees and/or consultants employed by the Ministry and Department of Seniors and Community Supports during the 2006-2007 fiscal year, broken down by amount and position title?

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My colleague is asking for that information actually on behalf of all of us. We are very concerned with what is currently happening in the not-for-profit sector. We've raised it a number of times under a number of different sections because, of course, we have not-for-profits that are working in social services, health, labour support, arts and culture, recreation and tourism, and a number of other areas.

Specifically, what we are seeking here is exactly what the salaries are that are being made, basically, by the government employees in the Department of Seniors and Community Supports to allow us to have a direct comparison with what's happening in the community. There is a very large wage gap there. We would like to be accurate as we move forward with our arguments on that wage gap, and that's very hard to tell right now.

All we can get are, sort of, salary ranges. You know, a salary range can vary by \$30,000 for some job classifications, so that doesn't help us. I mean, if somebody is being paid at the low end of one range and the high end of another, it really doesn't help us when we're trying to compare it to what's happening in the not-for-profit

sector. We are not looking for personal information, of course, Mr. Speaker, but job titles and what the current salary is. We don't want to know what the individuals are paid – that would be an invasion of their privacy – but we do need to know what the salaries are that are being paid today.

Part of this is a longer range strategy from members of the Official Opposition. My colleague from Calgary-Varsity, in fact, has a motion other than a government motion that's on the books for this year which is seeking to introduce legislation to remedy any salary gap. You can see my dilemma. How do I describe that salary gap accurately if I don't know what's actually being paid by the government members currently? We know it's there. We would like to be able to give more accurate comparisons to what's actually going on there.

This is of great concern right now. We're looking at huge problems in this sector with staff retention, never mind recruitment. Most of the not-for-profits in the social service sector that I work with on a daily and weekly basis – like Bosco Homes, like a number of the other group homes, John Howard, a number of the children's services agencies, foster families, groups like that – can't fill the positions that they have. Now we're hearing about group homes that are closing. They can't take more. For the most part a lot of these groups are dealing with children that are high needs. They're struggling. They're at a difficult point in their lives. There is opportunity there for us to work with them, for knowledgeable, dedicated staff people to work with them and turn their lives around. It's heartbreaking when we see that these not-for-profits can't even fill those positions. We're closing beds. We're having to turn children away that we could be helping, so now they sit somewhere without getting the programming that would be helpful to them.

I'm hoping that we can get that information from the government. I understand that there is a motion, and it was circulated to us at an appropriate time. I'm assuming that the member is going to move that, so I will cede the floor to her so that we may continue this discussion. But that explains why we're looking for that information.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to address Written Question 1 received from the Member for Lethbridge-East. I move that Written Question 1 be amended to read:

What were the salary ranges of contracted employees employed by the Ministry and Department of Seniors and Community Supports during the 2006-2007 fiscal year, broken down by salary range and position title?

To allow us to respond, we are recommending the slight wording changes to this question by focusing the request on contract employees and replacing exact salary amounts, which can't be disclosed due to FOIP legislation, with ranges. Information on consultants has already been disclosed in public documents through government's online reporting of grants, supplies, payments, and services.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:20

The Speaker: On the amendment the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Well, you can see the struggle that I'm having with this amendment. I have no wish to contravene FOIP laws, but I do

question why the government cannot – I believe they have enough people working in this area that an individual is not identifiable. If you look at a social worker 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 position, there are a considerable number that are hired by the government. So I'm struggling to believe that the government can't provide the current salary amounts without defaulting to the salary ranges. As I said, the salary ranges are from \$5,000 to \$10,000. Depending on how much money you're making, not likely in this particular instance, you know, in those higher range salaries, the salary range can be \$25,000 to \$30,000. As I said, that's likely not what we're dealing with here when we're talking about people offering social services. Unfortunately, it should be higher. It should be that high, but it's not. That's the problem.

How do we, then, go back to that not-for-profit sector and say: well, this is the salary range, so these people could be making \$5,000 on the high end or less? It's much more difficult for us to do the work that we're trying to do here. It makes a lot more number crunching and running around for our staff people, of which I've not been quiet about the fact that we don't have very many. It really puts an additional strain on our staff to try and get to the bottom of this.

I'm disappointed in the amendment. I had hoped to get more accurate and straightforward information, so I would recommend against accepting this amendment. I think we should have just got the information that we asked for.

I'm also curious why the consultants were removed from this. It's one of the things that was struck out, and perhaps that's because there are no consultants that worked in the Department of Seniors and Community Supports during the '06-07 fiscal year, but that would surprise me. Perhaps there were no consultants employed by this particular department in that fiscal year that have a position title or a salary. I can't think why we would need to exclude the consultants, because they are a piece of this puzzle.

I'm not sure if the minister is allowed time to respond to me, but I'd be interested in knowing why the consultants were cut out. But I'm disappointed about the salary ranges.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Others on the debate?
Should I call the question?

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, would you like to close debate?

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, I was hoping for more detailed and accurate information, but we on this side have learned to be grateful for the little bits of information that are tossed our way. I'll look forward to getting the information that the minister has indeed offered to provide to us with the amendment.

Thank you.

[Written Question 1 as amended carried]

Motions for Returns

The Clerk Assistant: Pursuant to temporary Standing Order 34(3.1) motions for returns are deemed to stand and retain their places with the exception of MR 1, MR 3, MR 4.

[Pursuant to temporary Standing Order 34(3.2) the Clerk Assistant read the following motion for a return, which had been accepted]

PDD Provincial Board

M2. Ms Pastoor moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents, including but not limited to reports, studies, statistical data, correspondence, presentations, and evaluations, pertaining to the July 2006 elimination of the Persons' with Developmental Disabilities Provincial Board.

The Clerk Assistant: Motion for a Return 1.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on behalf of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The amendments, unfortunately, take out the meat and the information we're looking for.

The Speaker: Hon. member, please. We haven't got any amendments yet, so move the motion. If we do get an amendment, then we'll vote.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll look forward to discussing the amendment.

The Speaker: You should move the question if you want it.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for clarifying the process, which I should know by now after three and a half years.

Indexing of AISH Benefits

M1. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Ms Pastoor that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents, including but not limited to reports, studies, economic analyses, correspondence, presentations, and evaluations, pertaining to indexing assured income for the severely handicapped, AISH, benefits to the average weekly earnings as reported by Statistics Canada.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to the motion for a return from the Member for Lethbridge-East, we are accepting the motion with an amendment. The amended motion we propose removes "the average weekly earnings as reported by Statistics Canada" as there are no documents available relating to this clause. There is, however, a discussion paper on indexing the AISH monthly living allowance. Therefore, to allow us to respond, we propose that the amended motion read:

A copy of documents, including but not limited to reports, studies, economic analyses, correspondence, presentations, and evaluations, pertaining to the indexation of assured income for the severely handicapped, AISH, benefits.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to speak to the amendment. The original motion for a return requested a copy of all documents. The amendment takes out the term "all" and it then leaves it up to the ministry to decide what information it will provide. We've gone through the FOIP process so many times

with information not being included, information being blacked out. This is information that's important, I would say, to all Albertans, especially to those who are receiving AISH benefits, a number of which live in the Calgary-Varsity constituency.

We're trying to get an understanding of where the government is coming from when it limits the amount to AISH recipients, basically, to \$1,100 a month, which is far from a living allowance for individuals, given the state of inflation. I know the province does provide support for health benefits and also provides some transportation allowances, but they don't begin to address the problems faced due to inflation by recipients of AISH. By taking out the word "all," we have no idea of the pertinence of whatever documents the government chooses to see fit, which would potentially include, I'm supposing, reports, studies, economic analyses, correspondence, presentations, and evaluations pertaining to and providing the reasoning for indexing the assured income for the severely handicapped.

It's hard to formulate a response when you only get a part of the information. Using my teacher example, how can you study for an exam for which you haven't been prepared? That's why on behalf of AISH recipients we're requesting all the information.

