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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.

Thursday, May 22, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. Grant that we the members of our province's Legislature fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all of our people. Let us be guided by these principles in our deliberations this day. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly the grade 6 class from the Kihew Asiniy education centre in Saddle Lake, Alberta. We have 15 students visiting us here today along with two teachers to take part in a tour of the Legislature and sit in the gallery in this Assembly. So far today they've had an enjoyable day enjoying stories and listening to stories about the Legislature ghost. I would ask them to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you two groups of students. The first group of students is from St. Anthony's school in Drumheller. They are accompanied today by Mrs. Celeste Schrock, Ms Michelle Kostelecky, parent helpers Mr. Pete Cardamone, Mr. Neil Duncalf, Mr. Doug Herman, Mrs. Lisa Kluck, Mr. Dave Kakuk, Mr. Dale Thompson, Mrs. Keri Clark, Ms Donna Maxwell, and Mr. Lorne Christal. They're going to be getting a new school over the next couple of years, and it's wonderful to have them up here today. I ask them to rise now and receive the traditional welcome of the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to introduce to you and through you students from the Morrin school. They're accompanied today by teacher Mr. Harvey Saltys and parent helpers Mrs. Lori Cawiezel, Mrs. Danna Nelson, Ms Cheryl Devaleriola, Mrs. Lorna Hodge, Mrs. Tanya Jarvis, Mr. Ty Jarvis, Mrs. Clare Sinclair, Mrs. Dawn Herd, and Mr. Bill Avramenko. Also with them today is parent helper Mr. Andy Neuman. Andy is the executive director of the Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology in Drumheller. It's wonderful to have them. I ask them to now rise and get the traditional recognition from my colleagues.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Little Bow I'm pleased to recognize a school group from the potato capital of Alberta, Vauxhall. Some of the members of this Assembly will also know Vauxhall as the home to the only high school baseball academy in Canada. The Member for Little Bow is very happy to see the Vauxhall elementary school class in the Legislature today. They have visited us here virtually every year that he has represented them, 16 years. A special thank you to teacher Terry Olfert, the parents, the teachers and the students who

have come to Edmonton to experience the Alberta Legislature. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me real pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature Mr. Matt Grenier, who is seated in the members' gallery. I had the pleasure of meeting Matt and his family at last week's Junior Achievement gala held here in Edmonton, where Matt and his mom spoke and shared their personal story of inspiration, hope, and fortitude. Matt was not always the confident, eloquent young man we see today. Earlier in school life Matt was diagnosed with some learning disorders. However, with the love of his family and through the leadership and support of the Junior Achievement program Matt rose above all these obstacles to become the successful, confident young man we see today.

Matt became the spokesperson for Junior Achievement in '01-02, championing the program and, of course, lighting the way for thousands of young Albertans who have benefited from the Junior Achievement program. Today I would like to introduce one of Alberta's future leaders, a 2008 graduate from Queen Elizabeth high school with various interests, very eloquent, and with future plans to become a pilot. Matt is accompanied by his mom, Nancy, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's a great honour for me to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly eight members from the Sikh community visiting for the first time this Assembly. They are all members of the nagar kirtan, the Sikh parade committee, and they are all good friends of mine as well. First, I would like to introduce Mr. Darshan Singh Gill, the chairman of the committee. Secondly, Avtar Singh Gill, who is also part of the Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha. Representing Gurdwara Mill Woods is the president, Mr. Mohinder Singh Seehra, and Surinder Singh Hoonjan, the general secretary. Joginder Singh Pannu is also in the gallery today. He is the president of Sri Guru Nanak Sikh Temple. He lives in my constituency and helped me a great deal during my election campaign. Finally, Gurcharan Singh Sangha, Mohinder Singh Cumo, and Sakattar Singh Sandhu are members of the committee.

All these members have worked very hard on a volunteer basis for three months to organize the Sikh parade that was held last week. More than 15,000 people from all over Edmonton took part in this holy parade. The Sikh community donated \$7,000 to the food bank and an awareness camp for donor tissues was organized on that day. I was happy to see that six members from this Assembly attended the holy Sikh parade. Today these friends are sitting in the public gallery. I would like to ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. The first one: I've never had the chance to introduce one of my relatives, so this is a special day for me. I'm delighted to be able to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my favourite aunt and uncle, Jean and Angus Richardson. They have travelled here from Vancouver to

visit my mom. Jean is a retired nurse, and with her assistance my uncle Angus owned and operated a very successful seed company in Vancouver. They were married here in Edmonton 43 years ago today, so I would ask you all to please join in celebrating their anniversary – please stand – and to welcome them to the Alberta Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I have a second introduction. I am delighted today to be able to introduce some of the people that make it possible for all of the Liberal MLAs to do their job every day. Two of our staff are joining us in the public gallery. It must be the end of session because both of their comments to me were about what they were going to do on holidays. We have Jeff Zawadiuk if Jeff would please stand. He's our senior administrator and works on our finance. Jeff will be heading on vacation soon to visit his partner, who is volunteering in South Africa, and to fulfill a promise to his mom and join her on a balloon ride over the Serengeti. Jeff finds it interesting that all of his university studies were on municipal and federal politics, but he works in provincial politics.

Joining Jeff today is Lisa Bowers. She's our caucus receptionist. Lisa has plans, big plans, unlike the government. Lisa has been expanding her musical horizon and spends Tuesday evenings learning to play the acoustic guitar, which she can't wait to play while sitting around a fire when she heads camping later this summer. Lisa, please join Jeff, and would you join me in welcoming them to the Alberta Legislature.

1:40

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the staff of the NDP opposition office. We might have the smallest staff of any caucus in this Legislature, but I believe it to be the brightest and hardest working, putting endless hours into the very difficult task of ensuring that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and I look good and are well versed, articulate, and ready to respond to the range of issues that get presented in this Legislature. Seated in the gallery are our administrative officer, John Ashton; director of outreach, Rob Pearson; my executive assistant, Michele Jackson; research director, Sarah Hoffman; research officer, Doug Bailie; and our chief of staff, Lou Arab. I am very proud of them all. I know that they know the routine, so I would ask that they now rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In making this introduction, I'm asking for the patience of my colleagues in the Assembly and in particular my francophone colleagues in the Assembly.

M. le Président, aujourd'hui il me fait un grand plaisir de pouvoir introduire à vous et à travers vous à tous les membres de notre Assemblée Valerie Gauthier, une étudiante d'échange de l'Université de Montréal. Valerie rejoint l'équipe du Nouveau Parti Démocratique pour la durée de l'été, et nous sommes très contents de la recevoir dans notre caucus. J'aimerais demander à Valerie de se lever et de recevoir les plus chaleureuses salutations de la part de cette Assemblée.

[Translation] Today it gives me great pleasure to be able to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Valerie Gauthier, an exchange student from the University of Montreal. Valerie joins the New Democrats for the rest of the summer, and we are very happy to have her in our caucus. I would

now ask Valerie to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. [As submitted]

Members' Statements

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

Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan 2008

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise today to acknowledge the nagar kirtan which took place on Sunday, May 18, 2008, to celebrate the 309th anniversary of the creation day of Khalsa.

On April 13 Sikhs all over the world celebrated Vaisakhi. Vaisakhi is the day when the 10th guru created the order of Khalsa. Guru Gobind Singh Ji baptized five Sikhs and gave Sikhs a clear identity and a code of conduct to live by. Every year Sikhs all over the world celebrate the creation day of Khalsa by gathering at gurdwaras to offer their prayers.

This year, Mr. Speaker, approximately 15,000 people participated in the procession that began at Gurdwara Mill Woods and travelled to Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, which is in my constituency of Ellerslie. After prayer and brief introductions at Singh Sabha, the nagar kirtan returned to Gurdwara Mill Woods and concluded. The Sri Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara was also an active participant in the nagar kirtan.

In addition, a booth was set up to raise awareness in hopes of enhancing organ and tissue donation. As well, transit workers from the Sikh community organized a food drive and collected a bus full of food and raised \$3,200 in cash donations for the food bank.

The event was attended by many elected officials, including myself and the hon. members for Edmonton-Manning, Edmonton-Meadowlark, and Edmonton-Mill Creek, who brought greetings on behalf of the government.

Today I want to acknowledge the Sikh community here in Alberta. All Albertans benefit from the values the Sikh gurus have given us. I would also like to recognize their contributions to the cultural mosaic of Edmonton, Alberta, and Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Health Risk Study of Fort Chipewyan

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The announcement today of a systematic review of health risks, including cancer, in Fort Chipewyan by the federal and provincial governments is long overdue both for the benefit of residents and for the oil sands industry reputation. First Nations have many challenges to deal with as a result of historic and current dependency on government to make decisions that protect their well-being. Ongoing developments, especially oil sands activity in the Fort McMurray area, affect air, water, and land, including their key foods such as fish, plants, and wildlife. First Nations, like many Albertans, are torn by, on the one hand, great economic benefits, including jobs, and, on the other hand, perceived adverse health effects. In Fort Chipewyan and Fort MacKay health professionals have repeatedly asked for careful epidemiologic studies as people are uncertain and anxious for themselves and their children.

What do we know of the cumulative impact of long-term, low-dose exposure to polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, arsenic, and mercury present in the air, water, and food in the area? If oil sands development was a few kilometres upstream of Calgary or Edmonton, we would be taking these concerns very seriously indeed. There is very

little, if any, research on human health effects of the mixture of these three toxins, yet we know that mice exposed to a mixture of polyaromatic hydrocarbons and arsenic have an increased risk of cancer tenfold compared to exposure to either chemical alone.

Reports with statistics hastily put together last year indicated that Fort Chip cancer rates were similar to the rest of Alberta. But due to small numbers these are notoriously inaccurate in predicting risk – and researchers have told the government this – nor do statistics reassure people who experience oil-related smells, tastes, and changes in the food they eat daily. Finally, under the pressure of both local and international public outrage we may see a serious commitment to examining the human health impacts at ground zero of oil sands development. This is good news for First Nations, for the oil industry, and for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Alberta Telus Tour for the Cure

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I had the honour of participating in the launch of the Alberta Telus Tour for the Cure, an initiative led by the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation and sponsored by Telus, Safeway, and the government of Alberta. This travelling educational exhibit will visit 16 Alberta communities between now and September to increase awareness of breast cancer.

I'd like to state a few facts about this disease. Firstly, the bad news. One out of eight women will develop breast cancer in her lifetime. In this House there are 83 members. Ten per cent of our households will have that directly impact our spouse or the member themselves. One in 29 women will die of this disease. This year 2,000 women will be diagnosed and 440 will die in this province. Eighty per cent of breast cancers occur in women over the age of 50. These are our daughters, our wives, our mothers, and our grandmothers.

However, now some good news. Death from this cancer is on the decline due to mammography and improved treatment methods. Regular screening can detect a breast tumor about two years before it can be felt by physical exam, before it's large enough to spread.

The Alberta Telus Tour for the Cure coincides with the government's province-wide implementation of the Alberta breast cancer screening program. This program will encourage women between the ages of 50 and 69, those women at greatest risk, to get a screening mammogram every two years. Regular screening leads to early detection, early detection leads to early treatment, and early treatment leads to better chances of survival. It's that simple.

There are many other things that a woman can do to decrease her risk of developing this disease: stop smoking, reduce alcohol intake to one drink a day or less, exercise regularly, and maintain a healthy weight by eating healthier foods. These simple steps can foster good health and reduce the risk not only of developing breast cancer but of many other illnesses.

I encourage all Albertans to visit the Alberta Telus Tour for the Cure when it travels to your community. I challenge all members of this Assembly to join me in making a pink promise, a personal commitment to help reduce the incidence of breast cancer.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Effluent Discharge into Athabasca River

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The integrity of our water system is a major concern to Albertans. We want assurances that resource development does not compromise water quality, and if it does, we expect to be informed and immediate action taken. The Minister of Environment has stood repeatedly in this House and denied any contamination of the Athabasca River associated with oil sands activity. We are not convinced. To the minister: has the Athabasca River ever been contaminated from oil sands by-products, either from tailings or from oil and grease in waste-water ponds?

1:50

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me make it very clear that if the member opposite has concerns about possible contamination in the Athabasca River, I share those concerns. I should. I'm the Minister of Environment.

To answer his question directly, I'm sure that there have been incidents from time to time when there may have been an opportunity for hydrocarbons to enter the river. We have spills of one kind throughout the province, but we do have in place the necessary safeguards to ensure that any possible damage would be minimized.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have in my hand a presentation by Suncor presented in May 2008 to the community of Fort Chipewyan. It indicates that the Millennium upgrader discharged, and I quote, oil and grease from pond D through the waste-water pond system and into the Athabasca River in September 2007. Does the minister deny that a million litres of water contaminated with oil and grease was discharged into the Athabasca River?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, what we need to keep in mind is that there are two different storage facilities or ponds that are associated with oil sands development. One is the traditional tailings ponds on which we've had much discussion in this House, that deal with water that is a part of the process. The other is an industrial water that is water that's generated through cooling, water that's generated through domestic and also through stormwater. That is the water that the member is referring to.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, this minister has repeatedly stood up under this line of questioning and denied any contamination of the Athabasca River from tailings ponds or waste water or any oil sands activity. Can the minister tell us why the public were not informed of this incident, which clearly represents contamination of the Athabasca River?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we have industrial operations operating throughout this province. Right here in the city of Edmonton we have instances where there are stormwater discharges that will accumulate hydrocarbons. They may come off an industrial site. When those occurrences happen, it is mandatory that they be reported to Alberta Environment. In a similar manner there are mandatory requirements that oil sands operations report any discharges that are beyond what is authorized in normal day-to-day operations.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the incident involving the Millennium upgrader and the discharge into the Athabasca River of a million litres of oil and grease in September 2007 is a serious matter. This is not waste water. Oil and grease are a toxic blend. Waste water does not cause a sheen to appear on the river; oil does. And communities downstream were not notified that the water they drink had been contaminated at this time. Only eight months later during this presentation did Suncor demonstrate this. Can the minister tell us why the first time residents of Fort Chip were notified was May 6 by Suncor?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, there are in any industrial site in the province of Alberta, in fact in virtually every jurisdiction in North America, operating authorities with respect to discharge of domestic or industrial waste. They are based upon specific volumes of water. If there is an exceedance of that, it is the responsibility of the industry to advise Environment, and an investigation will then incur.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister assure the House that there is hard scientific evidence that the contaminants in the river did not reach the communities of Fort Chip and Fort MacKay?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't answer the question, because I don't know the answer to the question. But I can assure the member that I will ask my officials, who do have the technical knowledge far beyond mine, I can assure you, to get that answer for me.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The agenda for the Suncor presentation at the Fort Chip meeting on May 6 of this year was to discuss, quote, effluent discharges, oil and grease, into the Athabasca River over the past five years. End quote. Their presentation also notes that in 2003 pond effluent was released into the river. To the minister: why have we heard you in the House repeatedly denying that there were releases into the Athabasca River?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, there is a rigid system in place to ensure that there are no discharges from tailings ponds. Tailings ponds contain the result of the processing, the removal of oil from oil sands. There are, in addition to that, industrial activities that take place in there. There is stormwater that goes into ponds. I think it only makes sense that you may have from time to time on the industrial site some oil spills that would then be washed into this tailings pond.

