



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 26, 2008

Issue 24

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

First Session

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

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

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

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

[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 26, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome back. Good afternoon.

Let us pray. From our forests and parklands to our prairies and mountains comes the call of our land. From our farmsteads, towns, and cities comes the call of our people that as legislators of this province we act with responsibility and sensitivity. Grant us the wisdom to meet such challenges. Amen.

Hon. members, today we'll be led in the singing of our national anthem by Colleen Adams, and I would invite all to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly the officer who leads the Salvation Army's good work not only in Alberta but also in the rest of the divisional area of responsibility that encompasses Saskatchewan, the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut. The Sally Ann, as it is affectionately known, has been at the forefront of alleviating the needs of vulnerable people in this province since 1895 and in this country since 1882, and in the contemporary context it is in 115 countries around the globe. Members will be interested to know that the Salvation Army is the largest nongovernmental direct provider of social services in Canada.

From the divisional headquarters in Edmonton, in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, are Majors Eric and Donna Bond, who provide oversight and the divisional leadership for Alberta, Saskatchewan, the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut; Majors Fred and Wendy Waters, who are area commanders who share responsibility for northern Alberta and Saskatchewan and all of Canada's northern territories; Major Ken Percy, who is the divisional secretary for public relations and development – his wife, Major Michele Percy, who is the other half of the team, could not be here today – and, finally, Karen Diaper, who is the communications co-ordinator for north and central Alberta. I would now invite our guests to rise and receive the recognition of this House for all that they do to provide hope and support for those in need.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise to introduce to you and through you 20 very special guests, most of whom are with the PDD program at Mira Facilitation Center. They are here with their group leaders: Laura Holm, Cynthia Froma, Loice Kandie, Ashley Prieve, Tina Froese, and Hayley Halvorson. I would ask them to either rise or give us a big wave and let us know that they're here. Please welcome these wonderful members.

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of students, parents, and teachers from the Lacombe Christian school. There are 50 students and nine adults with two teachers today, Mrs. Stephanie Littel and Ms Andrea De Vries. The parent helpers today are Mrs. Annette Zuidhof, Mr. Ed Ten Hove, Mr. Bryan Pikkert, Mr. Peter De Wit, Mr. Brian Fraser, Mr. Henk John Kuipers, Mr. Leo Hoogenboom, and Mrs. Janelle Curtis. Of course, one of the most important people with them is their bus driver, Mr. Dean Den Oudsten. I believe they're seated in both galleries, but most of them are in the members' gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure for me to introduce to you 26 brilliant, inquisitive students from St. Alphonsus school in my constituency as well as their teacher, Miss Kirsten Kimak, and parents Anita Riva and Monika Romanik. I would ask that they all please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two guests, more of whom we'll hear about during members' statements this afternoon. With us this afternoon we have Mr. Bill Rees, a volunteer of over 50 years with the Edmonton YMCA. Mr. Rees has recently been honoured by having the former Enterprise Centre in downtown Edmonton renamed the Bill Rees centre. Accompanying him this afternoon is Mr. Ron Coulombe, executive director of the Edmonton YMCA. I would ask both gentlemen, seated in Mr. Speaker's gallery, to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly an honour for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislative Assembly a group of ladies who are retirees of the Evergreen Catholic separate regional division school board No. 2 in Spruce Grove and Stony Plain. They have been on the tour of the Legislature, and I saw them enjoying our cafeteria at lunch today. I would ask them to rise as I call their names or to wave. They are Judy Lamothe, Maurya Miska, Denise Nobert, Doris Pinkoski, Jane Richard, Edith Cole, Annette Vasseur, and Bea Wilson. They are in the members' gallery, and I ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Benito: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly four very

special guests from the Airport Taxi Drivers Association. With us today are Mr. King Osman, director of public relations; Mr. Mohamed Kedir, financial counsel; Mr. Aweis Hassan, financial counsel; and Mr. Akram Shamie, secretary.

The Airport Taxi Drivers Association was created four months ago as a nonprofit society to represent the 200 voiceless drivers who operate at the International Airport. This organization is made up of almost exclusively immigrants from east African nations like Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and the Sudan as well as far eastern countries like India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and even eastern European countries like Poland and the Czech Republic. In this respect, we are truly a diverse group of immigrants all working together within Canada to provide taxi service to and from the Edmonton International Airport. They are in the public gallery right now, and I would ask that these gentlemen now stand to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. Thank you.

1:40

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 17 grade 6 students from St. Mary school, which is located in Westlock. They are accompanied this afternoon by their teacher, Anita Flese; teacher assistant Virginia Sjostrom; and parent helpers Rose Bain, Tammy Smith, Kim Andronyk, Patti McKeever, and Angie Wells. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you a person that's well known to you, and that is your former page. Mr. Taddes Korris is visiting us today along with Miss Allison Nicholas, a talent voice performance major at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland. If you're wondering what Mr. Korris is up to, I'll tell you. Taddes is currently studying music performance at McGill University in Montreal, and on June 9 the dean of music at the Manhattan School of Music has granted him a special audition in New York City. As well, Taddes will be receiving a major Canadian award – I cannot tell you what it is because it is embargoed – in Toronto acknowledging his work in spearheading a recording project of Lithuanian composer Mikalojus Čiurlionis. These exceptionally talented two young people are guests in your public gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive our traditional warm welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Bill Rees YMCA Centre

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to honour the outstanding work of the YMCA in Edmonton and its many volunteers who give of their time, talents, and financial resources to help enrich the lives of others, often with little recognition. But there are times when we need to pause and take special note of those who make exceptional contributions over the course of a lifetime.

The Edmonton Y did just that recently when the YMCA Enterprise Centre in downtown Edmonton was renamed in honour of Bill Rees, a volunteer for over 50 years, the last 16 of those on a full-time basis. The Enterprise Centre was made possible through a \$2.7 million donation from another exceptional Edmontonian, Mr. Bill

Butler, who selflessly proposed that the centre be named after one of its most committed volunteers and submitted Bill Rees' name for recognition in lieu of his own.

This isn't the first time Mr. Rees has been recognized for his efforts. In 1995 he received the fellowship of honour award, the highest award bestowed by the YMCA in Canada. As further recognition the YMCA of Edmonton established the Bill Rees volunteer of the year award.

Thanks to the generosity of both gentlemen, Mr. Speaker, the Bill Rees centre will provide community support and employment counselling to at-risk individuals and their families. I understand they are currently serving over 1,000 clients.

Ladies and gentlemen, our government is proud to support our province's voluntary sector through initiatives like the new community spirit program. I encourage everyone to take notice of people like Bill who have shown that a life lived in service of others creates both opportunity and hope for those in need.

It is a pleasure to welcome both Bill Rees and Mr. Ron Coulombe, executive director of the YMCA, to your gallery today. On behalf of all members I extend our thanks and heartfelt congratulations to Bill on this outstanding and very well-deserved tribute.

Thank you, Bill.

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

High-intensity Residential Fires

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From the years 2000 to 2007 86 high-intensity residential fires occurred in Alberta. These fires cost millions of dollars of damage and had a tremendous impact on many families. Roughly one-third of these fires began on construction sites and most were caused either by acts of arson or human error.

After Edmonton's MacEwan fire in July 2007 a working group established by the Minister of Municipal Affairs was tasked with researching and recommending ways to reduce the occurrence and severity of high-intensity residential fires. On Friday I was on hand to hear the minister announce the government's response to their report. These changes will make Albertans safer. I applaud the minister and all stakeholders for taking steps to find a balance between safety, affordability, and technically sound practices.

Demonstrations at the Edmonton fire training centre showed us just how effective gypsum board is in preventing the spread of fire in a garage. It was a very impressive display. This buys time to get your family out and for firefighters to respond. Alberta is a leader. These changes put us at least two to three years ahead of national code changes. However, legislation alone can't solve all the problems. One of the key recommendations accepted by government is a commitment to public education and awareness. We must be proactive and provide Albertans with the information they need to prevent fires. At the demonstration we were also reminded of other safety measures we should all be taking: smoke detectors, barbecue safety, and keeping our yards free of debris.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Women Building Futures

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Women Building Futures is a nonprofit charitable organization founded in 1998 that works to improve the quality of life for the 19 per cent, or 1 in 5, of women in Alberta living at or under the poverty line. Women Building Futures is helping Albertans to build better lives and gain

economic independence. Not only is this organization helping to reduce the shortage of skilled workers in this province, but they are providing companies with new competencies and resources by enabling positive change one woman at a time.

Lack of affordable housing is one of the key barriers facing women trying to enter training programs. To overcome this issue, Women Building Futures has purchased a 30,000 square foot warehouse in downtown Edmonton and is renovating it into a 50,000 square foot training and affordable housing facility. The facility will increase the organization's capacity to help 400 women out of poverty and provide 400 qualified apprentices and skilled workers annually for Alberta's construction and oil and gas industries. The attached housing facility will provide 42 units of affordable housing, 18 of which are earmarked for single moms with up to four children each.

Some current goals of the organization include attracting more women into the construction trades; providing trades training that meets the needs of women and industry; evaluating and addressing barriers to the recruitment, training, and retention of women entering and participating in the trades. This program has been invaluable to women from Alberta's aboriginal population and continues to grow and serve this entire province.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Women Building Futures on their 10th anniversary, to recognize their essential contributions to our province, and to wish them continued success in the years ahead. It should be noted, Mr. Speaker, that many organizations help this outfit out.

Thank you.

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

Multiple Sclerosis Society

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has one of the highest prevalence rates for multiple sclerosis in the world. MS affects 11,000 Albertans along with their friends and families. However, Albertans with MS have access to a world-class network of support through the Alberta division of the MS Society of Canada. This is made possible by the over 100,000 Albertans who regularly make a personal investment in MS research each year.

During the months of May and June the MS walks and MS bike tours raise millions of dollars for MS research and services. Last year alone Alberta division and its chapters contributed \$3 million to Alberta-based MS research and nearly the same amount of money to programs and services. Mr. Speaker, you will be interested to learn that Premier Stelmach and ministers Horner, Snelgrove, and Danyluk have all participated in these much-needed fundraising events.

1:50

I'm proud to report that the Alberta MS Society anticipates that they will contribute \$4.7 million to Alberta-based MS research this year. This unparalleled success is due in part to a funding agreement with the government of Alberta and our endMS campaign. The endMS initiative is designed to recruit, train, and retain more bright young researchers in Alberta. It will also create a national MS collaboration network that includes a regional MS leadership centre in Alberta. I would like all the members of this Assembly to join me in recognizing and supporting the MS Society of Alberta's commitment to research, prevention, and improving the wellness and the quality of life for Albertans with MS.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Effluent Discharge into Athabasca River

Mr. Taylor: Thank you. Last week it was revealed that in September 2007 oil and grease were released into the Athabasca River from Suncor's Millennium upgrader. To be clear, this was from a waste-water pond containing oil and grease, not simply industrial water generated through domestic and stormwater sources. Oil and grease, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Environment: will the minister admit that the water referred to is not stormwater but oil sands by-products contaminated with oil and grease?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I explained, I thought, very clearly last week what this water was. This water results from some domestic sewer, it results from some groundwater runoff, stormwater, and it also results from water that's used in the cooling process. What it is not is tailings; that is, water that results from the processing of oil sands.

Mr. Taylor: I never said that it was tailings, Mr. Speaker. I said that it was waste water containing oil and grease.

Given the minister's comments on Thursday that "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," can the minister assure us that oil and grease and other hydrocarbons have not been released into the North Saskatchewan River? He didn't know about the incident at Suncor, after all.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the very nature of stormwater is that from time to time you may get a spill of one kind that is swept up by stormwater. That's why we are encouraging, in fact requiring municipalities on a much more frequent basis to divert their stormwater into their waste-water systems and treat stormwater in a similar way that they treat domestic water.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, the minister stated that oil sands operations report discharges that are beyond what is authorized in normal day-to-day operations. Is the minister saying that there are some levels of contamination into the Athabasca River that are acceptable to him, and if so, how much is acceptable?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, to use the example I gave earlier, just as the city of Edmonton has an authorization for the amount of discharge that they can release into the river through their water treatment facilities, industrial complexes have similar approvals. There is expectation that the water be treated to an appropriate level and then, based upon a scientific analysis of what is the discharge rate that would be safe to put into the river, be it the Athabasca or any other river in Alberta, there are authorizations that are granted.

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

Environmental Responsibility

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Boy, way to commit to a specific answer.