Now, with regard to the striking out of "indexing" and substituting "the indexation of," we know, for example, that teachers' salaries, with the most recent contract, are indexed according to the weekly labour results, the same type of indexing that MLAs receive. What we were calling for and trying to move the government towards with Motion for a Return 1 is that AISH recipients receive that same form of indexation that takes into account what average earners are receiving. It also looks at other market-basket measures in determining what's a livable allowance, given our highly inflated economy, where finding affordable housing is next to impossible. That is why we called for indexing as opposed to the indexation of.

3:30

Now, the hon. minister referred to, if I heard it correctly – and I'll sit to be corrected shortly – striking out the average weekly earnings as reported by Statistics Canada. This is a comparative measure to give a sense of a per capita, per allowance basis where Alberta stands in the indexing of vulnerable individuals such as those receiving AISH support payments.

With that, I'll look forward to the minister's responses and enjoy returning to the opportunity of discussing MR 1.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Does the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on behalf of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East wish to conclude debate?

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for offering me that opportunity. There is a need for social justice to be not only seen but to be acted upon in this province. Individuals who are receiving AISH support are having a very desperate existence. It's an existence that no member of this Assembly would want to face, and that is why we are trying to improve the lot of AISH recipients by having the government provide us the justifications for the meagre allowances that AISH recipients receive. Unfortunately, that information will not be forthcoming. That is regrettable both for members of this House and for those recipients who, unfortunately, for a variety of reasons are forced to eke out an existence on AISH.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 1 as amended carried]

Royalty Forecasts

M3. Mr. Chase moved on behalf of Dr. Taft that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents used by the government to project that royalties will increase by approximately \$1.4 billion in 2010 as forecasted by the new royalty framework.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and speak to Motion for a Return 3, which was proposed by the Leader of the Official Opposition. Following a thorough review of the motion I'm recommending to the Assembly that we reject the motion due to the fact that it's outdated. I'm prepared to table more relevant and up-to-date information.

The Leader of the Official Opposition has asked for the documents used to forecast a \$1.4 billion increase in royalties in 2010 as a result of the new royalty framework. That projection, done in October to coincide with the announcement of the framework, was based on 2006 projections, Mr. Speaker, for commodity pricing and levels of activity, the same assumptions that were used by the Royalty Review Panel. I'm prepared to table later this week the most up-to-date information that explains how the revenue forecasts in this year's budget were reached. As the hon. leader knows, these new forecasts are projected to increase royalties in the area of \$1.8 billion in 2010, and information on how that number is reached is included in the document I will be tabling.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Additional speakers?

Ms Blakeman: I just wanted to thank the Minister of Energy for tabling those documents, and I'm sure they'll be helpful. I'm glad to get the information.

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

Mr. Chase: I would like to get it on the record that the number of changes that have been made since this motion was first requested have caused a great deal of consternation and confusion. New terms have been introduced to this Assembly, such as "tweaking." We're not sure what the basis of the information is that the Minister of Energy is providing upon which royalties are based, and therefore we will look forward to receiving whatever information can be provided, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre acknowledged.

[Motion for a Return 3 lost]

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

Crown Agreements with Suncor and Syncrude

M4. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Dr. Taft that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a complete list of attendees from government and industry at all meetings regarding potential changes to the Crown agreements with Suncor and Syncrude.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are looking for some concrete information, I am hoping, around these meetings. Of course, much flowed from them, and we would like to get some information on the record showing whether there were relationships and who was there. I think part of the issue for us is that it could be

construed that there was impropriety, but one can't say, and we don't like to until we have a better idea of who was there. Around the issue of transparency and accountability, that's why we're asking to know who exactly was at the meetings, you know, and what was their association with the group. That makes it much more transparent, and that way nobody makes a mistake. No one should be accused of something that they shouldn't be accused of, and when we make a statement, we can make it believing to the best of our knowledge that it, in fact, was true.

There certainly is a lot of interest now in those various meetings, so that's why we've asked to know who was at these meetings, and additional questions can then flow from that. But until we know that, nothing can be proved or disproved, and it just leads to a bunch of conjecture. I would prefer to do that based on fact rather than on some things that we believe to be true but can't prove.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to the minister's response.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A matter with respect to this motion has arisen. I've been advised by the hon. House leader of the Official Opposition that she's unaware that they received a proposed amendment to the motion. The proposed amendment was in fact prepared and has been circulated and has been initialled by the Clerk's office. I'm given to understand it was sent, but I understand that it may not have been received, or at least they don't have a record of receiving it. So I'm going to ask the indulgence of the House, because we don't have provision for this in the rules and it's already on the floor of the House, for unanimous consent to have this motion go over for one week and reappear next Monday.

Ms Blakeman: Next Monday is a holiday.

Mr. Hancock: Next Monday is a holiday, so for two weeks, the next time Written Questions comes back.

The Speaker: The request being made from the Government House Leader is that Motion for a Return 4 be not now dealt with until the second Monday hence.

[Unanimous consent granted]

3:40 **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading
Bill 201
Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Heritage Act**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to move third reading of Bill 201.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and move third reading debate of Bill 201, the Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Heritage Act.

I appreciate the support I've received from both sides of this Assembly for this bill. I'd also like to recognize and thank my researcher, Jeri Romaniuk, who did a great deal of work with me as we developed this bill, and I believe she's here this afternoon in the gallery as we take it through third reading.

The co-operation in the passing of this bill demonstrates the commitment of all members to ensure that the traditions of hunting,

fishing, and trapping in Alberta are maintained and that the rights of Albertans to partake in these activities will forever be protected in this province. Mr. Speaker, my colleagues have shared their personal experiences of hunting, fishing, and trapping, and those personal stories have been enjoyed by the many people in this Assembly and by the many supporters of this bill who have followed the debates. The interest among the members of this House is a testament to the significance and popularity of these activities and how essential they are in this province.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I want to thank all of the associations, individual Albertans, and those who wrote from outside the province with their letters of support for Bill 201. I especially want to recognize Mr. Bill Bennett, the MLA for East Kootenay in British Columbia, who sponsored a similar private member's bill. The bill, the right to hunt and fish, passed British Columbia legislation in 2003. Mr. Bennett also chairs the nonpartisan Outdoor Caucus and will be sending the announcement of Bill 201 passing to his Outdoor Caucus distribution list.

Mr. Speaker, my vision for the future of Alberta includes recognition, recognition of the caring people who live here, Alberta's geographic diversity, unique wildlife, and the beauty of our landscapes. The people who visit Alberta will remember this province for these attributes. They will know that Alberta is more than prairies and a mountain range. There's a concerted effort between government, associations, and people to maintain and improve Alberta's wildlife habitats. Knowledgeable people all over the province are helping to support our wildlife species and our ecosystems. Organizations and the people who belong to and support them share a deep, sincere affection for the outdoors. Among organizations and fellow outdoorsmen there's a camaraderie and a willingness to share experiences with their family and friends. They teach their children skills so that they, too, can enjoy the traditions and sports of hunting, fishing, and trapping.

There are many reasons why I chose to bring this bill forward. I want what all hunters, fishermen, and trappers who are stewards of the environment and are proud of this province want; that is, to ensure that these activities are recognized for their role in Alberta's heritage and to be afforded the right to partake in these activities and for this right to be protected and supported by law. I've been involved in these activities since I was little, and I continue to be involved today.

Mr. Speaker, I was 14 years old when my father bought me my first hunting membership. It was with the Foremost chapter of the Alberta Fish and Game Association. My father taught me respect for and the proper use of firearms and an appreciation of wildlife. Later I became affiliated with many other clubs and filled many different roles with my local club, including secretary-treasurer as well as hunter education instructor. I've a membership with Ducks Unlimited and have attended three events already this year with plans to attend three more.

Mr. Speaker, it's the 70th year anniversary of Ducks Unlimited Canada. Ducks Unlimited was created by hunters who noticed that the wetlands were disappearing. These dedicated hunters took action, and to date there have been 8,000 projects across Canada. They have fundraised in excess of \$1 billion and have improved over 25 million acres of habitat for waterfowl.