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

Health Risk Study of Fort Chipewyan

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Community members and local doctors in Fort Chipewyan have been raising their concerns for almost a decade about the high rates of cancer that erupted after oil production began near the Athabasca River. Their concerns were not taken seriously, and only now, amid protests on the steps of the Legislature, does the government realize that this is not a problem they can continue to brush under the carpet. To the Premier: since there is a need to conduct a new investigation, does the Premier

believe that the findings of the original investigation conducted in 2005 were inadequate and superficial?

Mr. Stelmach: The original investigation was done by Alberta Health and Wellness, the federal government, and our Cancer Board, done by professionals, and I expect that the findings that they presented were true and accurate.

Mr. Taylor: So now we have a new investigation, but for 10 years this government has denied the claims of independent studies and local doctors and the knowledge of elders that cancer rates are abnormally high in Fort Chip. Can the Premier explain what changed his mind?

Mr. Stelmach: Nothing. This is something that we said we would do. I heard another presentation when I was in Fort McMurray. I said that if it's to, of course, get more information on what is happening in the area – and this is going back to 2006 as well because the study was complete, and there were no proven incidences or increases; the cancer rates in that area were consistent with rates across the province of Alberta. But if it's going to take some sort of a baseline study, I said that we're open to it, and we've always been open to that idea.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the Premier knows how many people have died or been diagnosed with colon, liver, blood, or bile duct cancer in Fort Chipewyan in the last two years since the provincial government announced that everything was just fine.

Mr. Stelmach: We can certainly communicate that information in terms of all of the cancer deaths in Alberta in every community. That is why this whole area of increased cancer rates not only in this province but in Canada, whether it be from the environment, from the food we eat, or our lifestyle, is something that we're going to work towards reducing with healthier lifestyles. But to say that in this one specific area the incidence is greater than in other parts of Alberta, to say that the report that was delivered by professionals is not correct: again, it's contested by a former radio disc jockey or whatever he did before this.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. [interjections] The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has the floor.

Alberta Treasury Branch Investments

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The subprime mortgage fiasco in the United States has caused hundreds of thousands of Americans to lose their homes while pension plans and investment funds lost billions of dollars and a major recession was triggered. The Alberta Treasury Branch was one of those investors buying up subprime mortgages from institutions who offered them as investment packages. My questions are to the minister of finance. What is the exposure of Alberta Treasury Branches to subprime mortgage losses, and what steps did the government take to minimize that exposure?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, today at 1:45 the Alberta Treasury Branch will be releasing or will have just released their statement relative to

asset-backed commercial paper. I think the most important thing for this Assembly to remember is that no Albertan will be short of cash as a result. They will get their money back; they will get their interest back. Over a period of the next six and a half to nine years Alberta Treasury Branches themselves will recoup on the paper that they hold, redefined so that it will in fact be of value in the future.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister has answered my second question, which was to ask for reassurance on behalf of those people in the province who have investments and mortgages and retirement savings with the Alberta Treasury Branches. I appreciate that the minister has provided that reassurance, but I will restate my question. What is the exposure of Alberta Treasury Branches to losses from subprime mortgages?

Ms Evans: There's not any anticipated exposure. I met last evening with the officials from the Alberta Treasury Branches. They identified that they expected to recoup all funds. I would also reassure this Assembly that the Alberta Treasury Branches and the board have taken a very good look at the due diligence surrounding this. This is triple-A rated commercial paper. It was, in fact, the CEO, Mr. David Mowat, who has helped Purdy Crawford untangle many of the issues surrounding this paper, and Canada as a whole and the financial institutions in Canada that invested were much better off than our American counterparts.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm having a hard time accepting the assurance of the minister that while ATB held considerable amounts of this paper, as she called it, subprime mortgages, there will be no losses. Will the minister stand up and confirm that that's what she meant to say, that the Treasury Branches will not have losses as a result of buying subprime mortgages?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I myself have yet to see the package they delivered today at 1:45. I know a lot of the content of it. I think this Assembly could be patient and wait until later when it will be delivered, and we will be able to get the detail and, no doubt, discuss this in greater detail in the days ahead. Let's let ATB make their report to Albertans, and then we will follow through.

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

Community Spirit Program

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Government recently launched the new community spirit program. While I realize it's only been a couple of weeks since it was launched, some people in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie are not aware of the new program. My question is for the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. What is the minister doing to ensure that the program established to support the great work of our volunteer sector is promoted to nonprofit organizations and individual Albertans?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, the community spirit program was launched on April 30 by myself and the Premier. While it's going to take some time to get the word out to all corners of the province, I'm happy to report that my department has shared information with

many not-for-profit charitable organizations, the media, and government departments. Information packages have been developed for those organizations as well as for MLAs to hand out in their constituencies. We have a website, www.communityspiritprogram.ca. Responses so far have been very positive in my travels across the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental to the same minister: how will the minister ensure that small and medium-sized nonprofits apply for the program instead of leaving it to the large, more established charities?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, the program is available to all 19,000 organizations that are in the not-for-profit and charitable sector. We have made sure that there was a cap of \$25,000 per year and \$50,000 over a three-year period to ensure that all organizations got access to it and that those larger organizations didn't hog all the money.

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

Commercial Vehicle Inspection

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The number of trucks that are found to be unroadworthy when checked is far too high. Over this past long weekend nearly 40 per cent of the trucks pulled over in Calgary had to be taken off the road because they did not meet basic safety standards. This is just unacceptable. My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Why are so many trucks in our province unsafe?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, there's no question that safety is the top priority when we're doing commercial vehicle checks, and we use North American standards to inspect the vehicles. You have to realize that a truck can be pulled out of service temporarily for a relatively minor issue like a burned-out tail light, things along those lines. Often the things they pull a truck out of service for could be, like I said, a burned-out tail light, that could have happened before they started the trip.

Mr. Hehr: You don't take it off the road for a burned-out tail light.

Mr. Ouellette: Yes, we do.

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think the trucks are pulled off just because of a burned-out tail light. There's something more serious than that.

Given that this government has privatized the inspection of these trucks and other commercial vehicles, inspections that are clearly failing, what measures does this government have in place to inspect these inspectors?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, to carry on a little bit to finish with the last question before I was so rudely interrupted by the hon. member from the other side . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister, with due respect, had exceeded the time allocated for him to give his response. Continue.

Mr. Ouellette: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I didn't have a watch on.

Mr. Speaker, I do have to say, though, that with today's technology they only pull over trucks a lot of the time when the technology tells them that there already is a problem. We also have partners in compliance that are already approved because of their past record, so they can actually bypass scales because of the good records we have.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What will the minister be doing to change this obviously flawed privatized commercial vehicle inspection program?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, if it was flawed, we wouldn't be pulling vehicles over and checking them and spot-checking them to make sure things are safe. We have very, very good private inspectors out there. In fact, our own department's inspectors have won world competitions on inspecting trucks. So we have a very, very good record on how to inspect vehicles in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Wildfire Assistance

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents were affected by wildfires this weekend, which have left a path of destruction and devastation in their wake. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. My constituents are asking what types of compensation or financial support are available from the provincial government.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our sympathies and best wishes go out to those individuals who were affected by those fires. The disaster recovery program only helps those individuals and items that are uninsurable. The damages caused by fires are fully insurable. I would like to say at this time that it does provide us with a reminder that we need to look at our policies and look at what insurance we do have to make sure that we're fully covered.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. The municipality incurred many costs and had to enlist many resources to fight these fires. Specifically for the municipality and the millions it's going to cost, can the minister advise what kind of compensation and financial support is available to them?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, the government does support municipalities. There are two programs in place, the first program being disaster recovery, as I mentioned. We also have the municipal wildfire assistance program under SRD, and I would ask the hon. minister to supplement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is the process now for applying for these funds, and how do these municipalities go about trying to get a hold of those?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency is working very proactively with the municipalities that have been affected, also working collectively with SRD to try to assess some of the damages and what the costs were. In fact, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency is in Thorhild today having discussions with the local representatives and assessing some of the damages and some of the costs.

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

2:10 Intermunicipal Development Plans

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Municipalities have operated with a great deal of autonomy since the Municipal Government Act became law in 1995. Municipal decisions have been made without necessarily consulting with their neighbours. The draft land-use framework is apparently going to change the way cities and towns make decisions. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Section 631 of the Municipal Government Act does not make it mandatory for municipalities to consider future land use in intermunicipal development plans. Will this be amended to comply with the draft land-use framework, and as this is only a draft, what would happen if the draft changed?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to pass it to my good colleague.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we have draftsmen working now examining the Forests Act, the Public Lands Act, the Alberta Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, and the Municipal Government Act to look at possible places it'll need to be amended to meld together the land-use framework as it's implemented with existing legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much. Maybe I will change ministry. He's going to probably answer it anyway. It's along the same lines. Section 632 of the MGA doesn't make it mandatory for environmental matters to be included in that development plan. Is that going to be amended to ensure compliance with the draft land-use framework? Again, if this is only a draft, what happens if it's changed?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, there are existing regulatory agencies, depending upon the size of the development, that have jurisdiction and look at environmental issues before a permit is issued. I assume the hon. member is talking about smaller type developments. There's no question that environmental impact will be the focus of the cumulative effects part of the land-use framework. So I'd say that that's another example where some legislative accommodation would be required.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I would ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs the next question, if I might. If municipalities have to ensure that their decisions align with provincial policies, smaller cities such as Lethbridge and southern Alberta communities without large planning and development departments are going to face challenges. What will the minister do to assist these communities in complying with the draft land-use framework when, in fact, it's really still sort of a framework for a framework?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would take a look at

the budget estimates for SRD, she would see that there was \$9 million allocated this year as start-up funds for the land-use secretariat, and there's money budgeted for years 2 and 3 as well. The land-use secretariat will have the resources to provide certain types of technical expertise and assistance to MDs, towns, and cities as we develop the land-use plans for each area.

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

Homelessness Initiatives in Edmonton

Mr. Xiao: Yes. Mr. Speaker, last summer when I was knocking on doors in my constituency, many of my constituents raised concerns about what was known as a tent city in Edmonton. They talked to me about their concerns: about drugs, safety, and health. My question is for the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. Since summer is around the corner, can the minister tell us what she has done so we can avoid another tent city in Edmonton?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the Member for Edmonton-McClung is concerned as he has had discussions with me in this regard. I can understand why because I'm concerned as well. Yesterday I did meet, hon. member, with Susan McGee, who is executive director of the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund. You'll recall that last year Ms McGee led community support groups in the successful management and closure of the tent city that the member is discussing. I did ask Ms McGee if she would once again lead a team to co-ordinate efforts for housing and supports for individuals.

Mr. Xiao: Mr. Speaker, my second question is for the same minister. Last year as a Rotarian we did a barbecue for the people living in the tent city, and it was obvious to me that many of the people were aboriginals. Can the minister tell us how those aboriginal people are being helped?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again the member is correct. We do know that 90 per cent of the people that were in tent city were of aboriginal descent. There is an organization in Edmonton called Wicihitowin, circle of shared responsibility, which is, as you know, the Cree word for people helping people. They have eight circles of responsibility. The first circle is for housing and shelter, hon. member. On behalf of the Edmonton trust fund, once again, I'd like to let you know that Ms McGee indicated to me that they will offer services that respect the aboriginal culture and that they will work closely with Wicihitowin to ensure that aboriginal people are well cared for.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Xiao: Yeah. My last question to the same minister: can the minister tell us how many people from last year's tent city have been sheltered?

Mrs. Fritz: Again, Mr. Speaker, I know this member is concerned about the growth that could take place if another tent city did arise here in Edmonton. Last year, though, to your question, we did assist 58 people with finding appropriate shelter. Forty-three of those are still in housing, and 10 of those are living independently and no longer require housing supports. This year we did put a response team together. That response team is going to work with the

Ministry of Employment and Immigration and the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund. They are going to provide intensive outreach into the river valley and into the inner city to help homeless people with safe housing and appropriate services.

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

Metropolitan Regional Planning

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The draft land-use framework outlines immediate planning priorities in the province, the first being the development of metropolitan plans for the capital – read Edmonton – and Calgary regions to be completed by January '09. However, the timeline for the plans to be completed for all six regions is not until 2012. The implementation of these plans will take even longer. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: since Edmonton and Calgary are able to prepare metropolitan plans by 2009, why is the government not developing plans for all the regions in the province by 2009?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, haste makes waste. Even the best designed public policy if it's not properly administered in the end isn't a very good public policy. This is going to be new ground going forward. Our thought is that if we do all these plans at once, we won't have the benefit of learning one from the other. The priorities are set out the way they are in the land-use framework. They're subject to discussion over the next six weeks, so I'd be happy to discuss it with the hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Certainly, haste over 15 years is taking its time.

Given that these metropolitan plans are being developed before their respective regional plans, how will the minister address the potential for these land-use plans to be developed and implemented in this uneven and unbalanced manner, creating inconsistencies before they're even in place? Clearly, the two big cities are going to overlap the outlying areas.

Dr. Morton: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct in that certainly the capital region will have a head start on the land-use plan for north central, the region that Edmonton is in, but there's no reason to make the worst-case scenario assumptions that she does. Our belief is, having met with and listened to the capital region and having worked closely with the Calgary regional partnership in my case, that integrating those plans with the larger regional plans will be done in due course and without the kind of difficulty she's imagining.

Ms Pastoor: Well, I was never accused of not having a good imagination.

Given that the development of the Calgary metropolitan plan will have a huge impact on the development of the southern Alberta regional plan, certainly in terms of water use, will the minister ensure that the municipalities in this region, such as Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and on, are involved in the planning process from the beginning in order to ensure that consistent policies are applied in a timely manner and, in particular, on water use in southern Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, this was the very

reason why the land-use boundaries were made congruent with the major watersheds. Yes, all affected communities will be consulted. If there are decisions made upstream prior to decisions being made downstream, the communities on the lower watersheds will be consulted and met with.