This government's standard response to criticism is to deny it or to blame somebody else. We know that pollution happens. We know for a fact that water is contaminated, but instead of fixing the

problem, this government whines about being treated unfairly. Now the MLA for Sherwood Park, a senior cabinet minister, says that environmental headlines are threatening everything in the Industrial Heartland and harming the province. To the Minister of Environment: is it the position of this government to blame environmentalists for Alberta's national and international reputation as a polluter? Is it everybody else's fault but yours?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear. It's the position of this government to protect the environmental integrity of this province.

Mr. Taylor: Well, then, Mr. Speaker, what the minister doesn't seem to understand is that the world is focusing on Alberta. Why won't the minister make stronger regulations for environmental protection rather than relying on greenwashing Alberta's image? Why not just be more environmentally responsible?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we already have some of the strongest regulations when it comes to protecting the environment of any jurisdiction in North America and, specifically, in Canada. That being said, that doesn't mean that there's not room for improvement, and I can assure you that we're constantly seeking to improve and raise those standards.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of those areas of improvement, I think, is the cumulative effects framework for the Industrial Heartland. Can the minister tell us if the Minister of Finance and Enterprise is interfering with the implementation of the cumulative effects framework for the Industrial Heartland?

Mr. Renner: No, Mr. Speaker. The implementation of cumulative effects is entirely the responsibility of the Minister of Environment in consultation with the Minister of Energy and the Minister of SRD.

The Speaker: A point of order?

Ms Evans: You bet.

The Speaker: The point of order will be dealt with at the completion of the Routine.

Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Savings and Investments

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Government motions, bills, and budgets all show a confusing move to cut taxes at a time when there is precious little being added to savings. This is an example of the government choosing short-term political and economic gain over longer term fiscal stability. My question is to the minister of finance. Can the minister explain why the choice has been made to jeopardize the future for Albertans by deferring savings at the same time that the government is reducing its tax revenue by billions of dollars?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in our budget this year we were quite proud to in fact do something that, in my understanding, the opposition totally supported, and that was relieving the responsibility of Albertans to pay the Alberta health insurance premium as of January 1. We chose to leave the money with Albertans.

Ms Blakeman: Well, yes, but you've also had a private member's bill that was going to cut personal tax, and you have put additional bills forward that are also going to cut taxes, so you're cutting taxes.

The question: as the minister has invited Albertans to contribute their ideas for a savings plan, can the minister explain if this process has been formalized and what action will be taken on the recommendations that are brought forward?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that anybody that listens to the debate today would wonder why anybody in the opposition would challenge us for reducing the amount that people would pay for looking after people that are elderly parents, for the caregiver, or for people who are getting disability credits in this year's taxation. I'm actually dismayed that anybody would challenge those kinds of tax reductions as being irresponsible.

Ms Blakeman: You're cutting taxes; you're not saving.

Again to the same minister: when will this minister treat the heritage fund as the savings account that it was intended to be and stop withdrawing money out of it for use in the general revenue fund?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, previously I've indicated that we will come forward with an investment and savings strategy, but to accuse this government of not saving money is to ignore that in the last three and a half years we've saved over \$7 billion, that our surplus policy allocates a third of every bit of unexpected surplus into savings, that we inflation-proofed our heritage fund at \$279 million this year, and if oil prices and gas prices stay the way they are today, we'll have even more for savings. We will bring forward a defined investment and savings strategy, but the current strategy is saving Albertans hundreds of millions, even billions of dollars.

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

Pipeline Leaks

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Three weeks ago between 60 and 125 barrels of oil leaked from a pipeline into the Otawau River. Last year alone there were over 800 pipeline leaks in Alberta, and no wonder since there are so few ERCB inspectors that each one must cover 4,600 kilometres of pipeline, or roughly the distance between Edmonton and Florida. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. Why is this government putting Alberta ground and water in jeopardy by failing to employ enough inspectors to detect and prevent these leaks?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no number of inspectors that could possibly be along every inch of every pipeline within the province of Alberta to detect a leak. The issue of leaks is not so much detecting them, being there to see them; it's the technical equipment that's in place, the monitoring that's in place that is a requirement of the operator of the pipelines and an audited procedure by ERCB.

2:00

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, apparently the minister thinks 800 leaks a year is just business as usual. Instead of spending \$25 million on a PR campaign to snow people into thinking that the Conservatives care about the environment, wouldn't the money be better spent ensuring that there are enough pipeline inspectors to keep the leaks down to a lot less than 800 a year?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the number of leaks that the member refers to is not the issue. The issue is: do we have in place a regulatory regime that ensures the integrity of our pipelines, and when we have a failure – and it's inevitable that from time to time there will be – do we have in place a regime that will protect the environment, that will respond immediately and deal with the issue at hand?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the real issue is that the Minister of Environment doesn't care that we have 800 pipeline leaks a year in this province. Can he tell the Assembly why his government has no plan to eliminate or even significantly reduce the number of leaks in pipelines in this province?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the member is referring to when he claims that the government is not concerned about pipeline leaks. It's a huge priority for the government, and it's obviously a huge concern and priority for my department. We just recently put in place a response team to deal with responding when there is a leak. More importantly, we ensure that there is ongoing maintenance to ensure that the risk is absolutely minimized.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Spring Flooding

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2005 floods caused major problems in southern Alberta and extensive damage to the homes and businesses of many Albertans. Just this past weekend the high water levels in the rivers threatened many Albertans in my constituency and the constituencies around me, but the damage wasn't nearly as severe. To the Minister of Environment: what has the government done to improve Albertans' safety during high flood situations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is absolutely right: we had severe rain this weekend. Fortunately, it was not of the duration and severity that caused the kinds of damages that we've seen in past events. But every time we have an event – and the 2005 event was a good example – we learn something. Since then we've done a significant amount to improve our response. We've developed links between Environment and Emergency Management to ensure that municipalities are well informed. We've got a flood risk co-ordination centre that has been developed since the '05 flood to ensure that our staff are on-site during any . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister, my first supplemental question. The rain seems to be slowing down. Is the danger over and subsiding in southern Alberta?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the immediate risk is certainly diminished. River levels have peaked over the weekend and are now receding. All of our flood warnings have been downgraded to flood watches. The cold low-pressure system seems to be leaving the province, and we are expecting good, dry weather this week. That being said, Mother Nature has a way of fooling us from time to time. I would advise all Albertans that this is the time of year when we do

have to remember that there is potential for flooding and that they should stay tuned to their media.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Minister. My final supplemental is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. How does the government assist municipalities in their response to these floods?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, we offer assistance to co-ordinate emergency responses with municipalities. We've also this last weekend activated the government emergency operations centre. After the flood we support and try to help Albertans get their lives back together as well as municipalities. We support individuals, families, businesses, and municipalities. Just as a note, last year we had \$50 million worth of support for flooding and in 2005 \$171 million.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent days have seen heavy rainfall in southern and central Alberta, leading to flooding and imminent flooding. What we're concerned about is the level to which communities are prepared for such disasters and what role the provincial government is playing. It seems this government has learned nothing from the massive flooding of 2005. Advisories are no substitute for government action. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs. There are flood watch advisories being issued for many rivers today. Can the minister tell us what he is doing immediately to mitigate the damage instead of paying millions of insurance dollars later?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, indeed, if you want to talk about immediately, as I said before, we have activated the government emergency operations centre. In the long term we are looking and working with the federal government as far as mitigation of flooding areas. We need to look at ways that we can not only prevent flooding but look at different areas where residences are, making sure that people understand and know where those flood areas are, that there's no building taking place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Environment. The residents of High River were blindsided by flooding yesterday even though a flood warning was issued by Alberta Environment. Can the minister tell us why more resources were not directed to this community immediately when the flood warning was issued? It's always mop up after.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the role of Alberta Environment is to monitor the flow of the rivers based on a tremendous amount of expertise, much of it obtained in the recent events of 2005 and before that in 1995, with extensive flood mapping and to make residents aware as soon as is reasonably possible that there is a potential or there is a risk from rising water. That's exactly what we did.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. To the same minister. In 2005 Alberta communities were devastated by massive flooding because of development in flood plains, yet this government has done nothing to solve this despite recommendations of the government-appointed Flood Risk Management Committee. What happened to the 16 recommendations of this committee, which was chaired by the minister of agriculture? How many more years will constituents in the Highwood be forced to tread water before this government takes action?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, we are looking at the report. It is going through the government process, and the recommendations are being looked at. Those recommendations are not simple. We're looking at probabilities of flood. We've been working, as I said previously, with the federal government to look at a focus which we can support, the mitigation of building in flood areas. It's focused on reducing losses.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Aboriginal Training and Employment

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know that the unemployment of aboriginal people living on reserves is twice as high as for other Albertans. The on-reserve unemployment rates are in the double digits. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration to ask him: why is this happening in a province where we have more jobs, or we say we have more jobs, than people to fill them?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I agree that we have a much higher unemployment rate amongst the aboriginal communities than we do have in other communities, and as a government we're trying to address this. We've earmarked \$11.8 million this year to help aboriginal people get the training they need to gain meaningful employment. We're currently supporting 57 projects to train aboriginal people as pipefitters, health care aides, truck drivers, drill rig workers, and much more. One of my mandates is to increase the total labour force of Alberta's Métis, First Nations, and Inuit to 74,000 this year.

Ms Calahasen: Well, to the same minister: all those numbers sound impressive, Mr. Speaker, but when we're talking about those people that don't have any jobs, how does this translate into long-term sustainable employment for the aboriginal community?

2:10

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'm really happy to give you a great example. My department is supporting 70 members of the Blood First Nation in southern Alberta to train as industrial and production workers and office workers. Once they've completed this training, they'll have jobs in a plant that constructs modular buildings for the energy sector. One of the most interesting aspects of this is that this plant will be located right on the First Nation itself. It will offer long-term, sustainable employment and will also enhance their local economy.

Ms Calahasen: My third question is actually to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. Since your ministry is responsible for the aboriginal community, what is it that you are doing to ensure that aboriginal people can get not only jobs but great jobs, especially in this hot economy? How can they benefit from this hot economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Well, Mr. Speaker, we're working very diligently with as many aboriginal entities, industry representatives, and other individuals as possible to help achieve a common goal of greater and fuller involvement of aboriginals in our workforce. To date we've helped facilitate 77 economic partnerships across the province of Alberta, all of them engaged in a high level of employment for aboriginal people. In addition to that, we're also working with Employment and Immigration on a proposed aboriginal skills training and labour force development initiative and with Education and with Advanced Education in collaboration with First Nations to improve the workforce action plan.

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

Commercial Vehicle Inspection

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Transportation tried to claim that the privatized annual inspection of trucks was working. In a strange argument the minister drew on the very statistics that prove him wrong. Some 40 per cent of the trucks pulled over in Calgary last weekend had to be pulled off the road because they were unsafe to drive. My questions are to the Minister of Transportation. Could the minister please explain how a 40 per cent failure rate at checkstops by Calgary police shows that annual inspections are anything other than a failure?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the people that work at the checkstops that stop those trucks are not privatized people. They either work for the Solicitor General's department or they work for the Department of Transportation under the inspections people. I want you to know, as I said last year, that we have people in that department that have won international world competitions, taken first place, on how to inspect vehicles, and they work for the Department of Transportation.

Mr. Kang: We are not talking about the inspections of the police, Mr. Speaker; we are talking about the private inspection places. Why is this government relying on the public servants in the form of police and ministry inspectors to catch this vast proportion of vehicles that slip through a private safety inspection system that just doesn't work?

Mr. Ouellette: I disagree with the hon. member, Mr. Speaker. He's talking about two separate things. Those private inspectors inspect the vehicle. They make sure the vehicle is fine and it passes. Just because a vehicle passes an inspection today doesn't mean there won't be something that burns out or breaks down or does something the next day or a week or a month down the road. Today we have the best type of technologies out there. We have technologies that actually pick the vehicles out when something isn't working. Like the thermal imaging machine: when a vehicle goes by, if it even has a warm brake, it picks that out. So a lot of the times they only stop the vehicles that they realize, and therefore it looks like a lot of the vehicles that are stopped – that brings our percentages up.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we're not talking about burned out brake lights; we're talking about something serious here. To the minister again. Primarily, of course, this is an issue of

public safety, but there is also a problem of cost. Could the minister please tell this House just how much it is costing to have police and the ministry staff doing the work that the private commercial vehicle inspection companies have failed to do?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I don't think this hon. member understands that the police or the DOT agents are not doing the work that the private inspection companies do. The private inspection companies are something totally different. They give you a safety sticker to allow you to insure and register your vehicle, Mr. Speaker.