Along with hunting, fishing, and trapping I've also enjoyed birdwatching right close to my home. Mr. Speaker, near my home in Cypress-Medicine Hat there's a body of water called Pakowki Lake, which in Blackfoot means bad water. The name reflects the alkaline content of the water, which makes it unusable for human

consumption. This lake is a bird sanctuary with hundreds of different species of migratory birds. It is a landlocked, shallow body of water that is one of the most important staging grounds in western Canada for waterfowl. I've had many opportunities to sit on the causeway in the island in the middle of the lake and watch the continuous action of the many species of ducks and teals as they take off, wheel, and then land again over and over. I can only liken it to some of the beautiful clips of a Disney wildlife series. Being an avid outdoor enthusiast does not mean that you have to shoot animals. It also includes watching them and enjoying their movement and recognizing the unique differences between them.

Mr. Speaker, for hunters who love adventure and extraordinary prize-winning game, Alberta is the place to be. Perhaps one of the most adventurous and majestic animals in Alberta is the Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep. It is the mammal of Alberta and is an Alberta emblem. Fittingly, it's also recognized as the symbol of Alberta's majesty. Alberta has the largest Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep in North America, and one can expect to spend a lot of time climbing and glassing before ever finding one that's considered legal to hunt and is a trophy.

I've attended a lot of sheep conventions put on by the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep. North America has mainly four species of sheep: the Rocky Mountain bighorn, whose habitat, naturally, is the Rocky Mountains; the Stone sheep, whose habitat is northern British Columbia and the Yukon; the Dall sheep, whose habitat includes the Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Alaska; and the desert bighorn, that inhabits the southwestern United States. Mr. Speaker, the conservation efforts of the foundation include restoration of habitat and transplanting species of the bighorn to areas that are appropriate for their future, where they can multiply and grow.

Mr. Speaker, just to give you an idea of how sought-after the experience of bighorn sheep hunting is, tags have been donated by the Alberta government for the annual convention for the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep auction for many years now. One such tag was bid for and was won for \$450,000. The money, of course, goes to conservation efforts. Alberta has donated the tag for the last eight years. Within Alberta the Cadomin mines and the Cheviot mines south of Hinton have an abundance of bighorn sheep due to the conservation efforts of the mining companies, the fish and wildlife division of the Department of Sustainable Resource Development, and local chapters of all the hunting organizations in the Hinton area.

I've been involved in many associations and foundations due to my interest in hunting, fishing, and trapping. I've attended Pheasants Forever conventions. The majority of people there are hunters, outdoorspeople, fishermen, and trappers. People involved with Pheasants Forever know how important it is to maintain and improve habitat. One example of the work they do is the planting and maintaining of shelterbelts in southern Alberta. Hundreds of miles of shelterbelts have been planted to provide food and shelter for birds like our pheasants. Mr. Speaker, they are preservationists and conservationists. I look forward to attending more functions in the future.

Mr. Speaker, the organizations just mentioned are but a few that through volunteerism have a mandate to do what they do for the love of their sport or activity, the love of the species they represent, whether animal, bird, or fish, and for the love of the land.

I want to thank all the members for their support and look forward to hearing the remainder of the debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. It is extremely important to note

that the first people in line for conservation and protection are indeed hunters and fishermen and trappers. For the trappers it makes absolute sense because their livelihoods, their historical pursuits are dependent on the availability of game, so they're very cognizant of limits. They're also becoming increasingly more cognizant of new trapping methods that basically are an instant kill as opposed to the old style of leghold traps. It's a more humane system of trapping that has replaced the old leghold traps, where an animal to get out—and you see the remains of a leg that has been gnawed off along traplines. Of course, that type of inhumane treatment is not acceptable, and the modern-day trapper realizes that. Provincial regulations have required a more humane form of trapping.

The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat recounted the restoration of wildlife sanctuaries. Without repeating in great detail, I mentioned how my father had single-handedly planted thousands and thousands of caragana hedges so that that kind of protection for not only waterfowl but for songbirds would continue to exist. It's to the credit of hunters and fishermen that their conservation support and volunteerism allow for all Albertans to enjoy a sport which is of a seasonal nature but is extremely enjoyable.

3:50

As the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat pointed out, you can enjoy wildlife without necessarily having a gun. You don't have to actually take down an animal or a bird to have that enjoyment. You can pursue them with a camera, or you can enjoy being in a wilderness circumstance, as was my case when my wife and I ran Cataract Creek for three seasons. We had a variety of wildlife that entered into our compound where we had the trailer parked. We had three fawns that used to play. It was almost like a game of follow-the-leader or tag because they would change the order in which they pursued as they sort of did a little ring around the rosy just within the boundaries of the forest.

We also had a black bear come in. My experience from having camped down to Yellowstone and up to northern Alberta was that black bears usually respond to noise and action, and I was all set to bang a few pots and scare this young black bear out of its interest in our firepit. I made sure that no cooking smells or odours were left in that pit, but there is salt produced after the burning of wood, and that seemed to be attracting the young bruin. My wife suggested in no small way that I remain in the trailer until the bear on his own intentions left, so not wanting to get into a confrontation over bear management with my wife, I listened to her wisdom and I allowed the bear to depart on his terms.

However, I was very aware that that departing bear might decide to visit any of the 200 other camp firepits that were currently being occupied by our campers, so his presence and monitoring his presence were very important to me. Of course, one of our daily activities was indicating to conservation officers the presence of wildlife.

On another occasion I was the first to notice a young, three-year-old grizzly on a cow that had succumbed in Cataract Creek. It wasn't out of the efforts of the grizzly, but he was an opportunist, and he decided to start feeding on this cow. That caused a great deal of difficulty once I reported it because there seemed to be a difficulty in determining whose responsibility the moving of this particular cow was. It was extremely important that it be moved because three days from the time I first sighted the carcass and the bear feeding on the carcass, the Rocky Mountain trail bike racing was going to come through this part of Cataract Creek, so the carcass had to be removed.

There were discussions among the various wildlife organizations, fisheries, forestry, sustainable resources, conservation as to whose

responsibility it was. Of course, the discussions took place, and they felt, well, it was the rancher who was allowed the opportunity to free-range his cattle. But he had no way of winching this carcass out. So, again, it was the combination of excellent government employees. It was a conservation officer that drove his vehicle down, winched the cow up the hill, and then the rancher, with our support, was able to winch it into the horse trailer and take away the carcass.

The three years that we spent in Cataract Creek allowed us to see on a number of occasions both black and brown bears and, as I say, this young grizzly. We frequently saw the prints of grizzlies throughout the area. There was one old sow that enjoyed living at the top of Mount Burke and would come down and not come too close to the campground, which we were appreciative of.

This same three-year-old decided that based on, I guess, his hunting experience, he was going to take down a moose calf. While I didn't get a chance to see it first-hand, campers reported the efforts of this young grizzly in pursuit of the moose calf. Well, of course, the mother took great exception to her young one being threatened and proceeded to do sort of a moose dance on the young grizzly, who decided that it was better to leave the field of battle. So we had a moose calf, a moose, and a somewhat battered bear, but all were still there. A number of campers sitting on their lawn chairs got a first-hand view of this sort of wilderness battle, very much like the member reported about how enjoyable it is to see nature first-hand.

The idea of preserving and conserving and, as a part of it, taking a limit which is based on the availability of the species is extremely important. Part of the Cataract Creek responsibility and the Kananaskis responsibility I had was maintaining a campground in the Kananaskis called Strawberry. In Strawberry that campground was opened to hunters to hunt in selected areas, obviously outside the park boundaries. It just showed what can happen, that you can have hunting and fishing coexist with parks and protected areas. This is the real Alberta advantage that I've seen.

Again, I've had the experience with my wife of going down to Chain Lakes and watching mule deer going through the various scrub willows. We, from a distance so that we weren't scaring the animals, followed the circuitous routes that they had through the willows and onto the prairie, trying to get as close as we possibly could. [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand and join the discussion on Bill 201, the Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Heritage Act. I feel that one of the best things about the discourse we've had on this bill relates to the number of hunting stories that many of my fellow members have brought to this Assembly.