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

2:20 Sustainable Development in Northeastern Alberta

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2006 the government struck the Oil Sands Consultation Group. A year later they struck a multistakeholder committee to consult. Last June those consultations were given to the Minister of SRD among others. Now we have a draft land-use plan, which still includes no specific implementation dates. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. The northeast is in a state of crisis. When will we see real action to protect the people, wildlife, water, air, and land in this region?

Dr. Morton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd point out, as other ministers on this side have, that there's been over half a billion dollars invested in the Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo area since our current Premier was elected, so I think it's a bit of a stretch to say that it's being neglected.

In terms of ongoing protection of environmental, air, water issues we have the cumulative effects management association, the oil sands secretariat. We'll be working closely with those two groups as we draft the land-use framework for that area.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that there are currently at least 18 new projects proposed in the Wood Buffalo region, why won't the minister acknowledge that the absence of an interim strategy will allow runaway development and pollution to continue while his government moves not with wasteful haste but, rather, with the speed of a slug on codeine?

Dr. Morton: Well, I don't have any experience with a slug on codeine. I would just point out that each of the 18 projects that she's referring to are subject to a review process with environmental requirements, and that process continues to run. The members on the other side seem to think, again, that there's some ability to stop and start the provincial economy. There aren't those kinds of buttons. Particularly, you might find that the parties on the left are pretty good at the stop button, but they're not very good at the restart button.

Ms Notley: When it's necessary, we can use a slow-down button, and I'd suggest that it is here.

Given your failure to present concrete implementation plans in this area, is the minister telling the more than 500 citizens who participated in consultations a year ago: "Thanks for sharing. Hope that made you feel better. Now we'll keep doing what we've been doing for the last 40 years"?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that is no.

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

Sour Oil and Gas Development

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the ERCB issued a decision forcing an oil company to construct a new emergency route before they could start drilling for sour oil. Although this is welcome news, many of my constituents are concerned about any sour oil or gas development in the area due to safety concerns, especially since many of them remember the two blowouts in Lodgepole in the early '80s. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. What measures are in place to protect Albertans living in areas where sour oil or gas is being developed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, of course, I think we understand that the ERCB does have a very extensive process in place for the development of sour oil or gas in the province of Alberta. This includes public consultations, hearings, proper emergency planning, as the member points out, and a rigorous inspection and enforcement mechanism. This particular case that the hon. member referred to demonstrates the ERCB's dedication to safe and responsible development of Alberta's resources.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: due to the safety concerns surrounding sour gas and the intensity of the levels of some of these wells and the numbers of wells being proposed, can the minister explain why the government permits the development of sour gas at all and especially near or in areas in close proximity to urban areas?

Mr. Knight: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, sour gas is an important resource in the province of Alberta. Approximately 30 per cent of the gas that's produced in the province contains some H₂S and would be considered sour. In order to utilize the resource pool, the Energy Resources Conservation Board has the most stringent regulations in the world to ensure that the resource is developed safely. Let me be very clear: in any development of any resource the safety of Albertans is our first and most important concern.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Some people claim that the ERCB and the EUB before it are rubber-stamp organizations that will approve any and all development. Can the minister assure my constituents and all Albertans that the ERCB protects the public interest?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you. Again, Mr. Speaker, I can assure this member, her constituents, and all Albertans that the ERCB is a fair regulator and that it does protect the public interest and the health and safety of all Albertans. It's plain and simple: applications that do not meet the standards of the ERCB are rejected. If an applicant cannot prove that proposed sour gas wells can be drilled and operated safely, their applications will be denied. In 2006-07 over 2,600 applications were denied by ERCB.

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

Smoking in Vehicles Carrying Children

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although I like to consider myself a relatively fun guy, it seems as of late that I'm trying to ban all sorts of things from cars: carrying guns and drugs to even plastic bags. Although I maintain I'm still a fun guy, I'd like to discuss another measure to improve roadway safety and the health of Albertans. To the Minister of Transportation. Okotoks will vote later this month on a bylaw to ban smoking in cars carrying children. Nova Scotia has already implemented the same. Can we expect action under this dome besides some private member's bill which may likely get hoisted in any event?

The Speaker: Another fun guy, the hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, many, many, many times in this House I've said that safety is a great, great concern for this ministry under the Traffic Safety Act. I absolutely have to say that it's not the ministry that should be looking at that. I don't think anybody should be smoking with children in anything, but I don't think it's under the Traffic Safety Act that you ban smoking in automobiles.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is on record as saying that he won't support such a measure because of difficulties with enforcement. Can the Solicitor General explain how this would be different than enforcing seat belt or helmet laws?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the appropriate ministry decides that it's appropriate to pass legislation regarding smoking in vehicles, I agree with the hon. member that it's no more difficult to enforce that than it would be with seat belts or other pieces of legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do have some agreement in the House, like from the hon. Solicitor General, like it was just pointed out by the hon. Minister of Energy that safety is job one of this government. To the Minister of Transportation: although you claim this is not your responsibility, when can we expect action from you or any member of your government on ensuring our children's safety?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I have to keep repeating: every member on this side of the House cares about children's safety and the safety of all Albertans. There are a certain amount of things that we have to leave to parents to police, that we have to leave for common sense to police. We can't just keep passing laws on every single little whim that someone gets in their head or a lawyer believes would be nice to have.

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

Voting by Nonpermanent Residents

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A Court of Queen's Bench justice ruled that last fall's St. Paul county municipal election was valid even though cottagers who were not permanent residents cast votes. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Will this decision have wide-ranging implications across the province in future elections?

The Speaker: To the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General: is this matter being appealed, or is it before any court? Is it a court case at the moment?

Ms Redford: I'm sorry. I have to say that I was reading something, and I didn't hear the subject of the question.

The Speaker: Well, I'm going to assume there is no sub judice at stake here.

2:30

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the ruling has come down, and it is public. I need to say to you and to all members of this Assembly that after every election the province does a review of the Local Authorities Election Act. We look at all elements of the act, whether they be challenges or opportunities, and the present ruling that did come down we are going to look at during the review. We're going to look at the court decision and the judge's decision, and that'll be part of the review.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. The minister said that he will act. Is he saying that changes will be made to the Local Authorities Election Act?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that we are going to have public consultation, and as I said before, we are going to review the court decision. The review is going to be very thorough. It is going to be led by an MLA committee, and any changes that are made will be made for the purpose of clarity and making sure that the direction and focus are reasonable. We will have that in place before the next election.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question: should Albertans have confidence in the integrity of the election process?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes. The demographics of communities have changed, society has changed, and the election process needs to basically accommodate those changes. We need to make sure that the election process gives the opportunity for people to vote and gives the opportunity for people to fit in the guidelines that we have in place.

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

Anthony Henday Drive Interchanges

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday when I asked the Minister of Transportation about the absence from the capital plan of funding for interchanges on the western Anthony Henday Drive, he replied by talking about functional planning. What the Premier promised the city of Edmonton was that funding would be considered for these interchanges, and it is that funding that I am asking about. So again to the Minister of Transportation: why isn't that funding in the three-year capital plan?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, first of all, when that road was built – originally that was a city of Edmonton road, and we took it over, whatever the budget would come up with. The traffic counts in

those days were a lot different than today. I will say that we just did a study on the traffic out there, and it is way up. It's up 45 per cent from last year at this time. That's why we're rushing ahead as fast as we can to get all of the planning and to make sure we have the proper bridges and the proper overpasses to adhere to the safety of Edmontonians and anyone who travels that road.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Well, I don't think it counts for much if the funding is not actually in the plan.

Again to the same minister: given that the use of engine retarder brakes within Edmonton city limits is illegal and we have sheriffs and police and transport officers on this road, why isn't this bylaw being properly enforced?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I haven't looked up the actual Edmonton bylaw. They may have one, and it may be a bylaw that can't be enforced. I don't know. It's our highway, and on our highways we do not make a law against a safety feature of a vehicle.

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, those engine retarder brakes are a safety feature for transport on the highway travelling very quickly. The problem for us is that on the Anthony Henday they can still get enough of a speed that when they have to hit those intersections with lights, which is why we want them made into interchanges, they stop and they use those engine retarder brakes, and that is illegal in the city of Edmonton. Why can't you do something so that those people can sleep at night?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I just have to repeat again. When we get those interchanges and they don't have to use the retarder brakes to get their vehicle stopped quicker, her problem will be solved. But right now our traffic safety plan will not pass a law to stop a safety feature on a tractor-trailer unit.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs will now be recognized.

Maintenance Enforcement Program

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Far too often custodial parents are confronted with difficulties with enforcing their child maintenance orders. Bluntly, there are still too many deadbeat parents out there who get away with not paying for the cost of raising their own children. My question is to the Alberta Justice minister. What remedies are available to custodial parents aimed at assisting them in collecting outstanding payments?

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you for that question. The maintenance enforcement program, that Alberta Justice supports, has been very aggressively pursuing parents that have not been paying their child support. We're expanding our special investigations and financial examinations unit to southern Alberta. This is a key proactive component of the MEP strategy to improve the regularity of payment for all files.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the benefit of this House and affected parents can the minister tell this House what

recent changes have been introduced that may further assist these parents in collecting outstanding payments?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to talk for one moment about what maintenance enforcement has now within their quiver of tools to enforce the existing program, and that is to deal with drivers' licences, fishing licences, the nonissuance of passports. We have also intended, by tabling legislation in this House, to change the calculation of interest payments for people that have not made their maintenance enforcement payments. We hope to bring that legislation to the House in the fall. That will allow parents who are not receiving payment now to seek a recalculation of the payments owing to them without going to court, which will make access to justice and access to funds needed to raise children much easier.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental: for those parents who are not satisfied with the process, being those who pay or those who are to receive, is there any formal complaint process that they can go through if the service is not adequate for them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first step that anyone can take if they're dissatisfied with the maintenance enforcement account that's being managed for them is to go to the client services department at maintenance enforcement. The second step that they can take will be to appeal the actions that have been taken within MEP. After that, it is always open to parents to go back to court to have the court reconsider the order that's been put in place and how it's been enforced.

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

Electricity Supply

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Regarding Alberta's power supply a top official of EPCOR stated yesterday: we're not prone to being dramatic, but it's only a matter of time before we have a catastrophic failure; the risk is real. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Is the EPCOR official wrong in his assessment of Alberta's power supply?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've indicated a number of times publicly and certainly I think indicated before in the House that in Alberta currently with respect to our utility, transmission is job one. We do have some applications that will come forward I think shortly with respect to the issue on some of the transmission build-out in the province of Alberta. There currently, of course, are a number of projects ongoing, and we expect that we will keep up. The lights have not gone out in the province of Alberta up to this point, and I don't believe they will.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister: what

plans does the government have to deal with the catastrophic failure of Alberta's power supply?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, of course, the gentleman opposite talks about something that has not happened in the province of Alberta. There is a reason for that, in all likelihood, and that reason would be that the Alberta Electric System Operator has in place a very robust plan to be sure that we don't have a catastrophic failure. It goes all the way from systems build-out to the management and operation of the system on a daily basis. I think the evidence will prove that they're very good at what they do.

2:40

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that we had a power blackout in July of 2006 and that power blackout was the result of a failed electricity deregulation plan, will the minister now guarantee Alberta consumers that there will not be a shortage of electricity, there will not be a blackout, and there will not be price spikes?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the term "sublime ignorance" comes to mind with respect to me being able to guarantee we couldn't have some weather incident in the province of Alberta. Could we have a tornado? I mean, I couldn't answer that. There is, of course, the opportunity for failures to happen caused by a number of factors. But on an ongoing basis and with a general assessment of the risk that we live in, we do a very good job of maintaining the transmission system.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 100 questions and responses today.

In a few seconds from now I'll call upon the first of several hon. members to participate in Members' Statements. But prior to that, I'm sure all members of the House would like to join with me in wishing two members happy birthday as their birthdays will occur over the next several days. To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow: happy birthday.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

DUMB Car

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You've heard about the Smart car. Alberta now has the DUMB car, an innovative new public awareness tool which will be touring the province this summer. DUMB stands for distractions undermining motorist behaviour. This computerized interactive driving simulator puts people behind the wheel of a car in real-life situations. Introduced by the Insurance Bureau of Canada, this technology shows drivers how they react when distractions take their attention away from the task at hand; that is, safe driving.

Mr. Speaker, yes, our lives are busy, but multitasking while driving in our vehicles is a short-sighted solution. It's more than cellphones. It's text messaging, GPS usage, CD changers, drinking coffee, and a myriad of other things. Anything that takes your attention away from the road even for one second can be disastrous.

Today the hon. Minister of Transportation and I each had the opportunity to drive the DUMB car. I can tell you that it was a real eye-opening experience. Congratulations to the Insurance Bureau for their groundbreaking work educating drivers across the province about the importance of paying attention behind the wheel.

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

Brittany Miller

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I stand today in the Legislature to recognize one of my constituents, Ms Brittany Miller of Calmar. I'm very proud to say that Brittany was chosen at the recent 4-H selections program held at Olds College to serve a two-year term promoting Alberta's 4-H program and youth involvement.

Each ambassador, like Brittany, exemplifies the leadership, communication, and personal development skills that 4-H is known for. Mr. Speaker, 4-H members are a part of an organization that is truly respected and admired throughout Canada. It is also Alberta's longest running youth program. In our province I'm very proud to say that agriculture is a rich part of our past and is key to our future. It is important to have the involvement of our youth to ensure the vibrancy and vitality of our agricultural sector now and into the future.

I would like to congratulate Brittany for her hard work and achievements in the 4-H program. I know Brittany will make her community of Calmar proud as she represents them in this capacity.

Thank you.

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

Health Care Privatization

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's increasingly obvious that members of the new regional health superboard are intended as hit men for the public health care system. The appointment of Charlotte Robb as CEO, who two weeks ago was president of DynaLife, is very telling. DynaLife, formerly called Dynacare, got its start in 1995, when this government decided to privatize laboratory services.

But Charlotte Robb is not the only appointment that should raise eyebrows. Members of the new board include insurance interests, private business interests, and a chair who once tried to open a private hospital in Mexico.

When asked about the upcoming direction of health care in the province, the minister of health does not hesitate to speak of health care as a business and the new region as a corporation, as if the aims of a health care system and a for-profit business had anything at all in common. The Premier, when asked, chooses his words very carefully, pledging to protect publicly funded services while ignoring the question of private, for-profit delivery.