Our police do the work they're supposed to do, and so do our DOT agents. They check to make sure they keep all Albertans safe on the highways by taking vehicles off the road that they feel aren't safe.

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

High-intensity Residential Fires

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. On Friday the minister publicly responded to the High-Intensity Residential Fires Working Group report. Also, I was pleased to see the government commit to take action on 18 recommendations. Can you please explain why two of the recommendations made by the working group were referred for review and a further two rejected completely?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The response was a balance of safety, affordability, and technically sound practices. The two that were rejected were rejected because we are doing them already. To amend the MGA to create a national fire adviser: we are already getting together with the provinces and the federal government and looking at different ways that we can address issues related to emergency management. The second one is to combine the codes with the land-use strategy. Mr. Speaker, we are doing that.

Secondly, the further review, going from 1.2 metres to 1.5 metres in the work site safety: the research has not been done; the national council is doing it now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. When will these changes become mandatory?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, we are starting right now. The education program is starting now, and we will continue to do that, working together with firefighters and fire commissioners and also emergency management. Also, we hope that by 2009 we will have all of the recommendations and the responses in place. We are the leaders in this country, and we are two, three years ahead of the national codes. No, it's not retroactive and will not have any impact on older homes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Last year's devastating fire in Edmonton's MacEwan neighbourhood caused millions of dollars in damage and had a

tremendous impact on many families. Will these new measures prevent a fire like that one in MacEwan Green from happening again?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the simple answer is yes and, secondly, by improving construction site safety and education, by working with municipalities, looking at site management, site surveillance, because in this particular case it was arson that started that fire.

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

Child Care Worker Wages and Benefits

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has removed its freeze on hiring staff with only a diploma for child and youth care, which means that workers with diplomas and experience are now leaving agencies and going to work for the department as the pay is higher. With a lack of resources agencies cannot afford to keep their experienced staff, and thus they lose significant resources, compromising the quality of care they can offer. When agencies have to replace staff, there are very few or no experienced staff left to mentor them. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: why has the department removed the freeze on hiring less qualified staff when it could better address this drastic turnover and attrition with better wages for all workers?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, the member is talking about some elements that are in the consultation that we undertook in the last couple of months, and thanks to the participation of 1,200 Albertans, we do have good feedback on that. As yet I have not presented the results of that consultation but do expect to in the next several weeks.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll look forward to seeing the results and having them turned into practical findings.

Given that experienced individuals are forced to other sectors that pay them livable wages, how will the department now ensure that the ratio of staff with reduced experience will not undermine the ability to deliver quality services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that I had stressed when we were announcing the space creation fund is that we would make sure that our regulations do support the creation of spaces, which does include staffing issues, recruiting and retaining staff, as well as affordability issues and accessibility.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why does the department continue to use hiring practices that poach staff from their own contracted agencies instead of simply standardizing wages and benefits across the board?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, again, I would just say that this member is aware that we are working with our contracted agencies on taking a look at the issues that are specific to them and also addressing the issues in terms of gaps between contracted agencies and government

workers and working on solutions both for the short term and the long term.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In an effort to do pretty much everything possible to avoid paying workers fairly, this government has aggressively pursued the importation of temporary foreign workers. These employees have few rights, limited access to objective legal advice, and can be sent home with little warning. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: notwithstanding these risks and given that at least 800 workers reported rights abuses in the first three months of this year, why won't the minister accept that the current system invites abuse?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The temporary foreign worker program is designed to meet temporary labour needs, and these employees are in Alberta to fill very short-term gaps. We are very, very concerned about the potential abuse that is there. We've set up call centres both in Edmonton and in Calgary to respond. As well, we've hired additional inspectors to go out to do spot inspections on employers that have and hire temporary foreign workers to try to minimize the abuse that might occur.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you for that answer. Given that temporary foreign workers often don't speak English and the government's complaint hotline only accepts calls in English, does the minister honestly believe that employer translators are the correct group upon which these workers should rely to protect the very rights that their employers may have breached?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, a lot of our temporary foreign workers have a basic understanding of English. Where they don't, as the hon. member asking the question indicated, we do try to offer as much as possible translation services and interpretation services for our temporary foreign workers. We try to make those numbers available to them. They have access to our staff via phones as well as to our inspectors who are travelling across the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you. Unfortunately, there's still not enough translation service out there. Why is it that the government is hosting seminars for employers on how to find and hire temporary foreign workers but has no similar seminars for employees here in Alberta in their own language to help teach them their rights?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we do try to advertise as much as we can to all of our employees, including the provincial nominee program, those individuals as well as those under the temporary foreign worker program. We're trying to reach them in various ways, recognizing that temporary foreign workers often are here on a very short-term basis. We still are very, very concerned about their individual rights and the type of treatment they receive.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Family and Community Support Services

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, family and community support services, or FCSS, provides the framework for cost-shared preventative programs administered by Alberta municipalities, including the city of Calgary. Independent studies suggest that every dollar spent on FCSS preventative services saves from \$5 to \$10 in future spending on policing, justice, family abuse, health care, and addiction treatment. Over the past five years more citizens required FCSS service and the CPI has risen over 17 per cent, but provincial per capita funding has increased by only 4.4 per cent over the same period. My question is for the minister of children's services. Will the minister commit to raising FCSS allocation to match inflationary increases in program costs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate this question because I don't think there's a better example of successful partnerships in this province than those that are associated with our FCSS. Government recognizes this, and in our past budget we increased the FCSS budget by 5 per cent, raising the total funding to FCSS to \$72 million.

In the same time period that the member is referencing, the last five years, I think it's important to note that we increased funding from \$58.6 million to the \$72 million that I just mentioned, which is 17.8 per cent. That's not to take away from the issue that he's raising, but I do want to say that the government is committed to supporting FCSS.

Dr. Brown: Given the serious staffing problems faced by FCSS-funded agencies, will the minister provide funding to enable agencies to pay salaries that are at least 90 per cent of those in equivalent government positions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A key principle of the FCSS program is that local governments determine their priorities. If a community is determined to allocate additional funding to human resource costs from the FCSS funding, our act and our regulations do support this.

There are two things I would like to note. It is important that in this year's budget with our announcement for out of school funding we did release another \$11 million for municipalities to put towards their priorities. As well, we have established a million dollar bursary that is available to FCSS and parent link staff for professional development.

Dr. Brown: For the same minister: does the minister believe that there is redundancy in any of the programs offered by FCSS?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, the strength of our FCSS programs is that they are community driven based on local needs. The partners who deliver the preventative programs aim to make sure that they complement and not duplicate each other. In fact, a recent FCSS review determined that the services provided by CFSA and FCSS were distinctly differently. It showed that both groups do very important work and do in fact complement each other.

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

Smoking in Vehicles Carrying Children

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday the Minister of Transportation assured me that safety was given serious consideration on any issue that involved the Traffic Safety Act, and I assume it's giving the greatest amount of consideration when the safety issue concerns the protection of children. To the Minister of Transportation, and we'll keep this pretty simple here today: do you agree that second-hand smoke is a danger to children?

Mr. Ouellette: From everything that I've heard on the news or read, I would have to say yes to that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: We are searching for government policy rather than opinion.

The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again to the same minister: does the minister concede that one way to protect children from this danger is to prohibit smoking in cars travelling on Alberta highways?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I tried to answer this last week and hopefully bring some common sense into some of the heads across the way here, a long way that way across the way, of course. There has to be some common sense used. I don't think that on every whim we can run out and pass a law about every little thing that somebody needs done. I think that the general public is saying: let us have some common sense; let us police ourselves. I would say that most parents will make sure that they keep their children away from second-hand smoke.

Mr. Hehr: I don't think you're hearing from the six-month-olds on that issue, are you, hon. Minister of Transportation?

Finally, if we agree that the primary goal of government is the protection of children, when will the minister commit to amending the Traffic Safety Act?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the Traffic Safety Act is meant for traffic safety. That's what we're looking at in the Traffic Safety Act.

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

WorldSkills Calgary 2009

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning our Premier announced the government's \$24 million commitment to host the WorldSkills 2009 competition in Calgary. Having participated in Skills Alberta, I understand the value of the program. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. How much money is industry investing in this event?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I do know that the hon. member has had experience not only with the Skills program but also as a journeyman and recognizes the value of this program. There are other entities who are investing with us in this very valuable program. The federal government is investing; as well, industry is investing through the WorldSkills committee, which is a global committee of some very renowned people from around the globe, that these young people get access to. Certainly, the corporate sector is a very important factor for the WorldSkills because these are the individuals that our corporate sector is going to be hiring down the road.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister: how will the benefits from hosting the 2009 WorldSkills competition in Alberta carry on into the future?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, the trades and technical areas are extremely important to Alberta's economy. We're certainly looking to inspire youth to take on the trades and the opportunities that are out there. WorldSkills and the people involved in that are key influencers to show youth the types of opportunities that are available for them in these skill sets but also to show the type of skill that we have in our province to the globe and to potentially attract other skilled workers into the province to help us not only with our economy but also to train that next generation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister. The Premier's announcement mentioned the government equipment legacy program. What is this program all about?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, a very interesting benefit to us hosting the WorldSkills competition is the 2009 WorldSkills equipment legacy grant. Essentially, what that means is that after the competition that equipment, that is worth millions of dollars, will be given to many of Alberta's leading learning facilities in the province for additional training so that far into the future the effects of having WorldSkills here will be felt by students in our province.

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

Anthony Henday Drive Noise Levels

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Transportation says that his government will not enforce a bylaw passed by the city of Edmonton to protect local residents against excessive noise. One major cause of such noise is the use of engine retarder brakes on the western Anthony Henday Drive. Claiming ownership and control over the Anthony Henday, this minister dismisses the very real, very valuable concerns of Edmontonians. My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Has the minister had time to review Edmonton's bylaws and their enforcement on the Anthony Henday?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I didn't completely review the bylaw, but I know that the city of Edmonton has a bylaw that states, "A person shall not use engine retarder brakes to slow or stop a motor vehicle at any time." This bylaw is effective on city streets only, and the Anthony Henday Drive is under provincial jurisdiction. There are no provincial acts or regulations concerning the use of engine retarder brakes. These brakes are a safety braking device on tractor-trailer units. We do not have a law within our traffic safety plan that's going to take away safety measures from vehicles.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. To the same minister. Well, given that you claim it is your highway and that you insist on

preserving the right to use engine retarder brakes, will you protect local residents against your highway noise?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, in consideration of residents' concerns my department has installed signs along Anthony Henday Drive requesting drivers of heavy vehicles to avoid using their retarder brakes. As soon as the at-grade intersections are upgraded to the overpasses, this will no longer be an issue. That's another reason why we're working as fast as we can to move forward on the overpasses.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Well, since those engine retarder brakes do make a disruptive noise and the minister doesn't seem to be willing to abide by the bylaws on this matter because it's his highway, why doesn't the government do the obvious thing and build the sound barriers to protect the residents from this noise now? It still isn't in your three-year infrastructure plan. You just talk about it like it's going to happen. When?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I told the hon. member already that we're working as fast as we can. I can assure the hon. member that we're going to move things forward. Not everything always gets done the third year that it gets onto a plan. Sometimes it moves up to first place.

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

Trade Mission to China

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A delegation from Advanced Education and Technology was on a mission to China last week. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Why did the delegation choose to go to China at this time, and did you get to go along?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was not attending the mission. We're not neglecting the importance of any of our trading partners. In fact, China is our number two trading partner. Trade between Alberta and China surpassed \$4 billion last year. We want to have a global presence in technology, and China is certainly developing a global presence in their technology and their infrastructure to do that research. The mission was to enhance those relationships as well as to work on some Alberta company partnerships as well as some government-to-government negotiations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister: wouldn't government funding for projects and partnerships in China and other jurisdictions be better spent here in Alberta supporting research or postsecondary education?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the continuum of what our research and technology does is very important. Technology commercialization and realizing those research dollars into marketable products is an important component of what this government's policy is moving forward to our next generation economy. Having those relationships with China and the company partnerships is extremely important in order for us to commercialize the dollars that we put into research in

this province. As an example, BioNeutra is participating in a program to develop competitive manufacturing methods for the value-added sectors based on grain products. That's a great way for us to commercialize what we do in this province.