On a personal note I remember my 14th birthday, when my Uncle Jim arrived from Calgary and, to the chagrin of my mother, presented me with my first .22 rifle. Uncle Jim passed away last year, leaving as his legacy to me his antique bolt-action 12 gauge shotgun. Hunting is an important part of my family history. As an aside, when I married 30 years ago, I traded that same .22 rifle for our first double bed. I tell this story to reiterate a point that I've heard throughout this debate, that hunting, fishing, and trapping are integral to the very foundation of Alberta identity. This is a fact that has been exemplified by the sheer number of members who have spoken in favour of this bill, due to their enthusiasm for these activities.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a look at the overarching historical perspective of hunting, fishing, and trapping as a means of illustrating its importance to our provincial perspective. The history of our province is an amalgamation of many other histories, that of

the great tribes of the Plains Indians, Hudson's Bay Company, the fur trade, the Canadian Confederation, the CP Rail, and the Riel Rebellion. I recognize that this is an extensive list, but let us also recognize that hunting, fishing, and trapping were important underlying activities that were woven into the course of many of these events.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, when we take a look at the Great Plains Indian culture, we can ultimately say that there was no more vital activity than the hunting of buffalo. As many of us may be aware, every part of this animal was harvested, for food, clothing and shelter, tools and utensils. The hunting of these shaggy beasts was hard and difficult work. Often hunting parties would drape themselves in buffalo skins and position themselves downwind from grazing herds of bison. As the hides would mask their scent, they would be able to more effectively stalk the herd and have a better chance of getting to within bow and spear range. Once within range the hunting party would release a fatal volley upon the buffalo, aiming for the vulnerable heart cavities of the beast, which were located behind their foreleg.

A more productive hunting method was the corral. Hunters would use any material at hand, such as deadfall or travois poles, to construct two long parallel fences which would converge down a sloping grade towards a sturdy corral. Hunting parties would then dress in animal hides or wolfskins and manoeuvre the target herds towards the fences, a process which could take some days. If successful, once the herd began to funnel into the fenced corridor, the hunters would frighten them, forcing a stampede into the corral. At this point all of the tribal men would shoot as many animals as they could before they eventually broke free. The kills would then be harvested, and the meat would be proportionately distributed amongst the tribe.

Some members have also alluded to the use of buffalo jumps as a means of sustenance hunting. This was a method of herding bison towards a cliff and then forcing them to stampede over it. One of the more famous sites in western Canada is Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, an iconic part of our provincial identity.

The introduction of horses to the Plains Indians changed their hunting techniques. Despite the availability of guns most native hunters preferred to continue using the bow as it did not require any awkward reloading and a buffalo could be felled by one or two precisely aimed iron-tipped arrows. Hunting would become exciting affairs with trained buffalo-running horses forming two columns at full gallop: right-handed archers on the right, and left-handed archers and spearmen on the left. As the startled buffalo stampeded across the plains, the faster cows would lead the thundering chase and become the targets of the lead hunters. The slower and more dangerous bulls would be dealt with by the rearguard. This was a dangerous and potentially fatal piece of work. Horses were often running at full tilt only a few feet beside the largest panic-stricken quarry. There was the possibility of being charged or gored, which resulted in many men being crippled or killed.

This way of life was not restricted to Alberta's native culture. As the 20th century approached, the Canadian federal government, land companies, and railways offered free land in order to entice a wave of immigration onto the prairies. At this point in time Canada was emerging from economic depression. Industrialization had led to a number of advances, and new markets opened up in agriculture, particularly in wheat. Alberta had free land, maturing wheat crops, and railways to transport it. It simply lacked the people. Mr. Speaker, the people came: scores of dispossessed, adventurous, and sometimes naive immigrants, who sought new beginnings and were lured by the promise of land and prosperity.

What followed would become a myriad of stories about pioneering hardships and pluck that would become the bedrock of our province. Hunting, fishing, and trapping were essential skills that had to be mastered if one was to survive. Mr. Speaker, there is an account of an impoverished Ukrainian farmer who lived near Andrew in 1905 and had the misfortune to lose his wife in childbirth. This was an incredibly harsh blow, made even more difficult due to the harsh winter and diminished food supplies. The family was reduced to eating thin gruel. A week after his wife's death, the farmer came across a hunting party of Cree, who explained that he could supplement his diet with wild game, that was plentiful in the area. The farmer was too poor to even afford a gun, and in desperation he pleaded with the Cree to take his newborn son, who would likely die without his mother. The Cree were persuaded and gave up a gun to the farmer so that he and his remaining family could survive. The newborn child would grow up to become a respected member of the Goodfish Lake community.

Wild beasts such as bears would often startle homeowners. Olive Woodman's *Hills of Hope* records that Harry Tyrrell and his wife had just erected the walls of a log cabin prior to the onset of a heavy rainstorm. As the couple sheltered in a makeshift tent, a large black bear seeking refuge knocked down the wall and landed in the house. As there was no weapon at hand, quickly thinking the strong pioneer – gumption prevailed and resulted in the animal being scared off. This was a normal way of life for many Alberta settlers, who had to be attuned to the land and the wildlife in order to survive. The honing of these instincts often occurred when one had to hunt in order to live through the winter. The economy of the province was sustained by these people as well as by enterprising westerners who found new ways to forge a living in Alberta's new west.

Revillon Frères was an Egyptian fur trader who set up shop in Edmonton and became a serious threat to the Hudson's Bay Company. By 1905 an estimated half a million dollars worth of pelts flowed through Edmonton, and the *Calgary Herald* would publish headlines that read: millions in the fur trade. Freelancers such as Colin Fraser would become prominent and roam the northern regions of Alberta. In 1910 he alone brought 30,000 muskrat skins to the lower Athabasca area. The fur industry was one of the initial enterprises that drove Alberta's economy. It was an industry that brought millions into provincial coffers and, in doing so, became entrenched within our history.

History is what I've spoken about, Mr. Speaker. History is the capacity to acknowledge where we've come from and to respect the precedents set down by our forebears. Certainly, our provincial legacy is a tale written by countless contributors. We may look to a glorious future that will be founded upon oil wealth and an unsurpassed environmental bounty, but as we contemplate this, let us also remember that Alberta's past is a narrative first defined by the proud native cultures and the steadfast will of early pioneers.

Alberta's story has been told in great part by our hunters. As such, I am pleased to remember them, and I urge all members to support the passage of Bill 201.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I've avoided speaking to this bill, actually, because I didn't know quite where to put it in my life. This bill is less attractive to me; let me put it that way. I'm not a hunter, although my father did teach me to shoot a rifle, and I followed that with various marksmanship courses, but killing animals has never appealed to me in any way, shape, or form.

[The Speaker in the chair]

This is a classic divide in my family. My father has been a fisherman forever. He still ties his own flies, and he still hikes kilometres into the bush along with his wife and his dogs in order to find the best fishing holes. He takes that seriously. He's a good fly fisherman. He eats everything he catches, and if he can't eat it, then it's a catch-and-release for him. He also hunts geese, and again he eats everything he catches. So for him it's a leisure activity, but he's also careful to not waste anything. But that's as close as I get. My father and I disagree on a lot of things, so this will be another one.

No surprise to anybody I'm a downtown gal. While I'm certainly in the minority in this House about supporting people going out and killing animals, I'm wondering if I'm in that minority in all of Alberta. I'm not so sure about that. When I read this bill, I thought: "Okay. Yes, hunting, fishing, and trapping are certainly part of our heritage in Alberta." There's no denying that, and the previous speaker from Lethbridge-West was able to give us a series of historical vignettes on that, but I question how necessary it is to carry that forward in the future. We don't need it to sustain ourselves anymore with, of course, the obvious exception of aboriginal communities, and in that I include the Métis settlements, who do still engage in subsistence hunting, fishing, and trapping. Outside of those communities the rest of us don't need to be doing that. So I wondered what was really behind this bill.

It goes beyond saying that this is our heritage. We've had other bills like that in this House, where we recognized the tartan of Alberta, and we recognized a number of animals and trees and things like that as emblems of Alberta. But I didn't think this bill was trying to say that hunting, fishing, and trapping are emblems of Alberta or to make it into some sort of official part of this Assembly. I kept looking at it and wondering what was really going on.