Research has consistently shown that public delivery – that is, services not contracted out to the business buddies of the Conservative Party – delivers better health outcomes at lower costs than the private system, that the Premier is careful not to rule out. But clearly that is not the direction this government is going. The government plan, still mostly hidden from public view, is to hand over health care to its friends in the private sector. The Premier hid this from Albertans during the election, and voters will hold him accountable for concealing his plans from them.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a few petitions here signed by concerned Albertans. They 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 Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have petitions, signed by people from Airdrie, Calgary, and Strathmore, asking that the government of Alberta be urged to look at a 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.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to present to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon. The first reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to immediately abandon plans to increase the role of private insurance in the health care system, and instead, commit to strengthening the single-payer, public system.

The second petition I have this afternoon is from Albertans from as far away as Red Deer. They urge 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.” This petition adds to the thousands of signatures that have already been presented.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by individuals from High River, Calgary, Spruce Grove, Edmonton, Hinton. Joining my colleagues, they are all asking for a public inquiry into the LAPP, public service pension plan, and Alberta teachers’ retirement fund.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to advise the House today under Standing Order 34(3) that on Monday we will accept written questions 8, 9, and 10 and to also give notice that on Monday, May 26, Written Question 7 and motions for returns 4 and 5 will be dealt with.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Bill 16

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2008

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 16, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2008.

The bill introduces amendments to section 291. This legislation is needed to clarify and confirm existing government policy

regarding linear property assessment for oil and gas pipelines, specifically when and how new pipelines become assessable. This has been an ongoing issue for municipalities, and a number of them have requested this change. This proposed amendment protects the public interest by assuring that municipalities have stable and predictable property assessment bases.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a first time]

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

2:50

Bill 17

Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2008

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, being the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2008.

This amendment act introduces and clarifies the statements that were made April 22 and the commitment to changing the amounts in a number of areas of income tax that we administer relative to in-home care of relatives and dependant credits. This will be a significant saving for a number of Albertans, and as such I commend this bill.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, is this a money bill?

Ms Evans: Yes, it is.

The Speaker: There’s a series of additional words that are required.

Ms Evans: This being a money bill, it is my pleasure to recommend for your consideration the annexed bill, being the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2008. Mr. Speaker, this was signed by the Lieutenant Governor.

The Speaker: So I take it that the Lieutenant Governor has been informed?

Ms Evans: I think he liked it.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to table responses to questions raised during Committee of Supply on May 1, 2008, for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today. The first is from constituent David Smith, who has multisystem atrophy, a neurological disease, and has real concerns about the private provider, ParaMed, especially when he’s left waiting to be escorted down for breakfast for up to an hour and 10 minutes. This is a person that needs to be given assistance to get down to breakfast. He feels that there are too few staff, who are underpaid, doing more than they rightfully should.

The second one is a series of letters, members of AUPE, who believe that Alberta labour laws should be changed. They have five

specific suggestions, including outlawing the use of replacement workers and one labour law for all unionized workers. Those individuals are Carrie Boblin, Michael Thomas, Raymond Fleury, Jason Clark, Ewa Klakowicz, Eleanor Cavan, Abraha Hager, Gaim Yohannes, Chunying Hao, and Shuren Li.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five letters to table today. They are from constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar who are concerned about Alberta's labour laws, and they want to see major changes to encourage fairness to all working people in Alberta. These individuals are François Côté, Don Sandberg, Sarah Atchison, Scott McLeod, and Alexa Morency.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Goudreau, Minister of Employment and Immigration, pursuant to the Veterinary Profession Act the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association 2007 annual report.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Environment, a response to questions raised by Ms Notley, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, during Oral Question Period on May 1, 2008, concerning the reporting of wildlife incidents in tailings ponds; responses to questions raised by Mr. Weadick, hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, Ms Blakeman, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, and Ms Notley, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, on April 30, 2008, Department of Environment 2008-2009 main estimates debate.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 7(6) I would ask the Government House Leader to share with this Assembly the projected government business for the week commencing Monday, the 26th of May.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We would anticipate on Monday, May 26, under Government Bills and Orders at 8:30 that we might be in Committee of the Whole on bills 1 and 3 and possibly 12 and 13, second reading of Bill 17, which was just introduced, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2008, third reading on the Alberta Enterprise Corporation Act, and as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, May 27, in the afternoon, depending on progress, the same agenda in Committee of the Whole, bills 1, 3, 12, and 13, second reading of Bill 17, second reading of Bill 22, which we anticipate being introduced on Monday for first reading, third reading of Bill 4, and as per the Order Paper. In the evening at 7:30 in Committee of the Whole, again, bills 1, 3, 12, and 13 depending on progress, in second reading bills 17 and 22 depending on progress, in third reading Bill 4 depending on progress, and as per the Order Paper.

Wednesday, May 28, in the afternoon in Committee of the Whole bills 1, 17, and 22 depending on progress, third reading of bills 3, 12,

and 13, and as per the Order Paper. In the evening we would anticipate the same agenda, of course depending on the progress made in the afternoon.

On Thursday, May 29, in the afternoon we anticipate third reading of bills 1, 3, 12, 13, 17, 22, and as per the Order Paper.

Orders of the Day

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: I would now like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

Main Estimates 2008-09

Agriculture and Rural Development

The Chair: I would now like to call on the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the minister for coming back to finish off this next 23 minutes. The question that had come up a few days back to the minister of agriculture on the WTO situation I believe is pertinent to this budget process, and I would like to give him the opportunity to finish that. He ran out of time the other day. If he could finish those comments before I go into the rest of my questioning. Then, if possible, I would appreciate it if the minister would be kind enough to just do a back and forth with me so we don't have a long diatribe and not get each question answered as we go forward.

With that, I would let the minister finish those prior comments.

3:00

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the Member for Livingstone-Macleod for giving me the opportunity to finish that particular question. We were talking about the WTO at the time. Our budget provides funding for our Policy Secretariat, and that is element 2.0.2. Of course, the secretariat is responsible for creating recommendations on Alberta's position and strategic direction of the World Trade Organization on agriculture and negotiations. They, of course, lead to our advocacy efforts with the federal government and industry leaders as we move through the WTO. I think that probably wraps up that particular question.

If the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod would like to carry on, I think probably we could do that.

Mr. Berger: With our current focus on the WTO negotiations, this budget that we are discussing here today: how does it support our work to increase the current market access and trade through the WTO? If you could take a few minutes and just bring me up to speed on what you have to say on that issue.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I suspect most people know, or at least my department does, that I was in Geneva two weeks ago for some of the WTO discussions that we had there. It was an interesting experience, I guess, to say the least. Some of my colleagues, of course, have been there, have done that: get exposed to a world opinion on where the world trade is going or would like to go and, maybe more important for us, where we'd like to see it go.

There's no doubt a strong WTO agreement has a potential to substantially improve market access and probably level the playing field that we have out there right now. I guess there have been lots of independent analysts who have concluded that a successful WTO agreement could mean an increase of over \$3 billion in agriculture exports for Canada, and over \$1 billion of that would come from Alberta alone.

It's really quite important to note, I think, here in Alberta that over 97 per cent of Alberta's producers are dependent on export markets. I'd like to repeat that: 97 per cent of our market producers produce on the export market. It was very interesting. Before I went over that particular time I had just met or talked to the Minister of Agriculture from Saskatchewan, Mr. Bjornerud, about how he expressed his desire, now that they've had a change of government there, for Alberta to feel at liberty to speak for Saskatchewan as well. A pretty interesting concept, I think, for western Canada. If you look at the numbers, when I say that 97 per cent of Alberta's products are exported, more than that are exported out of Saskatchewan. So it's a substantial amount. It speaks for western Canada, what we would like to see transpire over there.

As I said, we want to have a level playing field over there. We talked very much about export subsidies and domestic subsidies that particularly the Americans and the European Union people specialize in, I guess you might say, to put it mildly. We had some excellent discussions while we were over there.

The other interesting facet before I go on: I think the Saskatchewan people are going over next week. That's my understanding. So we're kind of doing a tag-team match. We've indicated to them to feel free to speak for Alberta while they're over there.

Anyway, in talking to the various people that we talked to – and we talked, I believe, to eight different ambassadors from different countries – there seems to be a real mood over there for moving forward with a WTO agenda and seeing if we can get some of these subsidies and starting tariffs moved off. Not all countries were probably real excited about doing some of that. I would point out, perhaps, that Argentina and China, particularly, had some concerns about what was going on, but at the end of the day they said that they were not going to stand in the way of progress if we could get some movement over there. So that certainly is absolutely encouraging.

Now, I know the Premier has been over there before, and our previous ag minister was over there. We felt very close to things moving before, and of course they didn't. Having been there and visited with these people, as I said, there's a lot of optimism right now, but you can also probably see a thousand ways that this thing could still come off the rail and fall apart. I guess it's interesting to note – and it happened while we were there – that while the EU countries, in particular, talked about removing some of their subsidies, France came out and openly said that they thought there should be more subsidies going on. I think the European Union represents, I believe, 38 different countries, so you can see the problems that pop up for them alone. You look at that, and you say: is it going to work? We certainly hope it is. Of course, we were over there. We were talking about opening market access because that, particularly for Saskatchewan and Alberta, is just absolutely essential.

Having said that, we realize that Canada has a little problem because when we talk about opening up market access and whatnot, we also talk about defending some of the sensitive product initiatives that are going on in Canada. It takes away from some of the credibility, I guess you might say, if Canada is punched when they go out there and negotiate. But I would have to say that Mr. Steve Verheul, our negotiator, is just doing a fantastic job. Every country

we talked to gave him all the credit in the world for moving our negotiating position forward in a fair and equitable manner. I guess you might say it was pretty encouraging.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, minister of agriculture. I would like to say that as an agriculture producer I want to commend you on your unwavering commitment to our industry. Those numbers that you just shared with us boggle my mind. The \$3 billion from Canada is one thing, but to realize that \$1 billion of the Alberta economy is 90 per cent export out of our agriculture industry is huge and, as a producer, was something I had never realized was that big. Really, I don't think we can stress enough here in this House the importance of your participation in these WTO discussions, and I once again commend you on that. In those meetings in Geneva you're there supporting our interests.

You'd mentioned in the opening remarks that our exports last year were \$6.6 billion. Could you elaborate just a little further on those figures as to which commodities we're trading and the value that they represent individually or as a lump, whichever the minister should choose in that regard?

I also am very impressed at the approach we're taking in trying to knock down the subsidies that the other countries are supplying. I believe that if we were to get those countries to back away from that, at some point agriculture will find a balance, and we will not be requiring all these stopgap measures that we're doing around the world right now.

3:10

Further to that, we have had these issues where people are mad that we're now wanting to use corn as fuel and all the other fuels rather than eating it all. But from an agricultural producer's perspective I think that some of these are just actually balancing out costs and bringing forward where maybe agriculture is catching up to the rest of the economy and that those are the costs that really should be realized as the fair market value for our products. I don't think that over the past number of years, especially both sides of agriculture but most recently the grain side, we have realized a fair market value. Our commodity sales have nowhere near kept up with our commodity input costs.

So those are just a couple more issues. If the minister could just take a minute and bring forward his thoughts and his answers on those. Thank you, sir.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Spoken like the true agricultural gentleman that I know the Member for Livingstone-Macleod is. He would like to know what's involved when we talk about \$6 billion. It is a pretty astounding sum, you know, to talk about those kinds of numbers in one province alone.

I'd just like to say for the record that last year's top five agricultural exports, of course, were wheat, live cattle, canola seed, beef products, and pork and pork products. Alberta's wheat exports were valued at about \$1.6 billion and represented 97 per cent of our wheat production in Alberta here, which is a very substantial number but pretty small compared to what happens in Saskatchewan. Once again, when we put the two provinces together, we're talking some pretty large numbers.

Alberta's canola seed exports were valued at \$923 million and represented 73 per cent of that crop's production in the province. Of course, the rest of it is crushed domestically, so that's self-explanatory.

Alberta's beef products and carcasses and boxed beef exports were valued at \$887 million and represented a third of our beef products last year. That number, I suspect, probably has grown as we export more beef south of the border live on the hoof at this time, much to our chagrin that that is happening. But probably we can fix some of those markets, pick up other markets, or maybe value add here in Alberta, which certainly would be a pretty desirable way to go.

The pork was valued at \$346 million and represented 49 per cent of our pork production, so you can see that the numbers, the percentages, drop a little bit. Almost all of the dollar value was shipped south and went to the U.S. That's probably something we'd like to look at and see how we can change that.

There were a couple of other comments that you made there. We talked about how we get these subsidies and whatnot. What could develop for Alberta is just kind of mind boggling. The U.S. market will always be our biggest market. There's no doubt about that. But, you know, if they could slide down some of these export subsidies and domestic subsidies, it would make such a difference for us.

You talked about the ethanol business. You mentioned the grains and oilseeds being in such a wonderful position right now, which they are. But the costs that we're putting in there are chasing probably just about as fast as the price of grain has gone up, so it is a concern. You know, we don't really have much – I stand to be corrected, but I think we have one reasonably small ethanol producer in Red Deer right now, who is about the only one we've got in Alberta, so we're living with the rise in feed prices, which is driven by the U.S. market as well.

I think it is something that we, particularly in Ag and Rural Development, look at along with my hon. colleague the Minister of Energy to see how some of these ethanol figures might start to work out, because they are pretty debatable on just ethanol alone, and looking, perhaps, along with the ethanol plants at getting close to a fuel source such as the feedlots and hog operations might provide for us and getting into the biodigesters and actually turning this into a relatively green process as we move along.

I think that's something that the minister and I certainly agree on, and that's probably where we'd like to see the situation go because we in Alberta have to get into the game. We can't stand back. The game is here. People would say: well, why are we going to get into the game? I think if we don't, you'll see ethanol plants, what we're talking about, being built pretty close to our borders on the U.S. side and even in Saskatchewan, on the Saskatchewan side. It's going to happen, so I think that if we can get our mind around this as best we can, which we certainly are working on, probably those would be some of the issues that we would like to bring forward on the ethanol side.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and once again, thank you, Mr. Minister, for your answers to those questions. Another surprising fact came out of your answers. I would assume it must be a function of price that wheat exports were so far above beef. That surprised me as well, but I guess it's the down beef market and the up wheat market that must be the big difference there. That's something quite new.

On the ethanol comment. Now, turning the grain directly to ethanol is not that efficient. From what I've learned, you can achieve almost a 2 to 1 efficiency, a 1.9 to 1 approximately, if you're using the feedlot model where the grain is actually processed through the ethanol, I assume, before it goes to the animals, and then

after you're also using the manure production. At that point you come from the normal of 1 to 1 basically, or a little better than 1 to 1, to a 1.9 efficiency, I think. If you could clarify that one for me if you do know. I'm not exactly sure on that. That's just some information that I had picked up, thinking that maybe there is an opportunity where we're really not utilizing the grain and excluding it from going into feed, but we're able to utilize it twice and also using it out the other end of the cow.