Ms DeLong: My final question to the same minister. It appears through these programs that government supports companies seeking to establish operations in China. Is this government supporting offshoring?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess, similar to my answer to the second question, that what we want to do is build the relationships so that we can commercialize technologies here in this province. If we can do that and have the relationships with those markets in Asia, those are huge opportunities for companies here in Alberta to commercialize and develop the products here at home and perhaps sell in those marketplaces but also to bring technology from those other markets back here to help us create that value chain right here in our province.

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

Student Temporary Employment Program

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year's summer temporary employment program, administered by the Department of Employment and Immigration, has a budget of \$7.4 million. I understand that upwards of 50 community leagues have seen their funds in the city of Edmonton reduced, also that 11 leagues have had their applications for the STEP program rejected outright. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Why is there a funding shortfall with the STEP program this year?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the question. Let me first indicate that STEP is a program that's extremely well received right across the province by a lot of the nonprofit organizations, a lot of organizations that are doing work within their individual communities. The STEP program has been a very, very popular program. This year we did not cut down the funding. What we did, in light of keeping up with inflation, is that we added some support on a per-hour basis. We brought up the amount of dollars that we were giving per hour, thereby cutting back on some of the others and not being able to meet as many organizations' applications as we had.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the budget estimates indicate that there is a \$400,000 reduction from 2006-07 through to 2008-09, how does the hon. minister communicate his new means of funding with many of the community leagues in the city of Edmonton?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we try to support organizations right across the province of Alberta. We work on a region-by-region basis to ensure that the same number or similar numbers are approved right across the province of Alberta. This program is extremely successful. We approve applications until the funds run out. As well, there were a number of applications that came in after the deadline. Those organizations had to be turned down. We'll have to review the amount of dollars in those particular budgets and determine whether or not we want to expand the program in the future.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that there have been some changes, as I understand it, in the program and in the application rules, will the minister and his department commit to working with the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues to resolve this issue so that the community leagues throughout the city can run their programs this summer?

Thank you.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, those comments indicate the importance of the particular program and the need to review it from time to time to see if it still meets its mandates and goals. I can commit that we will review the program to see if it is meeting the needs of Albertans and meeting those needs right across the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 102 questions and answers today.

Speaker's Ruling Referring to a Member by Name

The Speaker: I just want to make a brief note about something that happened twice in question period today, and that was the use of members' names. Now, the long-standing tradition is that we do not use members' names. Members will probably find a little confusion when they see the table officer stand up and introduce somebody with a bill. Table officers will practise the correct pronunciation of one's name time and time and time and time again and then will appear before me and recite that name so that it is correct.

Unfortunately, from time to time members can take liberties with other people's names. To avoid that embarrassment, that unnecessary embarrassment, the long-established tradition is that one would refer to a member by the member's title or the member's constituency.

Those of you who watch television and see a program called *Keeping Up Appearances* will find that the name of the starring person in the program is Bucket, but she insists that it be pronounced "bouquet." That's the central gist of the whole comedy series. It's been going on for years and years and years.

We once had a member called Piquette. Other members then would say that "packet" was the way the name was pronounced. What happens if we have a member in the Assembly called Fouquette? Can you imagine some of the games that people would play with these particular names? Hence, the tradition is long established. I just remind members gently again of the reason why.

If all members can go out and look at all 83 names in this Assembly and stand in front of a mirror and have the correct pronunciation of all 83, I will give you a gold star, and you can line up in my office tomorrow to receive the gold star. But that's the reason for it, and that's the explanation with respect to it.

In 30 seconds from now we'll proceed with members' statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Augustana Faculty Convocation

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for the opportunity to say a few words about the convocation ceremony at the Augustana faculty of the U of A in Camrose over the weekend. As one watches

the students come across the stage to accept their degrees, you can't help but be impressed by the sheer potential and enthusiasm that these young people possess. It gives one great optimism for our future.

There was a common element among many of these graduates that I observed, and I just want to mention it here. When you look down the list of where these students come from, they are places like Foremost, Rimbey, Fox Creek, Myrnam, Three Hills, Hinton, Drayton Valley, Provost, St. Paul, Fairview, Cochrane, Camrose, Wetaskiwin. These people come from small-town Alberta. They have great potential, and they're going to do great things in their future. It reinforces for me the value that such an intimate university experience can have, specifically for rural Alberta but also for Alberta generally.

The convocation was significant for two other reasons. For the first time two of the aboriginal graduates were also part of a special sweetgrass presentation by an elder, John Crier, from Hobbema. I have no doubt that these young students are going to go on to do great things in their communities and for their people.

Secondly, the honorary doctor of laws degree was presented to a Camrose icon, Bertha Fowler, affectionately known as Berdie to all of us in Camrose. She graduated from CLC, Camrose Lutheran College, the predecessor to Augustana, in 1939. In 1952 she and her husband, Bill, founded a local newspaper known as the *Camrose Booster*, and at age 87 she continues to write weekly columns in the paper. She was the first woman appointed to the board of the Alberta Opportunity Company, the first woman on the Alberta Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Board, the first woman elected president of the Chamber of Commerce in Alberta, a founding member of the Camrose children's daycare centre, a great role model for all of these students. I'd like this Chamber to congratulate her and all of the graduates.

Thank you.

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

Northlands Filly Pace

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Northlands Filly Pace is a race that has been known to celebrate Alberta standardbred horse racing's best. For 25 years three-year-old filly pacers from across Canada have faced off in this annual event at Northlands Park.

Alberta-based horses have dominated all comers. Every year the cream of B.C.'s crop make the trip to compete in the richest race for three-year-old fillies in western Canada. They've won but once. Ontario, too, has often sent entrants to the post in the Northlands Filly Pace and has come away with just seven victories. Great Alberta fillies such as Keeping Watch, driven by Todd Beelby in 1995, who won top stakes events across Canada, and Sippin Time, driven by Keith Clark, who dominated everything in the west, have underscored their world-class ability by winning this centre stage event. In 1999 Ron's Girl, co-owned by Edmontonian Ron Taylor and driven by Keith Clark, first introduced herself to the world as a top-class pacer by winning this event. She later went on to be for a brief period the fastest female standardbred of all time.

I'd like to congratulate this year's winning driver, Randy Fritz, who hit the finish line first driving Sprig Hanover. I'd also like to recognize Northlands president Ken Knowles, the board members, their first-class staff, and the hundreds of volunteers that are host to year-round world-class entertainment.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have 62 more signatures on the petition that calls upon the Legislative Assembly to “pass legislation that will prohibit emotional bullying and psychological harassment in the workplace.”

I also have a number of signatures from Albertans calling upon the government to “commission an independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government’s administration of or involvement with the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers’ Retirement Fund.”

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of signatures urging 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.”

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wish to advise the House that pursuant to Standing Order 30 I intend to move to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the high price of gasoline and its effect on the cost of living and the transportation needs of Alberta’s families.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Bill 22 Appropriation Act, 2008

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill 22, the Appropriation Act, 2008. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I’m pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of responses to questions raised during Committee of Supply on April 29, 2008, for the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was my privilege on Friday, May 23, to attend the Canadian Home Builders’ Association, Lethbridge region, as they kicked off their parade of homes. This

year they’re having 16 high-quality builders provide 25 homes. I’ve provided five copies of the brochure to the Clerk.

2:50

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

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to table five copies of a brochure from the Father Leo Green elementary school. This brochure outlines a French immersion junior kindergarten program that is being offered this coming September through Edmonton Catholic schools. I am proud to say that of the three Catholic schools offering this program Father Leo Green is in my riding of Edmonton-Manning.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five sets of tablings today. From the city of Calgary I would like to table the requisite number of copies of the 2007 Calgary Economic Development annual report, the theme of which was: Our Desire, Determination, and Passion Will Make Us Become Greater than We Already Are.

The second report from the city of Calgary is a preview of the 2008 economic development strategy, whose theme is: Think Big; Act Bold; Create Great. During the presentation of the reports this past Wednesday Mayor Broconnier commended the Premier for the 10-year capital plan but pointed out the need for 10 years of matching operational funding to support that capital plan.

My third tabling is a copy of the program of the 15th annual Canadian Energy Pipeline Association’s gala fundraising dinner. Engineers Without Borders, the recipient of this year’s dinner, was able to spend \$77 of every hundred dollars received in directly supporting overseas programs last year.

My fourth tabling is a copy of the agenda from Friday’s Immigrant Sector Council of Calgary Conference, which I had the pleasure to attend on Friday at the Red and White Club in Calgary-Varsity.

My last tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a collection of the most recent set of flood warnings from the government, noting that advisories are no substitute for action.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to table the appropriate number of copies of a news release from CUPE which came out today concerning TILMA and Bill 1. According to the release a legal opinion received by CUPE states that Bill 1 contravenes basic constitutional norms, including the rule of law and democracy.

I’d also like to table the appropriate number of copies of a series of correspondence from Edie Gonzales of the Bethany Care Family/Residents Council and a related inspection report of the Bethany care centre in Calgary, which the NDP opposition received through a FOIP request.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise indicated that she would rise on a point of order.

The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and Enterprise was under the expectation that the other hon. member was going to rise and apologize.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. I withdraw the remarks and apologize to the minister.

The Speaker: The matter is concluded. Everybody's happy. Love in the air again.

Request for Emergency Debate

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

Gasoline Prices

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that the House adjourn its ordinary business to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the high price of gasoline and its effects on the cost of living and the transportation needs of Alberta's families. I want to speak to the urgency of this matter. The price of gasoline has increased considerably in the past few months, and several experts are predicting that the price of a litre of gasoline may reach between \$1.40 to \$1.50 this summer. This will represent a considerable financial burden for many Alberta families. I'd also like to indicate that Standing Order 30(7)(a) states that motions under the standing order "must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration."

Mr. Speaker, the price of gasoline has recently increased by a significant amount, and steep increases are widely predicted for the coming weeks and months. We are, therefore, in the midst of a situation which can have dire consequences for many Albertans who are already having a difficult time making ends meet. Those Albertans rightfully expect the Legislature to give serious consideration to this issue. While the price of gasoline tends to increase in summer, the price is already about 10 cents per litre more than the peak price last summer and could increase by another 20 cents.

Beauchesne's 390 states that a motion for emergency debate must meet the test of urgency, meaning urgency of debate, "when the ordinary opportunities provided by the rules of the House do not permit the subject to be brought on early enough and the public interest demands that discussion take place immediately." Mr. Speaker, I know of nothing on the Order Paper or of any pending legislation that would allow the House an opportunity to debate this issue. It's a most urgent matter which requires the full attention of the Assembly. I believe that we should debate the issue of gas prices today in this House. The public can see what action might be taken by government or the positions of the other parties in the Assembly to advance possible solutions that may benefit Albertans.

These increases, Mr. Speaker, are taking a huge bite out of Albertans' household budgets. Whether they drive as part of their work, take their children to and from daycare, run errands, or are volunteers for community groups, the increasing price of gas is making it more and more difficult to make ends meet.

The price at the pump is largely being driven by increases in the price of oil, which is now over \$130 a barrel. Some analysts argue that skyrocketing oil prices are simply a matter of supply and demand. I believe that evidence does not necessarily support this analysis. Instead, rising oil prices are encouraging speculative investments, which will lead to further price increases. This kind of investment bubble is something we've seen many times. In the meantime consumers will continue to be gouged every time they go to the pump, and oil companies will make enormous profits.

Furthermore, there's reason to believe that the price of gasoline is outpacing what can be justified by the increases in the price of oil.

A report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives analyzed the relationship between crude oil prices and gasoline prices and found that . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, may I just please remind you that what we're doing here now is talking about the urgency. Should the matter be accepted by the Assembly, then the member can go on and do his debate. Now we're talking about the urgency of the matter.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that it is indeed very urgent. People need some protection from high prices, and they need alternatives for their families' transportation. For example, things like fuel-efficient vehicles, more support for transit, and so on are required. I believe that these things need to be debated today by the Assembly in order that we can meet the needs of Albertans for their transportation requirements, something that is becoming increasingly difficult for families right across the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there additional individuals who would like to comment on the validity of this? The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the outset I want to certainly express that I understand the member's concern, the member's position. At the same time, I don't believe that it's appropriate that we adjourn the ordinary business of the House to discuss this issue because, as you pointed out, Mr. Speaker, the issue at hand is whether or not there is urgency. I refer to Standing Order 30(2), where it expressly says that the discussion, the debate that we're having right now, is to discuss the urgency. Further, Standing Order 30(7)(a) talks about that the matter must be "a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration."