The bill refers very clearly to existing laws, so this bill is not establishing anything new. It's referring back and saying what we believe and uphold, and it reiterates again the various legislation that already exists, including the Wildlife Act, the Fisheries Act, and the Migratory Birds Convention Act. I believe the first one is provincial, and the other two are federal acts.

4:10

What I've heard as I sat through second reading, Committee of the Whole, and now third reading of this bill is a number of people who have gone on about this. I thought: well, maybe this is a vanity bill, that it's an opportunity for people to get up and get themselves on the record. It doesn't really say anything. It doesn't really create anything new. Okay. Well, fair enough. If that's what private members want to use the time for, who am I to say otherwise? Then I listened very carefully to the remarks that the sponsoring member made during Committee of the Whole. I actually looked them up again, and if anybody following along at home wants to do this, those remarks are appearing on pages 430 to 431 in the *Hansard* from May 5, 2008. That's when I started to figure out what was going on here.

There's a very long speech by the sponsoring member. Making sure that people don't get in the way of people that want to hunt or fish or trap seems to be a concern for the sponsoring member, particularly not anyone that wants to protest these activities, and he seems very concerned – it goes on for half a page here – that people not get in the way. Then it also goes on to talk about how, really, private owners and leaseholders should also not interfere or prohibit or stop people from coming onto the land to engage in these activities. That's sliding a little further off because, in fact, those individuals do have the right to prohibit that entry onto their land.

Yes, there are various regulations that are in place to say: well, if you let someone onto your land, you know, you're protected. Insurance issues and liability issues. But they still have the right to say: no, I don't want you doing this, and don't come around here.

I have discovered something else of interest that's happening. As I said, my father is a hunter, and every fall he goes out. He's always done all the right things. He goes to the property owner and asks permission to come onto the land, says how long he's going to be there, where he is, the licence plate number of his vehicle, et cetera, et cetera. What he started to see in the last couple of years is that he's going back to these same farmers where he's gone for 30 years, maybe longer, and they're saying: "Oh, yeah. Well, listen, I've already given an okay to another party to be on the land today." Often it's today, tomorrow, and the next day, so the whole weekend, right? My father would go on to the next landowner or three or four, so it's an entire area that's being covered here. Eventually he would find a place, and he would set up his blind or whatever, and he would spend the day there. What he started to notice was that nobody else was going onto those other lands. Although permission had been sought and given and the landowner had prohibited anybody else from going onto that land because they'd already said it was okay for one group of people, nobody else was going on it.

So who were these people that were securing access and then not taking advantage of it? What he eventually figured out was that these were professional outfitters. They were organizing for parties of people, groups of people that were coming from – who knows? – out of province, out of country, or perhaps out of the area. These professional outfitters were going around and literally locking up every single possibility because they had a group, and depending on where the geese landed, in whose field, they could then drive everybody over there, unload them all, and they could go off and shoot in that field. They would be able to provide this experience for their paying customers, but in doing so, it prohibited the small guy, the individual hunter who was out for what my colleagues here would call his recreation, his leisure activity. I thought: isn't that interesting? We have a situation where we've got a bill before this House which is upholding a sort of individual tradition of hunting, fishing, and trapping, yet what's actually happening out there is that increasingly those individuals are not being able to get that access anymore because it's being tied up by professional outfitters.

I suspect that maybe that's what's behind what's being brought forward in this bill. It doesn't say anything about that. Indeed, as I noted earlier, the sponsoring member went on at length about how the leaseholder and the landholder really should let people onto their land because there have been all these regulations put in place to make sure that there was good communication and things were respected, and they really should let them onto the land. This is really about making sure that people can hunt, fish, and trap – I think trapping is a bit different here, Mr. Speaker – unimpeded and even get access where, in fact, individual landholders and leaseholders have the right to prohibit them from accessing that land.

From Edmonton-Centre do I really want to be supporting this bill? No, I don't think I do, Mr. Speaker. In the Official Opposition we always approach private members' bills as free votes. We don't discuss them in caucus. We don't have a plan of attack. Those that wish to speak do; those that don't don't. We don't have any agreed-upon voting structure here. I've spent a couple of weeks while this bill has been moving through sort of listening, and I don't think my constituents do support this particularly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise

again today and speak to Bill 201, the Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Heritage Act. This is my third time speaking to this bill. I've chosen to stand up this number of times because I personally value hunting, fishing, and trapping. These activities have been a part of my life since I was a child. In light of this, today I'm going to share with the Assembly some of my more personal experiences and sentiments regarding hunting, fishing, and trapping.

Mr. Speaker, I began learning the sports of hunting and fishing when I was five years old. I caught my first brook trout in a stream with a red-and-white bobber and a worm. My grandfather would take me on his expeditions in northern Ontario and teach me all the tricks of his trade in catching everything from rock bass to muskie. I was there for years with my grandfather and uncles until I was able to shoot my first animal. I was 12 years old, and it was a white-tailed deer.

In those years I began to learn about the values of the experience of hunting and fishing: to venture out on crisp fall mornings and be surrounded by the richness of a peaceful nature, to sit on a lake engulfed in the mist and only be able to hear a trout rise close by, and also the value of family. This is why I have a firm belief in ensuring that these traditions are passed on. My uncles and cousins were also hunters and fishermen, and family gatherings would be full of conversation during hunting season as we sat by the fire after a day's activities.

Mr. Speaker, we were fortunate enough to have a cabin in the bush. I couldn't tell you how many times we'd all meet up and share our stories, giving the whos and whats, wheres and whens of our latest adventures. This is not to mention the food, which was, obviously, always delicious. To this day I do not believe that there is any smell that's any better than the smell of coffee brewing over an open fire with eggs and bacon sizzling in a frying pan. It's rewarding as well. I found that there was satisfaction and pride in being able to enjoy the fruits of my labour.

Mr. Speaker, I've hunted with a rifle, a shotgun, and a bow and arrow. I've been the hunter, and I've been the hunted. A few years ago I was out hunting moose and, upon backtracking, realized that a large grizzly had been following me for about 10 miles. I've fished for trout in the lakes and streams of Alberta, I've fished for muskie, I've fished for shark in Australia, I've fished for tuna in Hawaii, and I've fished for marlin in Mexico. I'm proud to say that this Christmas I was fishing for striped marlin in the Gulf of Mexico in the Sea of Cortez and was able to land a 125-pound marlin with a 10-foot nine-weight fly rod, probably the most exhilarating time of my life. These experiences to me were about family time. I think that they helped me build the foundation of my family and, inherent in that, my morals. They most certainly contributed to my becoming the avid outdoorsman that I am today.

Just a few years after I moved to Alberta from Ontario, which was in 1979, I became a fishing guide in the Jasper area. This was a unique experience in that tourists from all around the world would end up in Jasper and want to go fishing. I had the pleasure, Mr. Speaker, of taking people from all over the world, such exotic places as Mexico, South Africa, Tasmania, India, and Brazil. These people were here to enjoy Alberta in its fullest. They were fascinated by the fact that not only was fishing a part of our heritage but still practised in our society. It was so interesting because most of them would never have had such an opportunity in their own country. We'd get them all geared up, lead them to the water, and teach them how to fish.

These individuals would harness this unique opportunity. Some of them would catch and release, and some of them would catch and consume. I have to say that there's really nothing like watching them make their first catch, clean their fish, cook their fish on the

shore, and eat it when it is so fresh. Mr. Speaker, this experience really helped me to identify the kinds of privileges that we have in Canada and especially here in Alberta.

4:20

Around the same time many of my friends were and still are running traplines, so I've helped out there as well. Mr. Speaker, we've caught mink, marlin, beaver, squirrel. We've skinned them ourselves, we've sent them to be tanned, and we've sold them. Pretty much every weekend during hunting season we head out to hunt birds or fish for large rainbow trout in the lakes in my riding. The truth is that it didn't really matter anymore if we managed to shoot or catch anything. It was more about the experience. It was about family and friends sharing laughs and appreciating the surroundings.