One more thing I'd like to applaud you on is your effort to continue in the commitment to create a market choice for those of us. Being a barley producer myself – I just finished seeding my barley crop last weekend – I really want that choice. I believe that anyone in agriculture wants that choice. For those who for some reason don't want us in agriculture to have that choice and think we have to continue the way we are, if the way we are is so wonderful, I would assume that we should be cheering on the rest of the country to adopt the way it is in western Canada: through the Wheat Board and only one choice.

Those questions lead me to my last comment point. We have so many of our agricultural commodities that are destined for the international market, and we rely on that trade. Could you just elaborate a little bit on what a strong WTO agreement would mean in terms of increased trade and stability throughout the industry for the foreseeable future? And these agreements: how long do they last? It seems like when you're trying to change one, they go on forever. Do they go on forever when it works in our favour? It would be the same difficulty for other countries to bring forward any changes if we were the benefactor of the agreement rather than the one trying to get it changed to actually be of some use to us.

Those fairly much wrap up the questions I have for the hon. minister of agriculture, and I thank him for his answers here today.

3:20

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Member for Livingstone-Macleod certainly has his finger on the pulse of what's going on out there right now, things that affect him and agriculture in Alberta very directly at the present time, that's for sure. When I look at the clock, I'd like to talk about that marketing choice a little bit just to get it on the record.

I guess it's no secret that we in Alberta and now, as well, Saskatchewan both certainly are pushing for marketing choice. I guess we're maybe a little bit frustrated with where it's going at this particular time and chastise our federal counterparts because they were going to move this ahead. I understand they did introduce a bill in Parliament, but it seems to have gone sideways one way or another. I'm not sure why or how or whether they have something else up their sleeve. I don't know. I hope they have. But the chance of their getting this done, which they were going to do, before the August 1 deadline, which is, of course, the crop year change, is not likely going to happen now.

I guess that's frustrating for us here in Alberta and in Saskatchewan now, but we will continue. We have written a couple of joint letters with the Saskatchewan government and are going to keep pressing, try and keep their feet to the fire on that, at any rate, because I think it's very, very important to us here in Alberta.

Vote on Main Estimates 2008-09

The Chair: I hate to interrupt the minister, but the time allocated for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development estimates has expired. I would now like to invite the officials to leave the Chamber.

I just want to remind hon. members that pursuant to Motion 15 passed yesterday, if there is a division vote, the first one will be 10 minutes between the bells, and any subsequent one would be one minute.

Now, hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 59.03(4), which requires that the estimates of the offices of the Legislative Assembly be decided without debate or amendment prior to the vote on the main estimates, I must now put the question.

Agreed to:

Offices of the Legislative Assembly	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$92,734,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Pursuant to Standing Order 59.03(1)(b) and in accordance with notification provided to the chair and the Clerk on May 20, 2008, I will now put the question.

Agreed to:

Education	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$4,224,927,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$1,000,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Environment	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$248,240,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$1,100,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Finance and Enterprise	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$377,138,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$52,020,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Health and Wellness	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$13,217,448,000
Capital Investment	\$10,800,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Housing and Urban Affairs	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$550,990,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Municipal Affairs	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$692,328,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Treasury Board	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$67,264,000

3:30

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Those members in favour of each of the resolutions for the departments not yet voted on for the 2008-09 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The Committee of Supply shall now rise and report the 2008-09 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates and the 2008-09 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: I would now like to call on the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne to do the report for us.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions relating to the 2008-09 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates and the 2008-09 government estimates for the general revenue fund and the lottery fund, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

The following resolutions for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009, have been approved.

Support to the Legislative Assembly, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$55,841,000; office of the Auditor

General, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$21,795,000; office of the Ombudsman, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$2,826,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$5,736,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$962,000; office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$5,574,000.

Aboriginal Relations: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$117,028,000.

Advanced Education and Technology: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$3,342,055,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$127,400,000.

Agriculture and Rural Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$555,531,000.

Children and Youth Services: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,094,209,000.

Culture and Community Spirit: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$539,297,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$6,200,000.

Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$4,224,927,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$1,000,000.

Employment and Immigration: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$923,492,000.

Energy: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$261,318,000.

Environment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$248,240,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$1,100,000.

Executive Council: expense, \$30,080,000.

Finance and Enterprise: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$377,138,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$52,020,000.

Health and Wellness: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$13,217,448,000; capital investment, \$10,800,000.

Housing and Urban Affairs: expense, \$550,990,000.

Infrastructure: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$976,770,000; capital investment, \$459,943,000.

International and Intergovernmental Relations: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$29,196,000.

Justice: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$499,310,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$692,328,000.

Seniors and Community Supports: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,915,632,000.

Service Alberta: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$373,509,000.

Solicitor General and Public Security: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$557,845,000; capital investment, \$23,790,000; lottery fund payments, \$1,522,418,000.

Sustainable Resource Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$366,632,000; capital investment, \$27,450,000.

Tourism, Parks and Recreation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$246,282,000; capital investment, \$34,136,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$500,000.

Transportation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$2,252,311,000; capital investment, \$1,895,506,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$5,216,000.

Treasury Board: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$67,264,000.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 12

Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2008

[Adjourned debate May 21: Ms Blakeman]

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise and join second reading debate on Bill 12, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2008. As my hon. colleague the Member for Edmonton-Centre indicated last night in this House, we are very supportive of this bill. It essentially does three things. It allows for the payment of funds to cover the teachers' portion of the unfunded liability from September of last year to August 31, 2009, it makes prepayment of money made before the enactment of the amended section validated despite the lack of legal authorization to make the payments at the time that they were made, and it moves the authority of payment from the Minister of Education to only the Crown, thus allowing it to be managed under the Department of Finance and Enterprise: three things, obviously, that were necessary to do to make the legislation and the government's commitment to cover the teachers' portion of the unfunded pension liability go ahead as it should.

You know, I have a lot of teachers who live in my constituency, and I'm concerned about them, obviously, and about their ability to continue to get up and go to work feeling valued and feeling like they're making a contribution and feeling like the contribution that they're making is being appropriately honoured by this government, by the school boards that they work for, by society.

3:40

I'm concerned as well about the fact that a great number of teachers in my constituency and in every other constituency across the province will be retiring in the next few years as retirement age or early retirement age hits the baby boom bulge in education like it does in just about every other profession except, perhaps, this one because we all seem to stick at it for a while. I'm concerned about an impending teacher shortage, you know, as those retirements start to take hold and as our population continues to grow. We are not only growing our population, but we have the youngest population on average of any province in Canada, and a great number of people in this province are school-aged children. That's where my real concern lies.

My own children have finished their elementary, junior high, and high school educations. My son will go off to third-year university in the fall, and my daughter will start first-year university. So that part of our lives as parents and their lives as children and adolescents growing up, now both adults, is through, but I can well remember some of the issues that we faced as parents and that they faced as students in the system over the time of their K to 12 school careers, if you will. They are situations that have been talked about on the floor of this House repeatedly, I'm sure. It's nothing unique to my kids, to Scott and Jennifer.

They're situations and circumstances that most of the kids in the province of Alberta who were born in the mid-80s and beyond have faced and continue to face: class size issues; resourcing issues; the need for parent councils and PTAs to raise funds, depending on the school that you're talking about, for nice to haves or basics; sharing of textbooks. I still remember my daughter having to share her grade 7 science textbook with two other students in her class because

that's all the textbooks that they had money for that year. That sort of thing.

Through it all we have had the great good fortune to encounter a phenomenal number of very dedicated teachers. There are a lot of really good teachers in the system. A lot of those really good teachers, as we encountered them, were talking about looking forward to getting out of the system, to retiring from teaching, to going on and doing something else less stressful, going on and doing something else that they felt they would be more appreciated for.

Now, there's a whole plethora of reasons why teachers might feel stressed, overstressed, underappreciated. You know, the constellation of reasons is probably unique to each teacher who feels that way. But one thing that has been a constant for years and years and years now is the fact that Alberta teachers have had to pay a significantly larger chunk of their salary into the pension plan to cover what was their portion of the unfunded liability than they would have had to do if they were teaching in British Columbia or Saskatchewan or Ontario, for instance. In 2005 Alberta teachers paid 12 per cent of salary for a pension plan compared to just over 8 per cent in British Columbia and a little under 7 per cent in Saskatchewan and Ontario. Over the years that makes a difference. Over the years that starts to get under your skin. It starts to grate on you, you know. You start to feel unappreciated. You start to feel like: I could do better than this.

We had an interesting discussion if I can bring it back to what we all do for a living here in this House. Those of us who are members of the Members' Services Committee had an interesting discussion last night about pay for committee work that turned around a number of issues that often come up when politicians discuss their own remuneration. One which I brought up and a number of my colleagues on the committee agreed with is the difficulty of sitting in judgment of what your own pay packet should be. Of course, the response to that, which is a typical response, is: yeah, it is difficult, and we are one of the only professions, if not the only one, that is required to do that sort of thing.

By the same token, part of our job is to determine how much we're going to pay ourselves, and we would all be doing so much better financially if we were doing something else than this politics thing, this government thing. That's true in many cases and untrue in others, I suppose, the point being that for the workload – and the point was certainly made last night at Members' Services Committee – involved in this job, if you found a job in the private sector with a comparable workload, you'd find a significantly higher paycheque coming with it than you do in this one.

We all wrestle with these issues. I think that to varying degrees we all know what we're getting into when we decide to run for office or become a teacher or whatever, or we think we do. We know what the job pays, that sort of thing, but you don't ever really know till you've been at it for a while what the aggravating factors in the job are, and even the best jobs have aggro attached to them.

Personally, I've always sort of felt that the way to determine when it's time to move on, whether to the same job in another place or to a different career, is when the aggro starts to outweigh the benefits. Well, that unfortunately has already happened for an awful lot of teachers in the province of Alberta, and it will happen for more. We won't solve that problem, a hundred per cent of that problem, simply by passing Bill 12, but it takes one of the niggling factors, the chronic low-dose itches out of the job. It's high time that we did this, and certainly on this side of the House we will be supporting the government in the passage of Bill 12.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five

minutes of comments or questions. Anybody want to take that?

All right. I would call on the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it behooves me to make a few comments on this bill before its passage, just to indicate what an historic opportunity we have thanks to the leadership of our Premier in bringing forward the issue of unfunded liability, which has been an issue for Alberta teachers for some period of time, putting it on the agenda, and making it part of the mandate of my predecessor as Minister of Education, to deal with the issue and get it done in the first year of his mandate as leader of our party and as Premier of the province. I think that that was a very bold and a very important move, and I think that as Minister of Education and on behalf of education stakeholders and teachers in the province I want to say thank you for that because it's a very important step forward.

I think it's also important at this time to say thank you to the previous Minister of Education, who had it as part of his mandate, and the Deputy Minister of Education, Keray Henke, who made it a good part of his work last year to bring forward the negotiations which resulted in the historic agreement between the government of Alberta and the Alberta Teachers' Association, which was then put into effect through negotiations between teachers and their school boards over the course of December of last year and January of this year, and to put the five-year collective agreements in place which allowed the unfunded liability agreement to be put into effect.

The net effect of all of that, Mr. Speaker, which is being brought to the table here under the terms of the amendments to the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, was to deal with an issue that has been an issue for teachers, particularly those teachers who have commenced in the profession since 1992, because what this does is deal with the unfunded liability of the pension plan.

3:50

Under an agreement in 1992 teachers paid for one-third of the cost of supporting that unfunded liability, and the province paid for two-thirds of the cost of that unfunded liability. The reason for that agreement doesn't particularly matter, but the reason for that agreement was that historically there were issues with respect to the government's contribution to the plan and how the plan was vested. That's why the government was paying two-thirds of the cost. Then, of course, there were enhancements to the plan and cost-of-living adjustments to the plan and those sorts of issues which had not been factored into the actuarial analysis for the contributions over time, which resulted in teachers not having paid their portion sufficiently to support the pension plan, thus the unfunded liability was created. The agreement with respect to how that unfunded liability was to be dealt with was the one-third/two-thirds split.

Well, that was probably a good agreement at the time and indicated, going forward, how the unfunded piece of the pension plan would be dealt with. It turns out – that was 1992, so some 16 years later – that there were teachers who, as I say, started teaching after 1992 or even those who started before 1992 but not long before 1992 who were paying for a portion of the pension plan which they would not be drawing on. It was seen as an impediment to attracting the best and the brightest to the profession, and it certainly was a sore point for many of those teachers.

I am just absolutely delighted now to be able to be proceeding as Minister of Education in this province under the leadership of our Premier and under the leadership of the previous minister and under the leadership of our deputy minister and the staff that worked with him, working with the teaching profession and working with school boards across the province to be able to put into effect this agreement, which takes this thorn out and paves the way through the five-

year collective agreements that teachers have settled with their school boards, for us now to spend the next five years in this province talking about teachers as a profession and education as the foundational and most important element of how we prepare for the future of the province. Being able to focus in that manner is so extremely important to the future development of the province and the future of our children and our grandchildren and their ability to participate in a knowledge-based economy, trading out into the world, and having the quality of life here in Alberta being able to contribute as full citizens in our community.

This bill, although it's a very short bill and looks fairly innocuous – it talks about changing one section of a pension plan act – is an historic bill. I would be remiss if I didn't, before I sit down, say how important it is because as we go forward, what we really need to do in this province is understand the vital role that our teachers in this province play in the education of our children. We know, for example, that high school completion is a problem, that we want to get the high school completion rates up. We know that one of the primary elements for children to complete school is to have role models and mentors, usually in the form of a teacher that's made a huge difference in their lives.

I come from a family of teachers, and I've often been struck by the number of times when people talk about teaching as a profession that they talk about it as an easy job, talk about it in terms of the number of holidays; for example, the two months off in the summer or the two weeks off at Christmas. What they don't see on a daily basis are the teachers who are getting up and going to work every day, answering the bell every morning to be in front of our children to make sure that our children are not only excited and enthusiastic about coming to school but are able to find their passion, able to find what they're successful at and are able to be successful because they have those teachers in front of them. That's what I see every day. What I see every day are teachers who spend a lot of time and effort preparing their lessons, finding tools, finding displays, finding books, finding resources that they can use to make their classrooms a rich and meaningful place for their students, teachers who put all of their effort every day into making sure that our children are successful.