Well, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that as the member himself pointed out, gasoline prices have been rising over a number of months, and while prices are higher than they've been in the past, this rise has been a long-term process. I question how the member came to the conclusion that all of a sudden, today, this is a matter of urgency and requires the House to adjourn the business of the House.

To the best of my knowledge, Mr. Speaker – and I stand to be corrected – the matter has not come up in question period. We've been through Committee of Supply for the Ministry of Energy on April 29 and the Ministry of Finance and Enterprise just last Wednesday, May 21. Again, I stand to be corrected, but it's my understanding that on neither of those occasions was this matter brought forward. As I pointed out and as the member pointed out in his argument, the price of gasoline was rising at that time, and there was no apparent urgency at that point.

3:00

I would suggest that our standing orders are very explicit. They're designed for members to bring forward matters that are urgent and are emergencies in nature. I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that none of the arguments brought forward by this member, while compelling – this is certainly a matter of public interest – would suggest that this is a matter of emergent and urgent need for the House to suspend important business of private members for the afternoon to debate this matter, which at the end of the day, the standing orders also indicate, will arrive at no vote and no specific recommendation.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary Varsity, you wish to participate on this application?

Mr. Chase: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker. With regard to the urgency the Deputy House Leader pointed out the fact that gas prices are continuing to rise. I would suggest that if we don't talk about them today, when are we going to talk about them, and how are we going to deal with a trend that is causing a great degree of urgency for organizations such as the community kitchen in Calgary, that is no longer able to pick up food five times a week? They've had to cut back to three times. A number of organizations, whether it's the food banks or the community kitchens, are unable to provide the help that desperate individuals throughout this province require. The cost of gasoline is also keeping the suppliers from dropping off the usual amount of food donations, so there is a crisis in terms of feeding the people of Alberta who are below the poverty line. Of course, we've noted that 64,000 children are below the poverty line in Alberta, and I would suggest that that calls for urgency.

Another problem that calls for urgency based on the rising price of gas, which is directly related to the food concern, is the fact that a lot of grain-based products which would normally find themselves in the food chain are being diverted to produce fuels such as ethanol. The amount of money that is being taken away from food production, put into high-priced gas production is, again, having a direct effect on children and families who can no longer afford the food and can no longer receive the bounty that was provided courtesy of organizations such as the community kitchen and the Calgary Food Bank. I would suggest: if not now, when?

The Speaker: Others? The hon. President of the Treasury Branch on this application under Standing Order 30.

Mr. Snelgrove: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I read the motion. What it says is that we should adjourn the business to talk about the high price of gas and cost of living. We might as well talk about the weather. They change about as rapidly and as unexpectedly, so the urgency to sit here and debate an issue without any provided solutions doesn't seem that urgent at all.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, under Standing Order 30 the opportunity is provided to members to "briefly state the arguments in favour of the request for leave." I believe that the chair has allowed such to have taken place, and I am prepared to rule on this request.

First of all, let me point out that the leader of the third party in the House has met the requirement of providing at least two hours' notice to the Speaker's office. A notice was received in my office this morning at 9:26 a.m. Secondly, before the question as to whether this motion should proceed can be put to the Assembly, the chair must rule whether the motion meets the requirement of Standing Order 30(7), which requires that "the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration."

The relevant parliamentary authorities on this subject are *Beauchesne* in paragraphs 387 to 390 and pages 586 to 589 of *Marleau and Montpetit, House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. I've reviewed these references closely this morning in anticipating this, and there are two key points that I would like to emphasize to all members. First of all, to meet the requirements of urgency, there must not be another opportunity for members of this Assembly to discuss the matter. Secondly, the matter must relate to a genuine emergency.

The motion has been presented, and we've heard the motion with some debate in the last few minutes as well. I'd like to thank the members who did participate. There's absolutely no doubt in the chair's mind that an increase in the price of gasoline has an effect on

all Albertans and that it is an important issue in the minds of many people. I would like to point out, however, that the criterion for urgency in Standing Order 30 does not mean the urgency of the matter but the urgency of the debate. What would happen here today is that if this matter would be dealt with under urgency, it means that the other opportunities that members have lined up for, that have been pointed out or are on the Order Paper, would have to be suspended, and we would have to proceed with this. If this application put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood would be successful, we would in fact be adjourning for the remainder of the day.

What did the chair do, then, with respect to this particular matter as he looked at it? Well, what he did is he opened his file in terms of his gas receipts for the purchases that he's made in the last little while. He noted that he purchased gas in the Edmonton area on May 23, which was Friday last, and the price that he paid at the pump was exactly the price he paid on April 30 in the Edmonton area at a service station in the same neighbourhood. In that intervening time nearly a month had gone by. Nothing had changed in the price. Then he also went home to his constituency and found that the price, in fact, in Barrhead and Westlock and Morinville was less than it was here in the city of Edmonton.

I guess the whole question in here: if it's urgent today, why wouldn't it have been urgent a month ago? We've had a whole debate in the budget process. We've had numerous question periods. In fact, the chair does not even recall any questions being raised in the question period with respect to this matter. Not only would the Minister of Energy's estimates be an appropriate time; it could also have been the President of the Treasury Board. If it impacts people, families, and what have you, then a lot of other departments might have been questioned with respect to this. Actually, I understand that this is of great interest to a lot of people, but in terms of is it an emergency today when it was not an emergency a month ago and will it be an emergency of the same latitude in a month from now, it's quite interesting.

After hearing all the important arguments, after looking at the historical precedents with respect to this, and after looking at the chair's own gasoline receipts for expenditure in the last month, the chair does not find the request for leave in order under the Assembly's rules, and the question will not be put.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

The Clerk: Pursuant to temporary Standing Order 34(3.1) written questions are deemed to stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 7.

[The Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

Overtime Pay for Registered Nurses

Q8. Mr. Taylor asked that the following question be accepted. How many hours of overtime have been paid to registered nurses in the Capital health and Calgary health regions between April 1, 2006, and March 31, 2007?

Full-time Versus Part-time Registered Nurses

Q9. Mr. Taylor asked that the following question be accepted. What is the current ratio of full-time registered nurses to part-time registered nurses in the Capital health and Calgary health regions?

Sick Leave for Registered Nurses

- Q10. Mr. Taylor asked that the following question be accepted. How many sick hours have registered nurses logged in the Capital health and Calgary health regions between April 1, 2006, and March 31, 2007?

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

Hospital Ward Closures

- Q7. Mr. Taylor asked that the following question be accepted. Which hospitals had to shut down temporarily or indefinitely wards due to staff shortages between April 1, 2006, and March 31, 2007, and which wards were shut down?

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Briefly, I have put this written question forward as a motion because having this information would, I think, help all parties in this House determine the degree of severity of the health workforce shortage in the province of Alberta. There is certainly agreement in principle between the governing party and the Official Opposition that the health workforce shortage is a very real factor in the condition in which we find the acute care system in the province of Alberta today. However, it would be helpful to know precisely or as close to precisely as we could what the degree of severity of the health workforce shortage is.

3:10

Answers to this question, we believe, would help determine the depth of the problems in the acute care system. As the health minister conducts his review and seeks to make changes and reforms to the system, we know that although the quality of care that patients receive in the province of Alberta continues to be anywhere from good to very good to excellent to superb once they are in the system, there is a huge issue in many parts of the province with access and long, long waiting times, shortages of medical professionals. It does seem to greatly delay the ability of patients to access health care in a timely fashion.

Answers to this question would also help to determine, I think, what all parties in this House can and cannot support in the way of reforms to the health care system. Our first interest, certainly, here among the Alberta Liberal Official Opposition is the well-being of the patient. We very much believe in patients first, and I would point out that the Alberta Medical Association, I believe, has now trademarked that phrase, Patients First, because they feel very strongly about it, too.

I would not want to infringe upon any trademark by using that, but in very sincere and respectful terms we believe that the patient must come first, too, that the interest of the patient supersedes the interests of all other players in the health care system, be they boards, be they administrators, be they doctors, nurses, lab techs, anyone else. But in order for the well-being and the interest of the patient to come first, of course, Mr. Speaker, you need enough of those other people, enough of the front-line medical professionals. That, we feel, is what this question would get at by asking which hospitals had to shut down temporarily or indefinitely whatever wards and which wards those were during the fiscal year 2006-2007.

Our first interest is the patient. Our interest 1(a), if I could call it that, is to get the system working as it should. We want to be a constructive part of that process. I know that there are many on the government side who feel the same way. We don't always agree on the details, but a healthy and constructive debate around those details is likely to result in improvements to the system, solutions to the system.

That is why we're hoping that the government would in fact provide an answer to Written Question 7. Having said that, I will take my place now and await a response from the government.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the minister of health I must advise that we must reject this question as Alberta Health and Wellness does not collect information on ward closures in hospitals. Regional health authorities were also unable to provide this information, and this has been confirmed through the Health Boards of Alberta Services as well as the clinical and nursing practice leaders network. The information that the member requests simply is not available. Therefore, it would be impossible for the government to accept this written question.

The Speaker: Others?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to close the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One recognizes that the government cannot provide what the government does not have, so I will accept that explanation and merely urge that with the review and reform of governance of the health care system in the province of Alberta, we start to collect that information. I think, going down the road, it would be very useful information to have, and it will help us make better decisions about the health care of Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Written Question 7 lost]

Motions for Returns

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

Crown Agreements with Suncor and Syncrude

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

[Debate adjourned May 12: Mr. Hancock]

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I am advised that there was insufficient information available the last time this matter came forward, and the Solicitor General has some information that he would be prepared to give in response by the government on behalf of the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Energy I am pleased to rise and offer an amendment to Motion for a Return 4. In the original motion the Leader of the Official Opposition . . .

The Speaker: Hon. minister, please, if there's an amendment, might we have it so that it could be circulated to all members of the Assembly?

Mr. Lindsay: Okay.

The Speaker: We'll just await the arrival of such amendment so that all members will be able to see it.

Hon. minister, would you like to proceed with the amendment? I believe that it is now circulated.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The amended Motion for a Return 4 will read as follows:

that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a complete list of attendees from government at all meetings regarding potential changes to the Crown agreements with Suncor and Syncrude.

In the original motion the Leader of the Official Opposition asked for “a complete list of attendees from government and industry” at meetings with Suncor and Syncrude regarding changes to their Crown agreement as outlined in the new royalty framework.

The Minister of Energy is fully prepared to provide a complete list of those who attended all of the meetings on behalf of the Crown. However, the reason for this amendment is that it is not the government’s place to indicate who attended these meetings on behalf of the shareholders of publicly traded companies. The hon. leader may wish to pose these questions directly to Syncrude and Suncor.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. This government has bragged, basically, that they’re into a new era of transparency and accountability, yet time and time again, as is noted in this particular amendment for Motion for a Return 4, the government is only willing to provide half of the information required. Now, the hon. member suggested an alternative. He suggested that we go directly to Suncor and Syncrude and ask if they would be willing to provide a list of their attendees at this particular meeting. My question is: why would the government be so afraid to provide us with a list, a so-called roll call?

The government, also, in terms of transparency put forward a lobbying registry bill last year and suggested that any organization such as Suncor or Syncrude who wished to influence the government would have to be a part of that registry. Well, when this particular meeting took place, obviously members from Suncor and Syncrude were standing up for the best interests of their shareholders. That’s what companies are all about, and that’s where they receive their value and their support.

3:20

The notion that somehow this information would prejudice the company’s ability to conduct their business I don’t understand. What we’re asking for is complete and open and full disclosure. We don’t want to go through the FOIP process. We don’t want to go on bended knee, cap in hand to either Syncrude or Suncor, although I do believe that they would probably provide us with that information because they would want to indicate not only to their shareholders but to future potential shareholders, Albertans, Canadians in general, that what they do when talking to the government is above board. Therefore, they would potentially wish to provide that information.

But that’s not what MR 4 is calling for. MR 4 is calling for transparency and accountability in the government. If the government isn’t willing to provide even the list of names – nowhere does it suggest that we’re looking for every single detail of the discussions. We just want to know who was present when these discussions were taking place. The government is still in the process of negotiating with Syncrude, I believe. If my understanding of history is correct, Suncor has already agreed to the government’s suggested royalty framework. I don’t believe that same agreement has yet

taken place with Syncrude. This would provide a bit of a historical window on what led up to those royalty discussions.