Mr. Speaker, I'm a fundamental believer that you should never catch, trap, or hunt more than what you need. I believe that we should use all that we have and hunt, fish, and trap in the most prudent, responsible manner. This is one method that we use to ensure the conservation of our animal population.

Mr. Speaker, outdoorsmen's activities along with embracing animal and land conservation teach so much more than just a sport, such as to harness certain opportunities and not to abuse the system. I believe that this bill will ensure that all Albertans know that this government understands and appreciates the contributions that these activities make. These contributions extend beyond the lives of those who choose to hunt, fish, and trap and into the maintenance of animal populations. With this bill we are promoting a message that we value our environment as well as the people who care for and are connected to it. We are honouring our heritage and assisting in the transfer of those time-honoured traditions to the next generation.

For people like me this bill gives me a renewed validation of my hunting, fishing, and trapping experiences as well as a new desire to continue to hunt, fish, and trap. Mr. Speaker, I stand before you for the third and last time in full support of Bill 201, the Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Heritage Act.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I rise today to join the debate in third reading on Bill 201, the Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Heritage Act. Bill 201 ensures that hunting, fishing, and trapping are forever enshrined as an important part of Alberta's heritage and also protects the rights of those Albertans who take part in these activities. The sustainability of Alberta's environment is significantly affected by these activities in a number of very positive ways. I'd like to focus specifically on Alberta's wetlands and how outdoorsmen are vital to supporting and maintaining the health of these environments.

Wetlands are areas of land where the soil is often saturated with moisture to the point that water collects in pools. These are not lakes but, for example, more like inlets, outlets, or shallow bays. They usually occur in areas where the land is depressed, and they are always a part of a larger functioning ecosystem. It is here that animals are neither specifically aquatic nor terrestrial and where certain plants thrive; actually, some very unique plants. As you move north through Alberta, the prevalence of these wetlands increases, and wetlands are more likely to be permanent fixtures on the land. Mr. Speaker, nearly 21 per cent of this great province is covered by wetlands. They're a unique and valued part of our province and its ecosystem, contributing to the sustainability of our animal populations and acting as natural strainers, or sieves, vital for the host of freshwater systems that sustain us all.

Mr. Speaker, several organizations and agencies are committed to

the conservation of Alberta's wetlands. These organizations rely on individuals like hunters, fishers, and trappers who spend time in these environments to keep a watchful eye on the balance in these areas as they cannot survey the land alone. Ducks Unlimited is one such organization, which was founded by hunters who were concerned about protecting these areas. These sportsmen are invaluable because they have first-hand knowledge of the state of the ecosystem's delicate balance. In their absence this land would likely not be surveyed as extensively and would most likely end up being less protected and possibly lost forever.

One very popular wetland animal to both our heritage and our Canadian identity is the beaver. Of course, I would look across at the table to our mace, and I remember when that new beaver stand was presented to you, Mr. Speaker, and to this House by the society of Alberta trappers as a recognition of the importance of the beaver to this province.

The beaver has had an interesting role to play in the context of our nation's trapping history. Mr. Speaker, the Hudson's Bay Company sold approximately 3 million beaver pelts from 1853 to 1877, and the animals soon became the standard flag-bearer of the fur trade. Marjorie Campbell noted in *The Nor'westers* that never had the European felt makers seen fur like this. The Canadian beaver adorned the heads of many a European and gentlemen of the world in the famous felt hat. Furriers found that the fibres of beaver pelts could be matted into a lustrous, high-quality felt, and beaver hats soon became a distinguishing trademark of royalty and wealth. As time moved forward, demand ebbed as silk velour replaced beaver felt in popular fashion circles.

However, by this point beavers were establishing themselves as something of a nuisance, and by the early 20th century stories of ornamental trees routinely felled by beavers in Edmonton parks were certainly not very uncommon. In fact, Mr. Speaker, parks staff would trap the animals and relocate them, only to see them return the following year and in greater numbers. Busy as a beaver. This was the first indication that removal tended only to be a short-term solution as more beavers began to occupy this very favourable environment.

Mr. Speaker, beaver populations are typically determined by the amount of available habitat and food and tend to be restricted to wetlands, lakes, and waterways. By damming streams, beavers often raise the water level to surround their lodge with a protective moat, which creates deepwater habitats which sustain waterfowl, fish, and other species native to northern climes. When beaver dams become too shallow or the tree supply becomes depleted, beavers will abandon their lodges. Eventually water will breach the dam and drain, leaving a residual silt, branches, and dead leaves, which serve as ideal habitats for other animal species. Following this the wetlands will eventually dry out and evolve into suitable grazing meadows that benefit many herbivore and ungulate species. The cycle completes itself, Mr. Speaker, when grazing meadows are recolonized by tree species such as aspens and willows. At this point beavers will reoccupy the area and restart the entire process. The circle of beaver life, I guess.

As you can see, the beaver has an important ecological role that impacts many other animal and plant species to the ultimate benefit of Alberta's environment. As a result, Mr. Speaker, many hunting and trapping organizations have aligned themselves with conservation efforts that promote the careful management of the beaver. Fur trappers and hunters have come to respect the role of the beaver in nature, particularly in regard to the importance of creating and maintaining valuable wetlands.

Continued wetland conservation in our province is crucial for many other reasons as well. Our boreal forest, prairies, and Rocky Mountain wetland areas represent some of the most beautiful

landscapes in the world and house some of the most interesting and unique animals. The boreal forest regions represent the largest land-based ecosystems in the world, Mr. Speaker, and in fact in Canada it accounts for approximately two-thirds of our entire country.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Rogers: Two-thirds, hon. member.

I mention this, Mr. Speaker, because the boreal forest region is about 20 per cent wetland. Wetlands are vital in that they're often breeding, feeding, and staging point for various animals, and in many ways they are the starting point for numerous life cycles. We therefore have a responsibility to these vital areas of Alberta's landscape and to protect the animals who call these systems home. Alberta's hunters, fishermen, and trappers understand more than anyone the importance of conserving these habitats. Therefore, I'm very pleased to stand on behalf of the many constituents of mine from Leduc-Beaumont-Devon who would want to support Bill 201.

Thank you very much.

4:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 201, the Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Heritage Act, as proposed, of course, by my colleague the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. I think I'd first like to start off by speaking to the act and my support of the act because of the rich history of hunting and trapping where I, in fact, live in the central part of the province, in the prairie region of Alberta.

As a fourth-generation farmer on our property I had the experience of seeing an archaeological dig when there was a development in my area. That gave me a better idea of the rich heritage of the hunting and trapping that had taken place on my property, for that matter. There were teepee rings that were on a hill in an area that was to be developed as a road, and I reported to highways, to Transportation, when the development was going to take place on that property. They came out to do a couple of exploratory digs and in the end wound up doing 80 digs 80 centimetres deep in a grid pattern because the find was so rich. Thousands of the artifacts are in the museum here in Edmonton.

What they found was that for the past 10,000 years my property has been continuously inhabited, and they have hunted and fished on that property right back 10,000 years. There's a layer of ash in the soil in Alberta that shows the last – Mount St. Helens is probably the best way to describe it. It took place some 6,000 years ago. So anywhere where we dig in the province and we find that ash, we know that we're at the 6,000-year level. Of course, this area was inhabited well below the ash level to where they were judging it to be about 10,000 years. The artifacts, of course, that were there were spear points, sharpening tools, scrapers for hides, and all of the assorted goodies that went with that.

When my great-grandfather and grandfather moved to the area, the First Nations people had hunted the area right up to the time of homesteading, and my family has carried on, all four generations, from that point. It's a very rich area.

My children, of course, have been exposed to it, and wild game has been a part of the diet of my family for many, many years, to the point where, in fact, I still continue to hunt to this day. Every year I make my own deer sausage mixed with wild boar that I hunt myself and prepare and smoke, and it's in my freezer in Edmonton, actually. Even though I raise cattle, I still take my wild game around.