Mr. Speaker, while we look at this act, this Bill 12, and we read it as an amendment to section 26 of the Teachers' Pension Plans Act and it looks like a very innocuous document, what this really is is the start of five years of focus on education as a foundational element in our province, on education as an opportunity for every child in this province to be successful, to overcome whatever barriers that child might have to their success, so that each child can be the best that they can be, each child can maximize their own personal potential so that they can grow up to be able to take care of themselves and their families to the extent they possibly can and contribute back to their community as full citizens. There's nothing more important or foundational than that. There's nothing more important to achieving that than having a teaching profession and individual teachers who are excited about getting up and going to work every day because of the importance of their job and because of the value we put on our educators as members of our community who are playing that foundational role.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes open for comments.

Any other members who would like to join the debate?

Shall I call the question, then?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a second time]

Bill 13
Financial Institutions Statutes
Amendment Act, 2008

[Adjourned debate May 21: Ms Blakeman]

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 13, the Financial Institutions Statutes Amendment Act, 2008. There are a number of questions that I would have. However, on the whole we certainly will be supporting this. It's mainly a bill that helps change the Credit Union Act and the act that controls the Alberta Treasury Branches, and it brings them both more into line, which, I would suspect, will help. My question would be: will ATB be opening more branches in B.C. under the agreements that TILMA will open up?

It reduces the unfair advantage that ATB had over other financial institutions by allowing for fees to be charged to the bank in lieu of not having to pay income tax and establishes the formal regulatory program for oversight that is currently seen in other banks. My question on that would be: who, if anyone, is collecting these fees, and what are they going to do with them? Where are they going to go? Are they going into general revenue? Where exactly would they be going? That would be a question on that.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The primary role of the credit union corporation is to guarantee deposit protection to deposit holders. I'm not that familiar with the credit union corporation, and I'm wondering if the amounts that they protect are the same as for a regular registered bank. This is a good part of this bill, where again they'll be coming into line and actually have regulations to be able to operate with.

It will also allow the minister of finance by regulation to temporarily designate a person as ombudsman to review complaints that are not resolved with the credit union or to set the overall governance for the ombudsman and to allow the ombudsman to levy fees on credit unions. In itself I think that is a good idea. I guess my question would be: why is it a temporary designate, and why isn't it somebody that's permanent that would totally understand the banking business and would have a chance to create a history to draw upon to make decisions?

4:00

One of the other things that will enhance both the credit unions and the Alberta Treasury Branches is to allow the credit union members to exercise corporate governance rights, which will fall more into line with the Business Corporations Act. It just makes them, I think, probably a little more transparent in how they actually perform their duties and their governance.

The proposal is really to clarify the roles of the directors by introducing express due diligence to complement the good faith reliance defence that is currently provided. Due diligence is intended to promote fairer treatment of directors by allowing them to show the proactive steps that they have taken to fulfill their duties under the act. Again, it's a transparent kind of operation because I do believe that when directors of any company make decisions, particularly when they're shareholders, I think it's up to them to be able to prove to their shareholders what the thinking was behind their decisions. It also gives them a little more flexibility to meet those governance decisions.

It will also ensure that directors and their companies are not discouraged from doing business with the credit union as their peers

on the board will not have access to their personal and financial information. I would suspect that this is probably a fair thing to do because it may well restrict particularly people that come to the board that actually sit on other boards and perhaps are directors of a number of companies and, in fact, may be shareholders in those companies to be able to keep their private business private.

I would suspect that these people that come to these boards and should be appointed to these boards have got to bring some sense of business acumen as well as being able to look at the larger picture of how the credit unions and the Alberta Treasury Branches fit into the whole banking world. As we get more global, I believe that both of these institutions will also be looking at global participation. All in all, I think that this is a good bill in helping to bring both the credit unions and the ATB into line a little bit more regulated with the regular banks, with whom they actually compete.

One of the things, I believe, was going to allow them to have post offices, which in a way is, I think, probably wonderful for rural Alberta where Canada Post has actually closed down their postal depots and outlets. In fact, I can remember when I was a child and we had a country home that everybody met at the post office. It was just where you really found out what was going on in your community. The farmers would pick up their mail, and then go off to some of the coffee shops and solve the problems of the world. Now that we have more and more women involved in the farming industry, of course, they'd be in on that conversation. Really, it can truly be the hub of a small community, so that in itself is good as well.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, we are for this bill. We will be supporting Bill 13.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should there be questions.

There being none – sorry. On questions, or do you wish to participate?

Mr. MacDonald: No, Mr. Speaker. If I could please participate in the debate at the appropriate time.

The Speaker: Indeed you can. Proceed.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I have been listening to the comments from my hon. colleague from Lethbridge-East, and I have been looking at this bill. I would have liked to have had a look at the entire act for the Alberta Treasury Branches, but perhaps I can have my questions regarding this bill answered by the sponsor in due time, if not today, next week. I am going to have some reservations about this bill until my questions are answered and I can have a look at the answers in *Hansard*.

Now, when we look at the changes to the capital requirements, we are indicating in here that the “Alberta Treasury Branches shall maintain capital in accordance with guidelines authorized by regulations made under section 34,” and “the Minister [may] make such guidelines.” The current section 20 regarding capital adequacy of the Treasury Branches is being repealed. We are now looking at changes, of course, and I would like to know why it is necessary at this time for these changes to section 20.

We go down a little further and see the changes that are being contemplated here for section 34, and the current section is making regulations, but we are changing the regulations here, as I understand it.

We're also changing reporting requirements of the Treasury Branches, and I don't know if we're giving the minister more leeway, more power here, or less power because I certainly would have liked to have a look at the entire act here. I'm sure the hon.

member sponsoring this bill is going to provide clarification. But here we are:

without limiting any of the powers that the Minister has flowing from the application of section 2(3), authorizing the Minister, for purposes related to the administration of this Act or the regulations,

- (i) to require Alberta Treasury Branches to report to the Minister such information, at such times and in such form as the Minister directs it in writing,
- (ii) to conduct such examination or inquiry into the business or affairs of Alberta Treasury Branches as the Minister considers necessary or expedient to determine whether it
 - (A) is complying or has complied with this Act or the regulations,
 - (B) is in a sound financial condition, or
 - (C) is following or has followed sound business and financial practices,

or

- (iii) to require Alberta Treasury Branches to implement any measure that the Minister considers necessary or expedient to the maintaining or improving of its financial safety and soundness.

Now, in Public Accounts yesterday there was a brief discussion around the Alberta Treasury Branches and their annual general meeting today. If there is any exposure as a result of investments by the Treasury Branches to the taxpayers, any unnecessary exposure, certainly it will be interesting to see that unfold.

However, the changes that we're looking at here: I'm wondering why at this time they are necessary, and I'm also wondering what other financial institutions think of this and if the hon. member who has sponsored this bill has had any consultations with other financial institutions regarding the drafting of this proposed Bill 13.

Those are my questions at this time. I appreciate the opportunity to get them before the Legislative Assembly, and I am interested to hear from the sponsor of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I apologize because I did not have a chance to have a look at the complete act as it is now before us. Thank you.

4:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Additional speakers?

Should the question be called?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: I would like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 3

Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2008

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We are undertaking committee debate now of Bill 3, the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2008. It is my pleasure to rise and take part in that debate now. I did not have the opportunity to speak to this bill, I don't believe – no, I didn't – in second reading, but many of my col-

leagues did, and they didn't much like it. The reason why they didn't much like it is because we don't much like P3s. We don't much like private-public partnerships. We don't see much evidence at all that they improve the quality of life for the people of Alberta or improve the efficient, effective functioning of the government of Alberta or of the government of anywhere else that they've been tried. We see a lot of evidence of a lot of flaws and a lot of failures and some abandonment of them.

Now, I'm sure that there's somebody on the other side of the House that wishes that they could jump up at this moment and say something like: "But, look at the Anthony Henday. What a fine road that is. We wouldn't have it without a P3." Well, I very seldom drive the Anthony Henday, but I did last week on the way back to Calgary. Normally I come straight down Calgary Trail.

Mr. MacDonald: You were over in Whitemud, weren't you?

Mr. Taylor: Oh, was I over in Whitemud?

Mr. MacDonald: Yeah.

Mr. Taylor: Oh, okay. I thought I was in Rutherford.

Anyway, I normally come straight down Calgary Trail, but there was a traffic jam of some sort – it was rush hour – so I scooted over to 111th and down 111th to the Henday.

Mr. Hancock: There's a traffic jam there because of the LRT.

Mr. Taylor: There was no traffic jam on 111th. The LRT construction was going on right alongside. It looks like it's going rather well, as a matter of fact.

So I get down 111th, I get onto the Henday, I head over to highway 2, and I hit a bridge between 111th and highway 2. I invite all hon. members to go out there if you've got nothing better to do this weekend and just take a tootle over that bridge in your car, you know. That bridge is exhibit A of why P3s don't build roads any better than governments do themselves and maybe not even as well. You hit that thing, and it's got a dip to it that if you hit it at more than the posted speed, I think you'd get air, just like a skateboard, a four-wheeled skateboard.

Mr. Hancock: Unfortunately for you that bridge was not built on a P3. That was built on a traditional contract.

Mr. Taylor: Ah. The – what are you these days? – Minister of Education, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, says that I have it all wrong, that that section was built by the province. Well, we could get into another debate about how well the province builds roads, but nevertheless.

P3s have a long history of disappointing people who have high expectations of them, and there's just no way around the fact that public-private partnerships amount to government taking on debt. That's what this bill is all about, Bill 3 – I almost called it bill P3; maybe I should refer to it as bill P3 – amending the Fiscal Responsibility Act to allow a broader scope of what debt is allowed to be held by the government; in other words, to enable P3s. Section 1 – whoops, that's another bill that we're going to debate at another time. I'll put that one aside, Bill 18, the Film and Video Classification Act, which, you know, when the time comes to debate that, maybe we can refer to that as bill 18A or bill NC-17. I don't know. But I digress.

Bill 3, the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2008. Section 1 adds a section to the list of current accumulated debt that is

allowed to be held by the government. The section now includes any amounts raised on or after April 1, 2008 for the purpose of constructing, purchasing or extending the life of capital assets of school boards under the School Act, regional health authorities under the Regional Health Authorities Act, the Alberta Cancer Board under the Cancer Programs Act and public post-secondary institutions under the Post-secondary Learning Act.

Previously the government could only have debt with capital infrastructure projects that fell under provincial jurisdiction: roads. The addition of this section now means that the government can take on additional accumulated debt, most likely in the form of P3s, to help finance schools, hospitals, postsecondary institutions, et cetera. You know, I would be interested in hearing specific examples from the government as to what other forms of accumulated debt we might be talking about if we're not talking about P3s. I think we are talking about P3s because this government and its members have never been shy about extolling the alleged virtues of P3s, even though said virtues do not really exist. We think that this is an act of accounting fiction by government.

The government pushes out debt-financed infrastructure already in roads and now schools and universities and colleges and hospitals if this bill goes through. You know, you're essentially tripling the P3 debt load. That is completely irresponsible.

We've just finished, Mr. Chairman, debating second reading of Bill 12, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, which we were highly supportive of. I just point that out because anybody who's in the midst of reading a critical diatribe by members of the opposition on this bill should know that members of the opposition sometimes actually speak favourably about government legislation on those odd times when they actually get it right. Bill 12 is an example of the direction that we need to go, where we are taking a piece of the provincial debt, the unfunded teachers' pension liability – note the word "liability," synonymous with debt – which prevents this province from being debt free, even though that's the claim the government likes to make, and taking care of it. So we actually get closer to debt-free status.

You know, we've managed to get our debt levels down tremendously. What was that phrase that the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* used yesterday? Something about "mad props." In other words, congratulations are in order to the government for doing that. But now that we've done it, especially in the context of the economic times in which we live, why would we want to turn that around? Why would we want to overturn that? Why would we want to bring in this bill that enables P3 projects and go back into debt? I don't understand.

This government has more money than it can manage. I was going to say that this government has more money than it knows what to do with, but it certainly always seems to find something to do with the money, to piddle it all away, doesn't it? This government has more money than it knows how to manage, and you're opening the door to expensive debt, to long-term debt, to 30-year debt, to private debt, and rather than just spending the money now, you're putting future generations of Albertans on the hook for unnecessary high-interest payment. I don't know why this government feels it has to do that. I'd be very intrigued to receive a credible explanation for this. I don't know why this government believes that P3s can somehow magically solve our infrastructure deficit in a way that they couldn't resolve by taking a sustainable, orderly, predictable approach to working down that infrastructure deficit.

4:20

We already know that we're trying to build infrastructure like there's no tomorrow. There's no question that every bit of infra-

structure that we're building is needed. There's no dispute there. We're trying to build infrastructure like there's no tomorrow at a time when the oil sands are booming. We're in direct competition with those megaprojects in the oil sands for billions and billions and billions of dollars' worth of construction costs, material, labour, and the effect of trying to do it all at once is to cause shortages of everything, including the people who build the projects, and as a result much higher costs.

I don't understand how this government can think that doing it through a P3 arrangement is going to be any different. All it potentially does is defer some of that cost to us. It defers it. It makes it look like it's not as expensive up front, but it makes it far more expensive over the long run. It's simply the difference between cash up front and borrowed money, and there is a finite quality to all of this infrastructure construction no matter who's actually doing it. There are only so many construction workers. There's only so much concrete. There's only so much steel that we can produce in the run of a year. There are only so many trees that we can cut down and turn into lumber. Really, whether it's a private contractor doing the building or the government itself doing the building or causing the building to be done, you're still wrestling with that problem. So I have some real problems with this bill, and I have some real problems with that section.

I have some colleagues who I know want to speak about this as well, Mr. Chairman, so I will take my seat now. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm speaking to Bill 3, the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act. I think that we'll all agree, certainly, that this province is in a huge catch-up mode. For the last eight, nine, 10 years, they've been so obsessed with paying down the debt that we now have a huge backlog of infrastructure that is going to have to be caught up with. It appears that the only way that this government can do that, or so they say because it's what they want to do, is to actually go the P3 route. Of course, I think everyone has heard me say before that I really believe that it's a P4, which is public dollars, private profit partnerships.

The way these contracts are actually written up is very important, but my problem with some of this is that if P3s are used, the government will be signing up to 30 agreements with private contractors, meaning 30 years of who knows what kind of interest rates. The point is that we have 30 agreements that we're going ahead with for schools and hospitals, et cetera, but how will we ever add to that over the next 30 years? Or are we going to continue to add projects that will always keep us in debt? I'm not sure that that's a good way to go, particularly in the climate of today, when even the World Bank is warning that perhaps better things are not coming down the road and that we really should be looking at where the global economy is going because it certainly will affect us in a very large way.

The intended scale of the move is clear from the government's '08-11 fiscal plan, where the line item for liabilities for alternative finance projects will triple in the next three years to almost \$2 billion. Now, this is only three years whereas some of these are going to be 30-year contracts. As I've said before, where is the end? There will never be an end. We will always need new schools. We will always need new hospitals. We will always need new infrastructure. In particular, in this province we are going to need roads.