I can remember the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner talking and standing up for the rights of oil companies to be fairly compensated by this government. He questioned sort of going back in time and rewriting agreements. It would be interesting to know, and that’s what Motion for a Return 4 is calling for: who were the players at this meeting? I cannot understand, again, why the hon. member from the government believes that this information is of such a secretive nature that it’s going to tip the balance in terms of royalties or somehow undermine shareholder confidentiality.

When we send transcripts of this debate on Motion for a Return 4 to Suncor and Syncrude – and I am sure that this amendment will pass based on the number of government members here present to vote for its acceptance – it will be my hope that Suncor and Syncrude will provide us with the accountability and transparency that this government has failed to do and which this minister has suggested. It’s a long, roundabout process of receiving the information, which should be available here and now, but again another roadblock to transparency and accountability is put before us. It’s unfortunate. It’s part of a disturbing trend that continues.

The Speaker: Shall I call the question on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Now we’re going to the debate on the motion as amended. Anyone wanting to participate?

Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion for a Return 4 as amended carried]

Traffic Safety (Seizure of Vehicles in Prostitution Related Offences) Amendment Act, 2002

M5. Mr. Hehr moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any studies, reports, or legal opinions prepared by or for the ministries of Transportation or Justice and Attorney General or sent to the ministries of Transportation or Justice and Attorney General for the preparation of Bill 212, Traffic Safety (Seizure of Vehicles in Prostitution Related Offences) Amendment Act, 2002, from the Second Session of the 25th Legislature.

Mr. Hehr: Well, sir, we’ve spoken a great deal about many possible amendments to things, from drugs and guns and the like. As you are aware, we get some opportunities as members of the opposition to present private members’ bills. I believe it would give us a great deal of assistance in looking at this material as we believe that Bill 212 was a very good initiative on the seizure of vehicles in prostitution-related offences. We commended the government on it, and we believe that some more of this type of legislation possibly could take place. To get this information is just comity and makes common sense to me. If this work has already been done and we could bring some more of this to this House for members to vote on, it would just make our jobs a little bit easier.

That’s about all I’ve got to say about that. Just basing it on comity.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I’m pleased to rise and speak to

Motion for a Return 5, which was proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Following a thorough review of the motion with my colleague the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, it is our recommendation that we reject this motion. We have searched through our respective department's files, and there do not appear to be any studies or reports. Legal opinions are prepared for the confidential use of the government in formulating policy, responses to proposals, or legal situations and fall under the judicially recognized area of privileged communication.

For these reasons we recommend that this motion be rejected.

The Speaker: Others to participate?

Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, would you like to conclude the debate?

Mr. Hehr: Yes, I would. I would just like to say that I'm greatly saddened by that decision of the government. I think this is one instance where it would have been useful for us to maybe share some ideas and ease the workload of this House. Nevertheless, if that is your decision, we'll carry forth and do the best we can to provide possible bills, motions to the best of our ability.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 5 lost]

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

Bill 204

Traffic Safety (Hand-Held Communication Devices) Amendment Act, 2008

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise to commence discussion on Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Hand-Held Communication Devices) Amendment Act, 2008. The bill's intent is to improve the safety of Alberta's roads for drivers and pedestrians alike by restricting the use of communication devices while driving. A number of other jurisdictions around the world have already done so. I am confident in my support when I say that we cannot ignore the relevance of this bill.

3:30

There is no question that cellphones are prevalent in today's society, and it is not uncommon to see a number of drivers in transit with a handset to their ear. It is not uncommon to hear the anecdotal evidence of drivers' inattention while on the phone. Members may question the idea that a mobile handset is enough of a distraction to be dangerous. Well, there are a number of credible studies that confirm the danger. Dialing and talking on a handset while driving inhibits attention, response time and ultimately puts drivers and those around them at risk of injury or even death. In fact, one study suggests that talking on a handset while driving is more dangerous in some respects than driving legally impaired.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Using a handset while driving ultimately amounts to negligence. A driver is choosing to take less care on the road for themselves and those around them. Under normal circumstances when an accident occurs, fault and negligence are typically clear cut. However, the likelihood of capturing the negligence of using a hand-held cell-

phone in the event of an accident is very limited due to the fact that it's difficult to confirm after the fact. The cost of accidents is huge in terms of property damage, involvement of the authorities, highway congestion, and especially the loss of life. We must act proactively and target such negligence before traffic accidents occur, thereby preventing some degree of unnecessary loss. By imposing restriction on the use of hand-helds while driving and an appropriate fine, there is an incentive to reduce negligence.

As I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, a number of studies confirm the danger of using a hand-held phone while driving, that Bill 204 seeks to address. In 2006 the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute completed an in-depth naturalistic driving study using observations from in-car video cameras. The study found that dialing a hand-held phone tripled the risk of collision while talking on a hand-held increased the risk by 130 per cent.

In 2004 the Canadian Automobile Association reviewed 84 studies on cellphone use and driving and found that there was a consistent increase in associated risk. In 2001 the University of Montreal found that cellphone users were 38 per cent more likely to get in a collision. The same year the American Automobile Association released *The Role of Driver Distraction in Traffic Crashes* and found that 8.3 per cent of serious crashes were caused by driver distraction.

Finally, in 2006 researchers at the University of Utah found that drivers using their mobiles were as impaired as drivers who were legally intoxicated with a blood alcohol content of .08. While their findings differ between the cellphone drivers and the intoxicated drivers as compared to the control group, the cellphone drivers exhibited the following tendencies relative to both groups: slower reaction times, longer following distances, longer speed recovery times after braking, and more accidents; the only group, in fact, to have accidents in the test environment.

Mr. Speaker, these studies all have minor weaknesses, as pointed out in the literature. However, the prevailing message is clear: distractions cause accidents, and using a communication device on the road is a common distraction. Whether it is in a test environment or on the road right now, this fact remains true. It is our duty to address it.

It is no surprise that Newfoundland and Labrador and, more recently, Nova Scotia and Quebec have instituted restrictions on hand-helds while driving. A vast number of other countries have also done so, including our neighbours to the south. Bans are used in Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Washington, California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia. These jurisdictions implemented legislation facing the same facts we do with the same goal in mind: reducing accidents and thus improving safety on our roads.

Albertans and Canadians across the country are concerned about the danger posed by cellphone use while driving, as indicated by a number of surveys and poll-based studies. The movement is supported by a local professor and expert in the field from the School of Public Health and department of emergency medicine at the University of Alberta. He is a leader in the field of injury prevention and believes that accidents and injuries are entirely preventable, including accidents caused by the distraction of talking on hand-helds while driving. As he states it, his view is that people are getting hurt and killed as a result of a bad habit, and he agrees that a solution is needed. In 2005 he led in the formation of the Coalition for Cellphone-Free Driving in Alberta. The coalition consists of a number of industry-leading companies and organizations who collectively acknowledge the risk associated with hand-held communication devices such as a handset while driving.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the facts we have are more than sufficient to move forward with Bill 204. The bill intends to reduce accidents on Alberta's roads and ultimately save lives, time, and money. The safety of everyone on our roads would be improved, and the bill would reinforce the importance of attentive driving. The danger is present and the risk is clear.

I urge members to support Bill 204, and I look forward to further discussion on this matter. Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I wish to stand in support of the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays' Bill 204. The hon. member has had a distinguished career previously in both the military and in the police force. He has seen first-hand the effects of dangerous driving, and I have no doubt that this is a large part of the motivation which prompted him to bring forth this bill. I commend him for having brought it forth. I am concerned that this bill may have a very short shelf life and may be another victim of the government's hoisting. I hope that does not occur because this bill needs to have full debate.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays put forward a number of studies that have been conducted since April 25, 2005, when I first brought Motion 506 to this House, which basically called for the same limitation on hand-held cellphones. Based on the research that the hon. member has brought forward, including research that took place in the fall of 2005 at the University of Calgary and that has taken place this fall and this past spring again at the University of Calgary, on top of the research that has been put forward by the University of Alberta, it seems to me that such an important step should be embraced by the government.

It is the me first versus the community good individuals who will be speaking against the bill. I think it's important, in order to save time in today's debate, to go back to that evening of April 25, 2005, and register some of the similar arguments that I am sure will be used against the acceptance of this bill today. However, before I do that, I want to give sort of a heads-up, sort of a preview to this House that if this bill receives the support in second reading of the members of this House, it is my intention in the Committee of the Whole to bring forward an amendment that would extend the hand-held ban to hands free because the research that the member quoted and that has come out of both the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta and has been noted by an emergency doctor, Dr. Francescutti, shows that it's not simply the holding of the device that leads to the accidents; it's the actual communication, the mental communication of responding in a conversation.

However, back in 2005 some of the me-versus-we arguments that we heard from came from the hon. Member for Calgary-West. This is a little short part of what he said:

Mr. Speaker, technology advances are moving at a rate that this Assembly, attempting to pass laws, will never be able to keep up with. Technology is going to continue to move forward, and we must embrace it, and we as legislators must be very cautious when creating laws surrounding such technology. Our motives might be in the right spot, but the outcomes we get from these laws may not be what we expect . . . There is no doubt in my mind that there have been people who may have caused accidents because they were driving with a cellphone in their hands, but there have also been accidents caused by people who were thinking about their day at work, others who may have been trying to quiet their children in the back seat, and still others because they were just simply daydreaming and not paying attention.

One has to ask: where does common sense prevail?

How many times have I heard in this Assembly the common sense argument? The Premier suggested with regard to farm worker safety

that you can't legislate common sense. Well, you can legislate and you can enforce common sense, and that's what the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays' Bill 204 attempts, to enforce common sense.

3:40

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort had similar concerns with regard to enforcing safety, enforcing common sense. He noted that in 2002 the former member for Lacombe-Stettler introduced an identical idea in the form of a private member's bill which, if passed, would have banned the use of hand-held cellular phones during the operation of a motor vehicle. But this Legislature at that time felt that such legislation was flawed from the beginning.

Now, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview again brought forward this same notion of banning hand-held cellphones in 2001. So this notion, Bill 204, has had several pre-lives in this Legislature. Unfortunately, all attempts to bring this to legislation which would result in enforcement have failed.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort continued:

I also realize that passing laws every time we have an issue in our hands is not the best or the most appropriate way for us to govern. It is very reactionary for us just to jump on the bandwagon and argue that Alberta needs legislation banning cellular phone use in motor vehicles because it can cause accidents.

The study that the member referred to also finds that hands-free phones were just as distracting to drivers as hand-held phones. I commend the member for recognizing that connection; however, he then goes on to discount the cellphone distractions by saying that any conversation that the driver may be involved in, be it on the phone or with a passenger, is likely to impair his or her driving abilities.

Does this mean that we should ban passengers from vehicles since they assuredly could distract the driver or cause a collision? Perhaps we should also consider banning radios, CD players from vehicles because they, too, can be distracting to drivers.

This is frequently an argument that is used against such important safety devices as helmets on bicycles, seat belts, not allowing people to ride in the back of a pickup. You generalize; you discount; you take away from the importance of the argument.

Again, the Calgary-Fort representative says:

Mr. Speaker, it is very easy for us to sit here and say: well, here's a potential problem; we really don't know how bad a problem it is, but we'll pass legislation just in case. If the government operated in this manner, I doubt we'd be allowed to do anything, let alone own a cellphone or operate motor vehicles.

Again, taking an argument to ridiculous lengths.

The Member for Red Deer-North said:

Mr. Speaker, you can't legislate against every single distraction. It wouldn't make sense. As soon as you prohibit one, you have to prohibit all of them. You can't legislate against people changing their radio or CD without legislating against talking to another passenger in the vehicle . . . Focusing our efforts on outlawing an action that is not even one of the major contributors to traffic accidents seems to be very short-sighted. I would akin it to us banning people from using ladders because often people fall off them, causing injury.

Again, taking something to its ridiculous extreme to argue against an extremely important concept.

The member, in introducing Bill 204, cited state after state, province after province, study after study indicating that he has done his research, as did the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, as did I, as did the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. Hopefully, at this point the Legislature will realize that the number of studies that have taken place have validity to them.

Now, we come to the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. He indicates:

Motorists on Alberta's roadways who do not pay proper attention to

the road when they are driving are a hazard to other motorists. Speaking on a cellphone, tuning radio stations, eating food, drinking coffee, shaving, and even watching movies as more vehicles are being equipped with DVD players cause a driver to be distracted.