When my wife and I first left the city to move to the country, I trapped, and part of the income and part of the money that we made was from the trapping of furs. There is still a good trapping business in our area. The wildlife is extremely rich in my area, and on my property out the window from my kitchen I am able to watch deer go by, both white-tailed and mule deer. Moose feed on my place, antelope come very close, and I'm in the middle of the flyway for the migratory birds. There is a project on my property where approximately 40 pairs of Canada geese nest every year. I don't think there has been a year since I was old enough, at age 16, where I haven't in fact had a hunting licence, to the point where I spent three years of my life in Ontario, and even during those three years I brought an Alberta hunting licence and came back and hunted every year.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, from my comments, I think the hunting heritage for our province is extremely important. I think that we have been very supportive as a province of that heritage and continue to be so, and thank goodness we are. The diversity of wildlife in the prairie region and throughout my constituency is unbelievable, with so many different types of wildlife that, in fact, weren't there when my great-grandfather first came out. There was a practice at that time with our First Nations people to burn off the grasslands to bring the green grass back so that the buffalo would return.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Infrastructure, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(iii) we now have up to five minutes allocated to the mover of the motion, so I'll call on the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard about Alberta's abundance of wildlife, beautiful landscapes, and the ongoing effort to maintain and enhance these attributes in our province. We've heard how it takes a government, many organizations, and individuals to continuously monitor and plan to effectively manage the wildlife in this province. Hunting, fishing, trapping, and conservation will always be simultaneous tasks, ensuring that the rights of Albertans to engage in the activities of hunting, fishing, and trapping are protected. It also protects their rights to be good stewards, environmentalists, and wildlife managers.

Mr. Speaker, these activities were a way of life in the past. They filled the basic needs of food and clothing and eventually evolved into commerce. Today these activities need to be recognized as part of Alberta's heritage and, as such, should continue to be enjoyed by all Albertans.

I again want to thank all members for their support, and with that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a third time]

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

Bill 203

Election Statutes (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2008

Mr. Marz moved that Bill 203, the Election Statutes (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2008, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence.

[Debate adjourned May 5: Mr. MacDonald speaking]

The Speaker: We are on an amendment, hon. members. On the amendment the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This is on a hoist amendment, and I find that very interesting given this bill. Hoist amendments are always a way of making something disappear without being seen to totally vote it down in this Assembly. It is a way to kill it. There's no question about that. Everybody that knows anything about parliamentary process knows that this is a way of killing a bill. I'm very interested in why the members of the government caucus, interestingly all working together, are keen to kill this bill.

There are two interesting parts to it, Mr. Speaker. The first is the actual establishment of the four years, which, in fact, is a non-partisan effort to try and get away from the political manoeuvring of the actual call of election dates and have it set at a fixed time so that everybody knows where it is and it's not subject to that kind of political manoeuvring. Now, there are obviously safeguards that are in the legislation so that if there was a need for the election to be called at a different time, it certainly could be. Those safeguards you expect to be in there.

I'm disappointed to see a hoist put up because we in the Liberal caucus, the Official Opposition, have been promoting the idea of fixed elections for some time. It was in our 2004 election platform. It was in our 2007 election platform. We've had a couple of private members' bills come forward in which that was a part of it: from the Leader of the Official Opposition Bill 210, Election (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2006. It was part of the Member for Calgary-Currie's citizens' initiative act from 2005. It's something that we're very interested in, so I'm disappointed to see a hoist motion being brought forward.

4:40

I was approached by some members of the media who told me that the reason why the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills had brought forward that motion to hoist was through a concern that somehow having a fixed election date would allow unions, particularly those unions that contract with the government, to hold the government hostage or hold them over a barrel because we were getting close to an election. I admit, Mr. Speaker, that that struck me as, I think, the all-time most bizarre reason I've ever heard for not having fixed election dates.

Of course, there are two parties involved with the negotiation for collective bargaining certainly, and the other major party involved in this one would be the government. So if you got to a point where there was an impasse because there was a looming election on a fixed election date, I think we would have got there, and half of the problem could be put squarely at the door of the government. The government has a better than fighting chance here of being able to make sure that those kinds of labour negotiations do not become a problem for an election with a fixed election date. I have to admit that that is the strangest reason I've ever heard for not being willing to support fixed election dates.

The idea that in this province, where the government has worked so hard to weaken and restrict organized labour and the collective bargaining process – I guess on the one hand I'm heartened to see that a member of the government would believe that they are so powerful that they could somehow skew an election or cause a great deal of trouble for the government because they are so powerful and clever and crafty. I'll take that as a sign of respect from members of the government towards those involved in organized labour, but that certainly hasn't been the experience.

I mean, when we look at this, that we can't get any kind of first contract legislation through this government, the idea of having legislation that would ban replacement workers sends shivers up the spines of almost everybody on the government side. I haven't seen

that this is a labour movement that is really well supported by this government. You know what? It should be, Mr. Speaker, because if you want a safe workplace, if you want fewer accidents, if you want to kill fewer people than three per week every week of the entire year, you want to be working on a union job site because they have enough protection. They've built it in to years and years of negotiation, that when something is unsafe, they can say it and be protected, and they won't do unsafe work. They do not injure and they do not kill as many people, as many workers, Alberta people, on union sites as on sites that are non-union sites.

Sorry. That got me off on a really long tangent, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize for that. That's why relevance is important in these debates. It was flowing from the comments that were made publicly by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills on why he had brought forward this hoist to get rid of this fixed elections date amendment act, that was sponsored by the Member for St. Albert. It's something that we've supported. I've described that in the number of ways that we've supported it. It's very important to me. It's very important to the people in Edmonton-Centre, who have been pushing me and have certainly stated in many ways their grasp of democracy, their willingness to see things like a citizens' initiative, to see things like proportional representation, which I'm also very keen on. There are lots of possibilities for building democracy in this province. These fixed election dates are the beginning of that, so to see it hoisted is – well, some would argue that it's antidemocratic. I suppose I'm going to come down on that side and certainly not using the excuse of somehow having labour unrest as a result of it.

We would be following behind a number of other ones now. B.C. and Ontario already have fixed election dates. New Brunswick is coming up on that one, as is P.E.I. I think that federally we may be looking at something like that. Saskatchewan and Quebec have engaged in a fair amount of discussion around this issue. You know, in Alberta we like to see ourselves as innovators and mavericks and out at the front of the column of the cavalry charging across the prairies, and the irony is that we're just about anything but that. You couldn't be any wimpier on electoral reform than we are in this province. I mean, really, we can't get anything through here. If anybody could possibly be backpedaling faster away from any kind of democratic reform, it would be this government. This would have been a very tiny little step forward, but a positive one that I think would have signalled to a lot of people.

The other part of this, the reason why I'm speaking against the hoist, is that we've all talked about and wrestled with the fact that our voter turnout is declining. How do we make this process more relevant to Albertans? How do we engage them more? You know, they're not fooled. These are smart people. They're living in Alberta, and they understand that what we have currently is completely manoeuvred by government. They're not fooled by that. They can see all the photo ops in all of the little papers throughout Alberta, those weeklies where the local MLA is handing out a cheque.

Now, thank goodness the Official Opposition was able to bring to light and get stopped the practice of signing the government member's own name on the cheque, which is particularly embarrassing. So that stopped. But those great big cardboard cheques, nonetheless, are still handed out to make it seem like somehow the member has garnered that money from the government by themselves and is presenting it to the community out of their own largesse, which isn't the case at all.

Certainly, Albertans notice that the elections are being manoeuvred. They notice the cheque handouts. They notice the timing of the

announcement of the projects. They notice, you know, how things are manoeuvred coming up to whenever the government chooses to have an election: the extra PR campaigns, the special full-page ads in the major dailies. I mean, a lot of money is spent by this government as it manoeuvres its way up to an election, and a fixed election date would have addressed that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On the amendment the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand and speak to the amendment and contribute some final thoughts on Bill 203, the Election Statutes (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2008. The first thing I'd like to say is that I'm gratified that this bill has stimulated such a spirited debate in this Assembly. As I alluded to in my introductory comments, my intention was to stimulate a discussion on the topic of fixed election dates. I've listened attentively to the comments of my fellow members and appreciate their thoughts and recommendations on this issue.