I have not heard any conversations yet about the Canamex highway. Certainly, I would assume that they're going to try to

make that a P3 as well. It really should be a true autobahn that goes from Alaska . . .

Mr. MacDonald: How fast can you go?

Ms Pastoor: You can go as fast as you want.

It really should be a true autobahn that goes from Alaska to Mexico. It shouldn't go through towns; it should go absolutely straight. It should be like in Germany, where there really aren't necessarily speed limits on it. People can go what they think they can handle. You can basically live along the autobahn if you need to. There are cut-offs where you can go and sleep and shower and eat and camp and do whatever you need to do. Certainly, the truck stops are the best that I've ever seen in the world. I believe that that's what our Canamex should look like. It probably will go to a P3. Again, that's another capital project that hasn't been mentioned, particularly in this bill.

Just how much in debt can we go, for how long, and what's the outlook for my kids when they realize that the province is back in debt again? The accumulated debt held by the government is what I'm talking about. Previously the government could only have debt with capital infrastructure projects that fell under provincial jurisdiction, such as roads, that I've mentioned. But the addition now means that it can be anything in the form of any P3. It can be schools, hospitals, postsecondary institutions. It can be almost anything that the government deems: courthouses, remand centres, any of those institutions that the government has to provide for.

I believe that P3s, P4s in my lingo, can look like accounting fiction by the government. The government is pushing out debt-financed infrastructure in ever more areas, as I've said, and I really think that tripling our debt load is irresponsible. Rather than spending the money now, the government is putting future generations on the hook. We can say that the interest rates are fairly reasonable at this point in time, and that this province has a triple-A rating. However, 30 years from now, 10 years from now who knows what our economic situation is going to look like?

The other thing that I believe it does is reduce democratic accountability. I fear that the school boards may not own their own facilities, and they can't ensure that they serve the unique educational needs. I speak of something in Lethbridge, that is not the first in our province but certainly a good one that we're doing, which is our west Lethbridge high school. We have the separate system and the public system high schools in one building, but they're separated by our local library, which will be an extension of the library that we have downtown. I think that this is a very good way to go. The school boards really have to be able to have control over what their buildings do, who goes into them and who uses them. I believe that schools should be open at least 18 hours a day. People should be able to rent the rooms. Community schools are what should be in all of our schools, where adults can go. We have adult learning. We have adult classes. In fact, credit courses could be actually offered at our schools after hours, especially in large cities where people can't really get out to the universities. There are any number of things that we could be using with those public buildings, and I don't believe they're used enough. Possibly if there is this huge debt, they may well be looking at more rentals to be able to meet the obligation that the government has put them into.

4:30

I would hate to think that we wouldn't have school boards in charge of our schools. I sometimes wonder, after the demonstration of what we've done with our health care regions, what may happen with our school boards. I hope it doesn't go the same way. I believe

that something that we call public infrastructure truly should be public. It should be owned and controlled by the public and not by a private company.

I think what it boils down to is debt, plain and simple. There are any number of examples throughout the world where it has been very, very unsuccessful. However, in fairness, there are some other examples. It's just been brought to my attention – and I didn't realize this – that the Confederation Bridge was actually a P3 operation. Of course, I haven't seen the contracts, which brings up another subject: how open will these contracts be? The contracts are pretty much done in the backroom.

I partly understand that when you're in negotiations, you don't negotiate necessarily in public, especially when you're operating as a government because people try to get the last nickel out of it. But the contracts, once they're signed, should be available to the public to look at. In a way they're protected because there's a third party, and that really isn't right. The public honestly should understand what those contracts are.

Many lawyers have made a lot of money on these P3s throughout the country, and certainly in the United States, writing up these contracts. To me the whole crux of being able to control a P3 is the quality and the openness of the contract that's actually signed. It has to be very clear exactly what maintenance means. Does it mean that they cut the grass? Then all of a sudden if we decide that because of water problems we're not going to have grass anymore, that we'll have a green plant with rocks, who looks after the green plant? What kind of flexibility is going to be in these contracts that will allow for the future to be able to play its role in these contracts? There has to be some kind of flexibility. They just can't be cast in concrete when the concrete is probably going to shift over the next 30 years.

I think that I will sit down and let some of my other colleagues speak for a moment as well. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. When we're talking about P3s and fiscal responsibility and debt, we paid off one form of debt in this province and let another form grow completely out of control, and that's the infrastructure deficit. Now we're looking at trying to pay it off. It may be by a political game of charades, but we're trying to pay it off.

If we look at the fiscal plan that was presented during the budget, deficits as defined by the Fiscal Responsibility Act remain against the law. The government can borrow only for capital purposes and as required for self-supporting corporations such as the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, the Alberta Treasury Branches, and Alberta Capital Finance Authority. The Fiscal Responsibility Act, it is noted – and this is what we have before us as Bill 3 – will be amended to clarify that the government can borrow to support capital projects that are owned by school boards, postsecondary institutions, and health authorities.

My colleagues were discussing a little earlier the schools and the P3 projects. We had other examples of P3 projects, of course, with some of the ring road construction. Mr. Chairman, if we look back at the annual report specifically for the department of infrastructure and transportation, as it was called before the latest expansion in the size of Executive Council, we'll see where there are some details but not all the details of the P3 project and the 30-year contract for the Anthony Henday Drive. The taxpayers don't get all the information. There's not full disclosure of all the costs that are associated with

that P3 project. There is a monthly payment, and there is a total that will be provided to the owner-operator, if I could say, of that public road over that period of time. But there are some contracts that allow for cost escalations and extra charges, that the taxpayers don't get to see. Yet, certainly, we will see Bill 3, no doubt in my mind, become law because the government has a great deal of confidence. They have more confidence in this whole concept than anyone else.

We were told P3s would save money initially. In fact, the new courthouse in Calgary was to be built by a P3, but that idea quickly came to an end when some of the cost escalations were involved. Speaking of cost escalations, the government keeps telling the taxpayers that building public schools by the P3 method will save significant money. The public schools that were announced to be built in Edmonton and Calgary last fall had an estimated cost of around \$300 million, but once the P3 model had been signed, sealed, and delivered, as they say, the costs had gone up to over \$500 million. That's with one series of schools. I believe that there were 16 schools, Mr. Chairman, involved in that. I can't understand why we would be supporting this bill when these sorts of cost escalations have already occurred using this model. I think this is an attempt to trick the taxpayers and guarantee a profit over a long period of time to an operator with very little, if any, risk. For this reason I cannot support Bill 3.

4:40

However, when we look at the regional health authorities and the prospect – well, it's political reality now, that we're going to have one superministry. Oddly enough, the interim chairman of the board will be an individual who just 10 years ago was promoting the construction of a private hospital in Mexico. This fellow is the interim board chair, a former Mulroney Conservative and a current entrepreneur in southern Alberta. Now, what will happen with the accumulated deficits in the health authorities? I know the health authorities are still going to exist, they're still going to function, they're still going to hire folks, operate their hospitals, use their budgets. But what plans do we have with this bill to fund further capital projects of this new health authority? Is it possible that we're looking at the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act to fund the construction of private, for-profit facilities? The Minister of Infrastructure looked up when I said that. Obviously, he would know because that is part of his portfolio. He builds up; the Minister of Transportation builds out.

Certainly, when we look at this and we look at the direction towards privatization that this government has always had, one should be quite concerned because taxpayers could be on the hook. Taxpayers could be subsidizing the construction of private health care facilities. They don't have any public interest in this. The public good has to be first and foremost, in my view, when this government makes a decision on behalf of taxpayers. What's in the public interest? Is the public good being met?

We can look at the history of P3s. It's already been on the floor of the House, and I'm not going to go into the details. But it hasn't worked. I still don't understand why we have such confidence in this scheme. Mr. Chairman, consider that the former finance minister, the now retired Member for Strathmore-Brooks, admitted publicly that we had a \$6 billion infrastructure deficit. It has since grown. We have a lot of problems – the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has outlined those – with escalating construction costs because we're playing catch-up. We didn't do our due diligence, and we didn't plan properly in the past. As a result we have this infrastructure deficit, whether it's \$6 billion or \$8 billion or \$14 billion. There's a wide range of estimates of what is needed to fix

the problem. We have a government that prides itself on being responsible and prudent, yet we have to add this wrinkle to the Fiscal Responsibility Act through this amendment. I am very suspicious, and for that reason I cannot support this bill.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would remind all hon. members of this Assembly of a study that was done earlier and released publicly which indicated that we're not saving enough of our nonrenewable resource revenue in this province. I would certainly agree with that report. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has talked about this in the past, and he has some really good ideas.

I'm disappointed that the Premier stated in the Assembly earlier in the debate on budget estimates that no more Alberta Liberal ideas would be tolerated by his government. There's one, another one, an additional one that I would ask the government to take into consideration and adopt. I know that you've adopted some of our ideas. The land-use policy framework, that came out yesterday: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview was working on that three years ago and came up with some solutions. Have a look not only at spending money, but please, let's consider saving a few dollars as well.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will cede the floor to another hon. member.

The Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 3, Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2008?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 3 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

Bill 1

Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2008

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise today in support of Bill 1, the TILMA Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2008, and I ask the Legislature to support this important piece of legislation. To me Bill 1 and TILMA are about common sense, especially when looking at transportation and the movement of goods between Alberta and British Columbia. I have in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne a transportation advisory committee, and we've spent a lot of time talking about this bill.

It makes sense that we should be able to transport goods into British Columbia easier than we transport goods into Montana, but until TILMA came into force, this was not the case. Mr. Chairman, in April 2006 Alberta and B.C. signed the TILMA agreement, Canada's most comprehensive interprovincial trade agreement. As of April 2007 the movement of goods and services between the provinces became a whole lot easier because of TILMA. As we move toward full implementation by April 2009, hundreds of duplicate and overlapping transportation regulations will be reconciled. For example, as of April 2007 commercial vehicles no longer have to get additional registration and permits to carry loads across the Alberta-B.C. border. This reduces administration and costs.

4:50

Mr. Chairman, this agreement also means bus operators will be able to take tourists from Alberta to B.C. and then, rather than come back with an empty bus because of provincial regulations, bring B.C. tourists back to Alberta. Talk about making sense. Can you imagine that a tour bus could take a group of tourists from Calgary to Kelowna and drop them off but not be allowed to take a group of Kelowna tourists back to Calgary or to Banff?

Another common-sense fix thanks to TILMA is that truckers will no longer have to restack their loads to meet different regulations in Alberta and B.C. This is what my transportation advisory committee spent so much time talking to me about. You know, you'd think a kilogram is a kilogram regardless of whether you're an Albertan or a British Columbian. Imagine this one: Alberta truckers hauling hay have to stop when they cross the border and restack their entire load because Alberta and B.C. regulations differ, not because of legitimate safety issues but just because each province established regulations in isolation of each other. Once again, Mr. Chairman, it's about common sense.

TILMA also helps the average Albertan transporting goods across the Alberta-B.C. border. We all know that many Albertans are purchasing property in the B.C. interior. Well, Mr. Chairman, all the do-it-yourselfers who are building and renovating will also benefit from the changes under TILMA. Imagine a Calgarian stopping at Home Depot to pick up some lumber for their cabin near Radium. That lumber is hanging out the back of his pickup the required five feet with an orange flag as a marker here in Alberta. Then he starts down the Trans-Canada and crosses into B.C., where he gets pulled over and issued a fine because B.C. regulations say that lumber that hangs out more than four feet must be marked. Well, these are some of the common-sense things that TILMA will bring us.

These examples are just a couple of hundreds of transportation regulations that TILMA will reconcile to make life easier for Albertans. Mr. Chairman, as this Legislature debates Bill 1, I would encourage all members to remember these simple examples. Bill 1 is the nuts and bolts that'll help us ensure the longevity and success of TILMA, Canada's most comprehensive interprovincial trade agreement. Bill 1 is another important step forward for our province as we continue to lead the country with breaking down barriers to trade, investment, and labour mobility. I strongly encourage all members to support Bill 1.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. Certainly, I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate or the discussion on the TILMA bill this afternoon. One of the first issues around this agreement was that it was developed in a fundamentally undemocratic manner. The Alberta government had refused a proper debate on it at the time, and not only members of this Assembly but members of the public in Alberta had some genuine issues regarding the impact of TILMA on this province, and there was no public discussion. So if there's one reason why one would be interested in this bill, it's simply because it's an opportunity to discuss this proposal in public at the Legislative Assembly.

Now, all this goes back two years, Mr. Chairman. The Premiers of Alberta and B.C. signed the deal. On the surface it sets out to improve trade, investment, and labour flows between the two provinces. We're going to have an implementation period before it becomes fully operational, and that will be this time next year. This TILMA agreement is developed from the agreement on internal trade, which was signed between the Canadian provinces 14 years

ago. As I understand it, that agreement on internal trade indicated that provinces could negotiate further agreements with one another as long as they furthered the cause of trade liberalization.

I would support this bill if I thought, Mr. Chairman, that it was to improve and facilitate the flow of goods. The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon was discussing in his motion earlier in this term the Port Alberta concept and the idea that goods would flow from Prince Rupert through to central Alberta, and they would be distributed from there. If that was the means and the end of this bill, I think I would support it.

I was looking at a report regarding Prince Rupert and an enhanced rail link between the tidewater at Prince Rupert and of all places, Mr. Chairman, Chicago. Actually, it was a destination south of Chicago through, I believe, to the Midwest. That rail link down from Prince Rupert through Edmonton down to Chicago was competitive with the same rail link from Long Beach, California, east to the American Midwest. If this was the only issue around TILMA, perhaps one could consider supporting it.

When we look at Alberta and what this new trade deal will do, we have to have a look at how it will change trade credentials and how it will or will not affect labour mobility. Now, there are those that would say that this has to be done. But I would remind all hon. members of this Assembly that Alberta has among the highest number of compulsory trades or trade certifications in the entire country. In those compulsory trades it is illegal to perform the work of a trade without holding, for instance, a red seal, an Alberta journeyman ticket, or without being registered as an apprentice. British Columbia, who we signed this deal with, by contrast has no compulsory trades. Until TILMA is implemented, many qualified B.C. tradesmen cannot legally work in Alberta without going through a qualification or an equivalency process, which includes fees – in this case that fee, Mr. Chairman, would be \$450 – and there are also examinations involved.