While looking into this issue, it's quite apparent that studies are unable to confirm or deny that hand-held cellphones are any different than the countless other distractions drivers are faced with each and every time they get into their vehicles.

I hope that the member has changed his mind and will support Bill 204.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to speak in complete support of Bill 204. In many ways I've been waiting for a few years to speak to this bill. When I spoke about this with the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays many months ago, we agreed so much on the issue that I told him I'd bring it forward if I had a lower bill number, but since my bill is 206, we can look forward to debate on the Alberta Income Tax (Physical Activity Credit) Amendment Act, 2008, in a couple of weeks from now.

Regarding the matter at hand, Mr. Speaker, my support for the hon. member and his invaluable bill stems quite simply from a fundamental right that we all possess: the right to safety. Some have compared debate on this bill to the one that took place 20 years ago after which seatbelts became mandatory. There was a great deal of outcry both inside and outside the Legislature; however, in the end the law was passed in the name of safety. Unlike the seatbelt debate in the past, however, this debate today is fortunate for us in that we have the overwhelming support of the public in this case to pass this bill.

Mr. Speaker, the Coalition for Cellphone-Free Driving is a leading organization in the fight against cellphone use while driving, and their partners include the Alberta Public Health Association, the St. John Ambulance Alberta Council, the University of Alberta School of Public Health, and the Alberta Centre for Injury Control and Research amongst many, many others. In the spring of 2007 they commissioned a survey of 1,200 Albertans about cellphone use while driving. That survey found that more than half of those surveyed used their cellphone while driving. Despite this, 94 per cent said they thought it was dangerous to use a cellphone while driving, and 76 per cent believed that people should not be allowed to use their cellphone while driving. Finally, again of these users of cellphones 74 per cent said they'd actually support legislation that would make it illegal to use a cellphone while driving. Additionally, a 2006 survey conducted by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation found that nearly 70 per cent of Canadians feel that driver distraction is a serious problem.

Now, many organizations and corporations have already taken the responsible step of banning the use of cellphones while driving. They include the former Aspen, Calgary, and Northern Lights health regions, NAIT, industry leaders such as Finning Canada, Husky Energy, Sterling Crane, and Tucker Wireline amongst a multitude of others. These organizations and corporations are all, incidentally, members of the Coalition for Cellphone-Free Driving.

On a final note, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to share some of the support documented in a resolution that the city of Grande Prairie presented to the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, the AUMA. They presented the following information. In Alberta nine people die and over 500 people are injured in over 6,500 traffic collisions every week. Driver distraction is responsible for 25 to 30 per cent of these collisions. Cellphone use while driving is a significant distraction, and 10 per cent of motorists of all ages use some type of cellular phone, either hand held or hands free. Whether they are hand held

or hands free, cellphone use while driving quadruples the risk of traffic collisions. Sixty-eight per cent of Canadians support a ban on using cellular phones while driving; 64 per cent rate cellphone use while driving as a serious or extremely serious problem. Again, this is what the city of Grande Prairie presented to the AUMA.

As a result of this, considering this and more, the city of Grande Prairie resolved the following: "that the AUMA encourage the Provincial Government to amend the Highway Traffic Act to ban the use of cell phones, both hand-held and hands-free, while driving." Now, there is no doubt that Bill 204 enjoys huge public support. When it comes to the safety of Albertans, who better to champion and propel changes in the legislation than the public directly and immediately affected by it.

I'd like to congratulate and thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing forward a bill that I'm sure will save untold dollars, a multitude of lives, and a great deal of heartache, and I have no hesitation in suggesting to the hon. members of this House that with some foresight it's clear that voting in favour of Bill 204 is as important to public safety now as the seatbelt law was two decades ago.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:50

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also want to congratulate the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing this bill. I fully support the bill, and the reasons are that a driver's preoccupation with dialing and talking means that less attention is paid to driving. You know, the ban should not only apply to hand-held units; we believe that hands-free devices also cause serious distraction.

The bulk of the research indicates that phone use is more of a problem than any other distraction because people get caught up in the conversation. Ninety per cent of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians believe that phone use by drivers is a very serious safety problem. Other polls also suggest the same. Approximately 30 countries have implemented a cellphone ban to date, and the state of New York and 14 local jurisdictions throughout the U.S. have also enacted prohibitions. Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, and Nova Scotia have also done the same.

The issue of the operation of cellphones in motor vehicles has been an area of concern since the inception of the devices in the early '90s, and according to the Corporate Research Associate poll commissioned by the government of Newfoundland – like I said before, Newfoundlanders, you know, believe that cellphones are a major problem and the cause of accidents.

The Canadian Medical Association at their 1999 annual meeting passed a resolution urging their members to lobby the governments to ban the use of cellphones in motor vehicles. Research in Canada and the U.S. and the U.K. clearly shows that the use of cellphones by drivers has a profound effect on driving behaviour. Even from personal experience, when you're driving and the phone rings and you pick up the phone and start talking, you tend to slow down, or you tend to veer over to the other lane. It is very, very distracting to talk on the phone.

Studies have demonstrated that the human mind has a finite ability to execute multiple tasks at the same time. When a person uses a cellphone to carry on a conversation, this requires the person to devote less mental resources to driving. The city of St. John's, Alliant Telecom Inc., the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission, and Newfoundland Power have developed policies to eliminate or minimize cellphone use while driving. Most unusual, many groups do not have a problem with a cellphone being in a

vehicle as long as it's not being used by the driver while driving. In fact, the benefits of a cellphone in emergency situations have been clearly documented, but only use the cellphone in emergency situations, and you should pull off the road to use it.

There are limits on human concentration. If drivers use a hand-held unit for dialing and talking, it means that less attention is paid to the driving. While this proposed ban is only on the hand-held unit, the government encourages drivers to pull to the side of the road to make or receive calls on any other type of phone. The manipulation of the hand-held phone is extremely distracting, but the conversation also diminishes the attention that should be given to driving. So we should not only, I think, ban the hand-held units, but we should go a step further and also ban hands-free use as well.

There are many distractions, you know. Every day while we are driving there will be some noise alongside the roadway, unexpected noise, operating the radio or CD. Distracted drivers react more slowly to sudden traffic conditions or events such as a car stopping to make a turn or pulling out from the side of the road, or they fail often to recognize the potential danger hazards such as pedestrians, bicycles, or debris on the road when they're talking on the phone because their attention is diverted to something else. It decreases their margin of safety, leading them to take risks that they might not otherwise take, such as turning left in front of oncoming traffic. When a driver's attention is drawn away from the road and his own environment, the result could be delayed reaction to a hazard or possible failure to detect it at all. All these are common factors associated with vehicle crashes. Driver focus is critical to anticipating and avoiding collisions.

One of the earlier studies on distracted driving, released by Transport Canada's ergonomics division in February 2002, *The Impact of Cognitive Distraction on Driver Visual Behaviour and Vehicle Control*, found that performing a demanding task while driving produced challenges on the driver's visual behaviour while in control, as indicated by braking behaviour, subjective assessment of workload, safety, and distraction. Using a cellphone while driving definitely does affect behaviour every which way you can think of.

A more recent study of the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, released in April 2006, concluded that driver age, experience, and daytime sleepiness all affect the driver, too, but the cellphone is the most serious thing. Driver distraction is cited as one of the most common contributors to traffic crashes, but the numbers vary depending on the study. According to the 2006 study published by the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration the various forms of driver distraction are estimated to contribute to 8 out of 10 crashes. This figure translates into 4 million crashes per year. Estimates of similar magnitude have been cited in other reports as well.

Distractions caused by cellphones have been the focal point in the distractor driving issue. Like other distractions, cellphones undoubtedly can take a driver's attention off the road at a critical time if being used while driving. Cellphone use is part of a broader problem of driver distraction and is often singled out. Using a cellphone while driving places demands on the driver's attentive resources, which is dangerous. Studies have shown that drivers who were distracted by cellphone use were unable to properly estimate safe stopping distances, anticipate hazards, and choose the appropriate time to enter into a line of traffic. Distractions can also result from reaching for and manipulating a device. Even if you use a hands-free cellphone, pull over and take or place a call while you're off the road. For all these reasons I believe we should go a step further, and we should ban hands-free devices as well.

4:00

I support the bill for the safety of Albertans. I think it's a little bit too late; it should have been done a long time ago. For those reasons I support the bill. All those accidents cause downtime, they cost money, and they're a strain on the health care system. I think we could save lives, money, and lots of accidents if you ban the use of cellphones.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak on Bill 204. I can remember a time when my cellphone was so heavy that I could hardly lift it, and that was in 1993. Today it seems like cellphones and BlackBerrys are everywhere, and we can do anything. The technology has come so far in the past 15 years. You can drive down Jasper Avenue and check your stock quotes. You can cruise the Deerfoot and conduct a conference call with someone 10,000 miles away. You can fly down the QE II, change lanes without signalling, apply a layer of eyeshadow, and stir your nonfat latte all while phoning home to tuck your 10-year-old in for the night.

Cellphones that have come along have done a great deal to improve efficiency. Work that could once only be accomplished from an office can now be done anywhere, but the technology has its drawbacks. I know that cellphones when combined with other distractions compromise safety on our highways. At least once a week I travel between Edmonton and Calgary. During this trip I frequently witness the downside and the danger of cellphone use: drivers going too slow, changing lanes without looking, and failing to identify hazards. I see drivers who combine every distraction under the sun. They're talking on the phone, they're changing the CDs, eating, putting on makeup and all at the same time, Mr. Speaker. Two weeks ago I saw a driver smoking and talking on his cellphone. At the same time he managed to flip another driver the bird, and I wondered how he managed to do that. We all know that this sort of thing is distracting. When you're driving 3,000 pounds of automobile down the highway at 110 klicks, the focus has to be on driving.

There is an abundance of evidence that indicates that cellphones increase the likelihood of collisions and decrease reaction time. One American study showed that talking on a cellphone reduces a driver's ability to recognize and respond to traffic hazards by a quarter of a second. I support Bill 204 because I believe that we must act to reduce collisions on our highways. The convenience of using a cellphone while driving is not worth the risk of collision and death on our highways.

This legislation is supported by our police. I have a great deal of respect for the police in our province. I also have a great deal of respect for the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, who was also a police officer for many years. He brings a great deal of knowledge and perspective to this issue. I've been on many ride-alongs with the police. They are incredibly busy protecting us from what I call the dark side. They see things that we can't imagine. If the danger of cellphone use while driving concerns our policing professionals, then it must be a problem. If our police support this legislation, I support this legislation.

I must admit, Mr. Speaker, that I'm guilty of using a cellphone while driving. Many of us are. It has almost become a societal expectation that we are accessible at all times. Legislating against using a communication device while driving isn't only about banning the specific act. It's about changing our culture, and it's

about changing our expectations. If everyone knows that using a cellphone while driving is illegal, then there won't be that expectation that we're always accessible. We've managed to make cultural changes in our society before.

Mr. Speaker, my assistant, Brock Mulligan— and if I may, I want to thank him for all the help that he's given me on Bill 204 — took a trip down memory lane a couple of weeks ago. We pulled out the *Hansard* debates from when Alberta's seat belt law was passed in 1987. There were all sorts of crazy arguments about how seat belts would infringe on personal rights. One member likened making seat belts mandatory to a death sentence. Another suggested that it would increase the likelihood that children would be left at home unattended because there wouldn't be enough seat belts in the car for them. Today these arguments are preposterous. We've had seat belt legislation for over 20 years, and the world hasn't ended. Lives have been saved, and we've yet to be visited by the horsemen of the apocalypse. Most Albertans buckle up because they know it's the law and that seat belts save lives.

I'm certain that it will be the same with cellphones. The growing trend around the world is to ban cellphone use while driving. Over 45 countries world-wide have also taken this step. Other provinces have already taken the initiative and passed legislation that is similar to Bill 204. It's already illegal to drive and use a cellphone in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Quebec. I believe it's time that Albertans join this group. Many companies that do business in Alberta have banned cellphone use by employees while driving. This is very encouraging. It shows that many of Alberta's corporate citizens take the health of their employees and the safety of Albertans seriously. Passing Bill 204 would show that our government supports this philosophy.

Mr. Speaker, we'd be naive to think that banning cellphone use while driving is going to put an immediate end to the practice. There will always be those who choose to break the law, but it's important for us as legislators to show that we don't condone this dangerous activity. It's also important that we put in place consequences for those who break the law. It doesn't matter whether you're old or you're young, a professional driver, or a novice taking mom and dad's Excursion for their first cruise: using a cellphone while operating a vehicle will affect your ability to drive safely. Let's act to make this hazardous behaviour illegal.