I also appreciate the motion to defer further discussion on second reading for six months. I have been briefed on the parliamentary tradition of the hoist; however, the motion is very clear, and when the time comes, I intend to challenge the parliamentary tradition on that.

I would like to reiterate that I believe there are some significant advantages worth considering at that later date as we contemplate implementing fixed election dates into Alberta's electoral system. Most importantly, there is the question of efficiency, which I urge members to consider over the ensuing months, efficiency both in terms of cost and human resources. Already in the short two months of this session we have seen many examples where a fixed election date would have improved our efficiency and effectiveness in this Assembly.

With fixed and predictable election dates we would not need to ratify appropriations for monies already spent. With a fixed election date we would not need to call the Legislature to order so soon after an election. We would not have to scramble, particularly amongst rookie members like myself, to prepare bills and motions before we even know the difference. The electoral office would have been in a position of election readiness prior to the writ being dropped, with enumerations completed when the weather was more suitable for enumerators. Voters would have been in a position to plan their vacations and business schedules in anticipation of a general election. This would assuredly have increased voter turnout. The election schedule needs to consider the timetable of the electorate and not be held at the whim of the governing party. After all, we're here to serve the people; the people are not here to serve us. The list goes on.

4:50

Finally, I acknowledge that Bill 203 would significantly alter the electoral model provided through our British parliamentary heritage. Parliamentary democracy is, however, an evolving institution. It is evolving as we speak. Since this bill was first conceived, we have seen our sister provinces of Saskatchewan and, more recently, Manitoba join the movement to establish fixed election dates. It is a movement. Fixed election dates will be a fact in Alberta at some point in time even if this bill is eventually defeated. I firmly believe that the concept of fixed election dates will outweigh the perceived disadvantages and will reduce costs, improve efficiencies, and increase voter interest.

I do concur that a change of this magnitude is an important one

that will require dialogue with Albertans, the electoral office, and this government, and that is why I will support the amendment. In the end this idea has merit and is worthy of further study and, hopefully, consideration together with a larger package of electoral reform.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to further debate six months hence.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, did you catch my eye to speak on the amendment?

Mr. Taylor: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I won't support the amendment, a hoist amendment on a bill like this. You can practically hear the clucking sounds of the big chickens who don't want to support this.

Ms Blakeman: I said wimpy, but if you want to say chicken, okay.

Mr. Taylor: I'll say chicken. I'm going to leave the last syllable off that.

First of all, I want to commend the hon. Member for St. Albert for bringing Bill 203 forward. Clearly, he was inspired by my Bill 217 in the fall of 2005 and the Leader of the Official Opposition's Bill 210 from 2006. In fact, if this doesn't work out for the hon. member, I'm sure we can find a place for him on this side of the House, down here among us.

You know, I would hold up as an example that fixed election dates are not something that even a government that cringes when the word democracy is mentioned needs to fear and loathe. Ontario has fixed election dates. It certainly appeared in the dying days of the last session of the Ontario Legislature, before Premier McGuinty was forced by fixed election dates to go to the people, to go to the polls as though he would probably go down to defeat. Then the leader of the Conservative Party came up with an idea that the people of Ontario found particularly cockamamie, and they re-elected the McGuinty government. So it is possible that even when you do boneheaded things, four years' worth of boneheaded things, and you can't seem to turn things around and you're staring down the barrel of the fixed election date, you might still win. Stranger things have happened, even in Alberta.

I just don't understand. I cannot wrap my head around why you wouldn't want to support this bill, and I can't wrap my head around why you would choose a legislative procedure that I believe to be as fundamentally undemocratic as a hoist motion to try and get rid of this.

Ms Blakeman: At least it's debated.

Mr. Taylor: It is debated. As my colleague from Edmonton-Centre pointed out, at least it's debated, at least it's debatable. But it is still, I think, a strategy, a tactic, a move that speaks to a government that is anything but open and accountable and transparent. I might as well call a spade a spade because I know that I'm going to be outvoted on this one.

An Hon. Member: Call it a shovel.

Mr. Taylor: No, I think I'll call it a spade just to be different. You guys call it a shovel if you want.

This government is anything but open and accountable and transparent. This government is anything but democratic. This government runs screaming in terror when one of its own members proposes, for reasons that he just outlined, efficiency if no other reason, to do something that would be good for the people of the

province of Alberta. You guys make me shake my head, you know, and the brilliance of you all is that you come up with new ways to make me shake my head on a daily basis.

I can't imagine that there's anything else that needs to be said, Mr. Speaker. These guys are unbelievable.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Speaking to the amendment, I have a few more things that can be said, despite figuring that the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, I will admit, has eloquently stated the case. I'll just add a few more concerns.

I want to commend the Member for Foothills-Rocky View, the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, who has had a similar conversion, who has had a similar Damascus moment to the Minister of Education because this individual has gone from advocating the idea of a wall around Alberta that would protect us from the democracy imposed upon us from without, that devil of a democracy that's the situation in Ottawa. Mind you, possibly part of that conversion is that it's a new devil that's sitting in Ottawa.

He spoke eloquently in support of the need for transparency and accountability. I mean, he's been a university professor for a number of years at the university that I graduated from. He has studied political science, and I would think that from an academic point of view this is an area that he's extremely well versed in. He understands the need for transparency and accountability and an open democracy. If he supports it, the fact that his government has recognized his potential and has elevated him to the position of a minister should mean that at least within his own membership ranks his opinion is valued, yet it seems to be totally disregarded in this particular case.

What I also find amazingly interesting is that the nine of us, or if you want to look at it as the 11 of us, represent such an enormous threat to the stranglehold that has been the Alberta Conservative case for 37 years that the idea of making this tiny step towards transparency and accountability by having a fixed election, as opposed to fixing elections, would cause such fear and trepidation, one little step declaring a particular date.

Now, union individuals in this province are always under the government's attack, and they get blamed for an awful lot of things. The former Premier referred to anybody who had a social conscience as basically a left-wing nut, and he threw in all kinds of people who fit into that category: Friends of Medicare, Raging Grannies. Anybody that brought up the idea of a social conscience was admonished.

A number of members from this current government were members when the Premier and this government received two awards for being the most secretive, lacking-in-transparency government two years running by the Canadian Press Association for their hiding of and sort of taking advantage and manoeuvring of the playing field.

Well, granted, the nine of us and the two NDP individuals that are here: there is no doubt about our intelligence. There is no doubt about the fact that our constituents have recognized our dedication, our personal integrity, and have asked us, in spite of large obstacles, to represent them because they have faith in us. The idea that we're that powerful: even the members of the government must find that

notion rather amusing. If you can't tilt the playing field a little bit towards the level by having fixed election dates, what does that say to the rest of Albertans, 21 per cent of which voted for you, 79 per cent of which did not?

5:00

Now, you've got a majority, but if you wanted to have a true mandate, then I think you'd want to bring more people to the process. By having a fixed election date, where people knew and could plan around it, as well as a whole number of other possibilities, like looking into a citizens' assembly and exploring the possibilities of proportional representation, having longer openings on the day that the vote is taking place, potentially looking at a double-day vote, potentially looking at a vote on a Saturday or a Sunday to accommodate individuals – this fixed election is the tiny little start. Why it is so feared by this government, who has had a stranglehold on power . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm sorry to intervene, but the time has now expired for the debate with respect to Bill 203. I must now call the question with respect to the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:02 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Ady	Doerksen	Marz
Allred	Drysdale	Mitzel
Amery	Fritz	Oberle
Benito	Goudreau	Olson
Berger	Groeneveld	Ouellette
Bhardwaj	Hancock	Rodney
Bhullar	Hayden	Rogers
Blackett	Horner	Sarich
Campbell	Johnston	Snelgrove
Cao	Klimchuk	Stevens
Danyluk	Knight	Weadick
DeLong	Lukaszuk	Xiao

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Mason	Taylor
Chase	Pastoor	

Totals:	For – 36	Against – 5
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[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 203 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's approaching 5:30. I would move that we adjourn until 7:30 tonight.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:15 p.m.]

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