Now, I know there are people who say: “Well, what’s the matter with that? We need all these workers. We have a shortage of workers.” But we have to respect and we have to protect our own qualifications and our own standards, which up to this time have been very rigorous and have been accepted throughout the world without a question. But here we are with this deal, this TILMA agreement. We’re going to change all that. We are, in my opinion, reducing our standards, Mr. Chairman, and we shouldn’t do that, particularly for compulsory trades. What’s the reason for this? There has never been an adequate explanation, in my opinion, given.

5:00

I know we have a shortage of workers, but so does B.C. If we look at B.C. and we look at their ability to recruit immigrants, people from abroad who are interested in coming to Canada and making a better life for themselves and their families, B.C. does a better job of recruiting and attracting these workers than Alberta. Now, why that is I don’t know, but it’s certainly not just a factor of weather. Whether it’s immigrants from the entrepreneurial class or any other class from the federal Immigration Act, it’s puzzling. But why we would be reducing our standards is beyond me. Each and every tradesperson in Alberta holding a compulsory certificate should be very concerned with the government’s direction here because those standards have to be maintained, and it’s the government’s job to protect those standards. I don’t think that TILMA is going to do this.

Now, there’s talk here about harmonization. Well, I checked into this, and it’s quite odd that there’s no interest in harmonizing our royalty rates. I would even expand this to Saskatchewan, Mr. Chairman. The Minister of Energy is probably thinking about this

idea. But I think we should be working with Saskatchewan and we should be working with British Columbia and that little corner of southwestern Manitoba where there is a hot play in the oil patch right now. Perhaps we should consider Manitoba, too.

We have the big oil companies working one province against another. We have a whole series of royalty regimes, and perhaps we could harmonize those. We all could increase our royalty share, our fair share, instead of having the big oil companies working Saskatchewan against Alberta against British Columbia. If we look up at the northeast corner of British Columbia, Mr. Chairman, we will see that there is a significant reduction in royalties there on some natural gas and some natural gas liquids. The Minister of Energy would certainly be aware of that. The people in British Columbia would probably stand in their Legislative Assembly and say: well, Alberta does the same with their oil sands; they have a similar structure, and they’re using that to attract investment and capital, and so are we.

If we’re going to be in the mood, as this TILMA legislation indicates, to harmonize our trade and investment and labour flows, perhaps we also should consider the royalty structure. The multinational oil companies are just doing their jobs. Their executives are doing their jobs. They’re trying to get maximum return on their investment, and you can’t blame them for that. But perhaps we could have a little coalition in the western provinces to make sure that in the public interest and in the public good we get every dollar we can on our nonrenewable resource royalties, and let’s not have these outfits working one province against another.

Certainly, whenever we look at the trade implications of TILMA, Mr. Chairman, we see that TILMA will harmonize the province’s commercial vehicle registrations, ending the need for dual registration. That would be acceptable. Electricity regulations are to be compatible with generally accepted and applicable North American standards or standards of the western interconnection region, the WIR, as it’s called. Both parties should work to enhance interjurisdictional trade and energy: well, why couldn’t we include royalties in that?

With electricity, certainly, we see the imports of electricity from British Columbia to this province. We are relying more and more on these imports from British Columbia just to keep our system stable. More co-operation in that way? Sure. More co-operation and an enhanced tie-in up in the Peace River district? I’m sure the Minister of Energy is on top of that. Enhanced co-operation down in Pincher Creek? Well, hopefully that will work out.

Now, if we go from trade, Mr. Chairman, to labour mobility, we already talked about that, but we have to be mindful that workers who are recognized as qualified in one province may not with our compulsory trades be recognized as qualified here. We have to protect our own credentials and our own system.

We look at some of the areas of public policy that are withheld from TILMA: First Nations policy, water services and investment, resource revenue, the royalty structures, social policy including our labour codes, workers’ compensation and minimum wages, the procurement of health and social services, management and disposal of hazardous waste materials.

Now, when we consider that and we look at the prospect or the proposal from Lac Cardinal for twin atomic reactors up there, Mr. Chairman, two twin reactors that it is proposed will be 1,100 megawatts in size, each reactor, how do citizens on the other side of the Peace River, on the B.C. side, feel about this? In B.C. you wouldn’t have to go too far south into Washington state to find an atomic reactor. I don’t know how the people in the lower mainland or the Fraser Valley feel about that, but you don’t have to go too far to find an atomic reactor. I just wonder how the people on the other side of the border, the other side of the Peace River feel about this

proposal, if they have any views or if this TILMA agreement will make them more comfortable with the proposed reactor or more cautious or more suspicious. It's hard to say, and I believe only time will tell.

It is not clear, in my view, that health services or public school boards are actually going to be exempt, Mr. Chairman, from this TILMA agreement. While they're currently listed as being so, the intention of TILMA is that by next spring the following groups will have been brought under the agreement: Crown corporations, government-owned commercial enterprises, municipal organizations, publicly funded academic, health, and social services entities, municipalities. I'm not sure about all municipalities. These discrepancies exist in the government's own information promoting this deal. In one brochure we see health and social services listed as both exempt and forthcoming on the same page. Right now it appears that contracts made in these areas cannot be challenged under TILMA, but at the same time these groups or organizations must use a TILMA framework.

5:10

Now, we all can recognize the benefits of eliminating barriers that restrict or impair trade, investment, or labour mobility. But we've been doing very well. Good fences make good neighbours. I don't understand whose interests are being served with this bill, the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2008, or the original deal.

I will say at this point in committee, Mr. Chairman, that I certainly welcome the opportunity to get some remarks on the record for the first time regarding this legislation. Again, I think the public would appreciate that if in the future the government is going to sign a deal like this, there is a wide public discussion not only in this Legislative Assembly but throughout the province before a deal of this nature is set in place. I don't think it's in the interest of the workers of this province. Hopefully I'll be proven wrong, and it will be in the interest of increasing our economic competitiveness and the profitability of our companies.

TILMA is a radical solution to a problem Albertans have not identified. The government for some mysterious reason thinks we need this deal, but I don't understand why we have implemented this and now we're having the discussion. However, with those remarks, I will take my seat.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise to speak very briefly to Bill 1, the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement. We've had free trade between Canada and the United States for about 20 years now, and just now we're finally breaking down the interprovincial trade barriers. In my opinion, TILMA is long overdue.

In the late 1970s I was involved as executive director of the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association, and at that time, because of the unique geography between the three prairie provinces and the very similar survey system – the adoption of the land titles system was almost identical – we had a loose group that I believe was called the western joint council or joint prairie council, something like that, to deal with common problems. Educational and experiential entrance requirements were one of the common problems, and as a result of that we came with fairly identical entrance requirements.

Later we decided to add British Columbia, at their request, and the group was formalized. We adopted a reciprocity system between the four provinces, which eventually ended up in a formalized joint

board of examiners. Since then that joint board of examiners has been expanded to a national board of examiners and a national reciprocity system.

I was also involved as a signing authority on the labour mobility agreement signed by nine provinces in Trois-Rivières in 2001, which brought all the professional survey associations across Canada into a common standard for entrance requirements. That has all worked very well.

Now, just this year on April 28 the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association and the Association of British Columbia Land Surveyors signed an agreement to implement TILMA between Alberta and British Columbia. It was interesting that at that meeting at Chateau Lake Louise representatives of the other provinces were very interested, in particular Saskatchewan. The Saskatchewan Land Surveyors' Association was lobbying their government, prior to the change in government, to become involved in a similar agreement with Alberta.

I think TILMA is really just the start of things to come. There's a lot of interest among other provinces. In my association with the maritime provinces years ago we talked about not so much an economic union but a union of the provincial associations at that time. I think this is long overdue. We've been involved in free trade with the United States for many years and now Mexico, but we've always had these interprovincial trade barriers, particularly in the central provinces of Canada. I think the west is now leading. I can see from my experience and from what I've read in the newspapers, et cetera, that other provinces are interested in getting involved as well. I think this is an historic moment to move ahead with this agreement with British Columbia and is a sign of things to come.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to be able to stand and speak further on Bill 1, TILMA, as it's known, in committee. I agree with my hon. colleague that has just spoken ahead of me: in itself it's something that has been discussed for many, many years. I know that when I was on the board of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, it was always something that had been brought up in terms of: why is our trade always going north-south instead of east-west? It seems to me that I can remember having some humorous conversations in that one of the most important things we had to get across the border was beer from B.C. I was certainly in support of that. I like Kootenay as well as the rest of us, I guess.

It's been many years in the making for this actually to go east-west. Now, we have had something called the AIT, internal trade, which was actually between the 10 provinces. For some reason or another Alberta I think decided that there were too many barriers and they couldn't get along, so they decided to go off on their own and would do something with B.C. In essence, the concept of having east-west trade is very important, and I can support that, but there are parts of this that really, really frighten me. Part of it is the governance. It's what I've always spoken about and I think is the part that will cut down on what our local municipalities, our local elected people, in fact our local communities will actually have control over: what happens in their community.

Not all communities want to turn into, say, a Port Alberta. Not all communities want to be nothing but business. Some of them actually are quite content to stay a little smaller. I know I've always used the example of the Pepsi-Cola company coming in and putting in things in the schools and the school boards saying that, no, they don't want it. In fact, it could then go to the appeal board, which is actually people who are not elected – they are appointed to this

appeal board – and could actually overrule bylaws or the wishes of elected people. So from that point of view, I am against this bill as it stands.

One other thing that would perhaps be interesting to look at is that Vancouver has the highest crime rate, and how easily it would be able to move over to Alberta. If companies are registered in B.C. but the activity is in Alberta, how easy it is going to be to launder drug money, et cetera. Of course, I know that jokingly we talk about the B.C. flower being the marijuana plant. However, it is true that a lot of their gross national product is, unfortunately, underground in the marijuana industry, and how easily it could move into Alberta. I think it's going to put pressure on our police forces, and I'm hoping that the police forces in both provinces, as I know that they are aware, will be able to work together on that problem.

At this point, Mr. Chair, I would take my seat, but I would ask that we adjourn the discussion.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

5:20

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report Bill 3 and report progress on Bill 1.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: I would like now to call on the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to do the report.

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 3. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 1.

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

[Motion carried; at 5:22 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 1st Session (2008)

Activity to May 22, 2008

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2008 (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 9 (Apr. 15 aft.)

Second Reading -- 47-48 (Apr. 16 eve.), 203-08 (Apr. 23 eve.), 464 (May 5 eve.), 517-18 (May 6 eve.), 572-73 (May 7 eve.), 653-54 (May 12 eve.), 702-03 (May 13 eve.), 833 (May 20 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 916-19 (May 22 aft., adjourned)

2 Travel Alberta Act (Ady)

First Reading -- 215 (Apr. 24 aft.)

Second Reading -- 464-65 (May 5 eve.), 518-19 (May 6 eve.), 703 (May 13 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 754 (May 14 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 834-35 (May 20 eve., passed)

3 Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2008 (Snelgrove)

First Reading -- 216 (Apr. 24 aft.)

Second Reading -- 654 (May 12 eve.), 703-06 (May 13 eve.), 755 (May 14 eve.), 834 (May 20 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 912-16 (May 22 aft., passed)

4 Alberta Enterprise Corporation Act (Horner)

First Reading -- 224 (Apr. 24 aft.)

Second Reading -- 654 (May 12 eve.), 834 (May 20 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- (May 21 eve., passed)

5 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2008 (\$) (Snelgrove)

First Reading -- 125 (Apr. 21 eve.)

Second Reading -- 143 (Apr. 22 eve.), 158-60 (Apr. 22 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 208-10 (Apr. 23 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 386-87 (Apr. 30 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (May 15 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 15, 2008; SA 2008 c2]

6 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2008 (\$) (Snelgrove)

First Reading -- 165-66 (Apr. 23 aft.)

Second Reading -- 387 (Apr. 30 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 463 (May 5 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 516 (May 6 eve., passed)

Royal Assent -- (May 15 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 15, 2008; SA 2008 c1]

7 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2008 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 348 (Apr. 30 aft.)

8 Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2008 (Renner)

First Reading -- 348 (Apr. 30 aft.)

9 Land Agents Licensing Amendment Act, 2008 (Mitzel)

First Reading -- 479 (May 6 aft.)

- 10 Security Services and Investigators Act (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 586-87 (May 8 aft.)
Second Reading -- 889-90 (May 21 eve., referred to Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services)
- 11 Insurance Amendment Act, 2008 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 348 (Apr. 30 aft.)
- 12 Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2008 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 348 (Apr. 30 aft.)
Second Reading -- 834 (May 20 eve.), 886-87 (May 21 eve.), 909-11 (May 22 aft., passed)
- 13 Financial Institutions Statutes Amendment Act, 2008 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 533 (May 7 aft.)
Second Reading -- 834 (May 20 eve.), 887 (May 21 eve.), 911-12 (May 22 aft., passed)
- 14 Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2008 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 770 (May 15 aft.)
- 15 Family Law Amendment Act, 2008 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 770 (May 15 aft.)
- 16 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2008 (Danyluk)**
First Reading -- 904 (May 22 aft.)
- 17 Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2008 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 904 (May 22 aft.)
- 18 Film and Video Classification Act (Blackett)**
First Reading -- 848 (May 21 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Community Services)
- 19 First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Amendment Act, 2008 (Blackett)**
First Reading -- 848 (May 21 aft.)
- 20 Agriculture Statutes Repeal Act, 2008 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 848 (May 21 aft.)
- 21 Heating Oil and Propane Rebate Act (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 848 (May 21 aft.)
- 201 Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Heritage Act (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 59 (Apr. 17 aft.)
Second Reading -- 89-102 (Apr. 21 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 430-43 (May 5 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 625-31 (May 12 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 15 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 15, 2008; SA 2008 cH-15.5]
- 202 Alberta Volunteer Service Medal Act (Cao)**
First Reading -- 59 (Apr. 17 aft.)
Second Reading -- 102-07 (Apr. 21 aft.), 258-64 (Apr. 28 aft., six-month hoist amendment agreed to)
- 203 Election Statutes (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2008 (Allred)**
First Reading -- 224 (Apr. 24 aft.)
Second Reading -- 265-74 (Apr. 28 aft.), 443-44 (May 5 aft.), 631-34 (May 12 aft., six-month hoist amendment agreed to)
- 204 Traffic Safety (Hand-Held Communication Devices) Amendment Act, 2008 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 224 (Apr. 24 aft.)
- 205 Traffic Safety (Used Vehicle Inspection) Amendment Act, 2008 (Bhardwaj)**
First Reading -- 401 (May 1 aft.)
- 206 Alberta Personal Income Tax (Physical Activity Credit) Amendment Act, 2008 (Rodney)**
First Reading -- 587 (May 8 aft.)
- Pr1 Young Men's Christian Association of Edmonton Statutes Amendment Act, 2008 (Lukaszuk)**
First Reading -- 719 (May 14 aft.)

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