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Probably not surprisingly, I rise today to speak in favour of this bill and again to compliment the Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing the bill forward. It represents a little bit of a departure for some members in the Conservative caucus as far as that it arguably relates to the legislation of common sense, which, I think we have heard from previous members from the caucus, appears to be something with which they're uncomfortable. Nonetheless, though, I'm very pleased in this case to see this bill come forward for a number of the reasons set out by previous speakers.

We know that drivers with cellphones are four times more likely to be in an accident. We know that in Newfoundland, where the ban on cellphone use has been in place the longest or one of the longest, they've seen their accident rate drop roughly 8 per cent within that same period of time. We know that right now roughly three-quarters of drivers acknowledge and admit to using cellphones while they're driving, and we know that that rate will increase as the technology increases and as the youth of the drivers increases. We also know that young people are much more likely to text message with their

cellphones than older people, and as they come on stream and start driving, you'll have people not only talking on their cellphones but text messaging on their cellphones, which I can't imagine wouldn't create an even larger hazard.

It seems to me that while this does arguably represent legislation of common sense, it also is something that could potentially bring about an 8 to 10 per cent reduction in accidents. I would assume that were we able to achieve an 8 to 10 per cent reduction in accidents, we would probably see a similar reduction in insurance rates because wouldn't the insurance industry obviously bring down their rates if the cost of paying out were to come down, too? If we can have a reasonable likelihood of bringing in actions that would reduce the cost of accidents on the road and potentially save all Albertans the costs of insurance, why wouldn't we do it? To me that's common sense.

Another sort of issue that I would certainly like people to consider, those people on the other side of the House who are interested in supporting this piece of legislation but perhaps were not quite as supportive with respect to previous discussions around banning cigarette smoking when children are in the car: I suspect — well, in fact, I know as an ex-smoker — that the time it takes to find your cigarettes and light a cigarette and put your cigarette lighter back and then hold it is probably almost as distracting as dialing on a cellphone. I would suggest that many of the extremely well-founded and well-argued positions in support of this bill by members, in particular on the opposite side, would apply directly to that argument for banning smoking when children are in the car.

4:10

That aside, though, I think that in this case many people have already made the argument about comparing some of the comments that have been made in the past with respect to why the government in the past was uncomfortable with seat belts or uncomfortable with helmets, and we know now that those changes made incredibly effective differences for all Albertans. The same kind of analysis obviously can be applied to this debate, and we will see a definite increase in safety on our roads as a result.

I'd like to pick up on just one final theme mentioned by the last speaker, which is the issue of people who are on the road for their work and who carry cellphones for their work. Whether they be MLAs, whether they be real estate agents, whether they be home-care nurses, it doesn't really matter. When there is an expectation out there that cellphone use on the road is possible, then workers will be expected to use them in that case, and while there may be some forward-thinking employers in Alberta right now who are advising their employees not to engage in that activity, there are lots of other employers out there who are expecting their employees to be available by cellphone and to use the cellphone while they're in transit. If legislation can be put in place to create a level playing field, as it were, for the business community so that nobody was required to be available and making sales or solving people's problems while driving between Edmonton and Calgary, then we could reduce the frequency of that activity and, obviously, the frequency of accidents.

With all those points in mind, again, to summarize, I am in support of this legislation, and I certainly hope it will receive favourable consideration when it comes forward for the Assembly to vote on.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to recognize the hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise in the Assembly to speak to Bill 204, which, if passed, would amend the Traffic Safety Act to prohibit the use of hand-held communication devices while operating a vehicle. I believe that there's a valuable debate to be had on this topic, and as such I am pleased to be able to express my point of view.

Mr. Speaker, I am in favour of Bill 204 because I feel that a driver's use of a hand-held device while operating a motor vehicle creates a serious distraction. This is an obvious safety concern which I feel has produced some serious ramifications for Albertans. It impacts our society, it impacts the workplace, and it impacts Alberta businesses. I would like to elaborate on these three points.

The most obvious impact is on society in general. Mr. Speaker, there are more than 112,000 vehicle collisions in Alberta every year. These collisions result in nearly 400 deaths and another 27,000 injuries. Transport Canada estimates that at least 20 per cent of these collisions are due to driver distraction.

The former minister of Alberta infrastructure and transportation reported on a study conducted by AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, which stated that 1.5 per cent of driver distraction collisions were the result of cellphone use. Now, this may seem like a small percentage, Mr. Speaker, but this represents 336 collisions in Alberta every year, 336 collisions that could have been avoided. Although this number is perhaps dwarfed by the total number of collisions, it is our responsibility as elected representatives to ensure that we are doing everything that we can to maintain and improve safety on our roads.

In this vein, we don't require statistics to tell us that there is a problem, Mr. Speaker. Common sense dictates that operating a motor vehicle while distracted can pose some serious consequences to the driver, to vehicular passengers, and to other vehicles and pedestrians on and in the vicinity of the traffic lanes. We should also consider that more and more people are utilizing cellular phone technology in their daily lives and that the prevalence of driver distraction will increase in tandem with increased usage. As a result Bill 204 will be seen as an important proactive measure in protecting Albertans using our provincial roadways.

Additionally, this bill could have a dual effect in that if the collision rate is reduced, Albertans' insurance rates could potentially be reduced as well. This bill also stands to benefit those Albertans who consider the roads their workplace. For example, road construction workers and my own colleagues in the serving profession spend a great deal of time on the roads and the sides of the roads and are definitely groups that are impacted by distracted drivers. As we all know, Mr. Speaker, there are a great number of people in our province who are employed in these sectors. As our economy continues to boom and our government continually improves the infrastructure of our province, we can expect these numbers to rise.

In lockstep with this let us also consider the forecasted increase in activity in the transportation sector: more and more vehicles on the roads every day hurrying about conducting their daily duties, whether it be for business, for recreation, for taking kids to school or hockey practice. Cellphone distraction obviously has an impact on the drivers who transport people, cargo, and services into and within Alberta. These individuals are expected to maintain a professional and responsible demeanor in order to ensure a safe environment for themselves and others who share the roadway. I ask you, Mr. Speaker: is it not fair that the rest of the drivers on the road provide them with the same courtesy?

In 2006 a total of 1,715 disabling injuries were related to work, and I can imagine that many of them involved distraction due to a cellphone. This workplace impact can actually extend into what I call a corporate impact as well. With the advent of multipurpose

mobile devices, many businesspeople choose to engage in cellphone use while driving as a method of multitasking. This usage often transcends simply dialing a phone number, but unfortunately in many cases it also involves scheduling, checking of e-mails, and text messaging. I think all members in this Assembly are familiar with the distractions that these activities can promote. If or when they result in a collision, the driver could make the claim that they were in fact working. This could create a litigious environment where employers could find themselves liable for the behaviour of their employees.

Many companies already recognize this risk and have abolished the use of cellphones while driving on company time. In fact, a group of graduate students at the University of Alberta started the Coalition for Cellphone-Free Driving. This coalition strives to reduce the use of cellphones on the road. It offers a generic policy for businesses if they choose to enforce these restrictions while on company time. Mr. Speaker, the corporate impact has already been recognized by many businesses. As a result they have addressed this issue within their workplace. I feel as though Bill 204 gives us the opportunity to address this issue within our entire society. This bill will send an important message that this government considers distracted driving to be a serious risk to the safety of all Albertans, something that is of paramount importance.

Mr. Speaker, I certainly endorse the spirit of this bill, and I believe that its passage would be in the best interests of the citizens of this province. As such, I urge my fellow members to join me in supporting the bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think we've all had the experience of travelling in a vehicle; I for one have. Someone is driving the van, usually my mother. Sure enough, the phone rings, and there she is: she'll fiddle in her purse, she'll grab that phone, and she'll put it to her ear. Next thing you know, she's talking to her favourite sister from Grand Rapids. Despite the fact that we've had the conversation before in our household that driving and answering cellphones is dangerous, despite the fact we've had the conversation in our household that making phone calls while driving is dangerous, she continues to do it.

I don't think it's because she doesn't have common sense. In fact, my mother is a schoolteacher, a principal in the Calgary public system. She's a pretty smart woman, so I don't think that's the reason why she does it. The reason why she does it is because we haven't said no to it. Simply put, she, like many Albertans, waits for governments to lead on this issue. I'll tell you what, too: once the government passes a law like this, my mother is more apt to follow. Her common sense becomes a little more clear because she realizes then that it's the average and the norm in society to follow its rules, that people are expecting her to, and she also knows that a police officer at any time can pull her over and write her a \$200 ticket. Now, I don't think my mother is any different than any other Albertan. There are reasons why you should do it anyway, but these just reinforce the point.

4:20

I would like to also just thank my colleague from the New Democratic Party here for saying that that is the similar logic that often needs to apply to smoking with children in vehicles. There's even more of a precedent there as there are children involved, and our society needs to protect children. Often when government leads

on this example, the logic that many of the people in this House will espouse on this issue, on Bill 204, which is an excellent initiative, is the same logic that applies to amending the Traffic Safety Act to ban smoking in vehicles with children in them. Simply put, people know it's wrong, but they need our help sometimes to reinforce the fact. When that fact is reinforced, as we've seen time and time again on helmet laws for motorcycles, on seat belt laws for individuals – and you can keep going down the pike – these issues become more clear in people's minds. We have good police officers out there to remind them from time to time that this is, in fact, illegal and that society no longer stands for this type of behaviour.

We've also heard many people in this House say that the statistics are overwhelmingly in favour of this: you're four times more likely to be in an accident while using a cellphone. In fact, I saw on a television program – I believe it might have been *20/20* – that it's equivalent to your having higher than a .08 blood alcohol level. Talking on a cellphone is the same as having an amount of liquor on your breath.

Many other private organizations have taken the lead ahead of the government on this issue. I know that many companies in our province, in order to protect their workers, have taken this form of action. In fact, I can also say that in the nonprofit industry, a group that I was with, the Canadian Paraplegic Association, has made it a zero tolerance policy for their employees. If they're caught with a cellphone and using it while driving, it can immediately be a suspension from work, and if it continues to happen, it will lead to termination. So there are other people in the province that are seeing a need to protect not only their workers but also other people, who can be innocent bystanders, when someone is driving and using this technology.

It's also interesting that this bill comes forward, again, in the fact of a private member's bill. It's not an actual government bill, but this does not detract from the bill's importance. This is of eminent importance to protect the average citizen here in Alberta. I speak fully in support of this initiative. I believe, like many times in this House, the general public is further along the curve. This will just catch our government up to where the average Joe and Jane Albertan on the street are on this thinking and help people, like my mother, to put down their cellphones and get on with the business of driving.

I'd urge other members of this House to support Bill 204, as I will. I'd also like to commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing forward this bill. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to join the debate on Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Hand-Held Communication Devices) Amendment Act, 2008. It appears as though this issue regarding cellphone use while operating a motor vehicle has some history in this province as it has been brought forth in this Assembly on previous occasions.

The issue this time is specifically related to restricting any person from operating a vehicle while using his communication device unless the device is designed and configured to allow for hands-free operation. A further component of this bill would restrict drivers participating in the graduated licensing program from using any type of communication device at all while operating a motor vehicle.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say right off the bat that I'm in favour of creating a safer environment on our province's roads and highways. However, I am not in favour of this proposed legislation, and let me tell you why. Being of the baby boom generation, I have seen cellphones and other electronic devices evolve and become almost

a factor of public dependency over the last few decades. Having gone through the technology adaptation process myself, from having had only a land line to having a high-tech data phone like the BlackBerry, I understand quite well the argument this bill is trying to make. I know that with any new technology there is a process of adaptation which takes place as the general public finds ways in which to utilize their devices. Unfortunately, using a hand-held communication device such as a cellphone has become almost the norm in today's society even while driving.

Mr. Speaker, as much as I see the potential challenges surrounding people talking on the phone while driving, I don't want the facts to become clouded and technology such as hand-held devices to be seen as the sole factors distracting Alberta's drivers and a key potential driver distraction that must be legislated. Since automobiles were first invented in the late 1800s, drivers have always been prone to being distracted, and accidents always did happen.

The real problem here is not with mobile communication devices that are causing drivers to get distracted. Instead, the problem lies with the fast-paced lifestyle of the average person living in the 21st century. Our society is used to instant gratification and for years has been conditioned to multitask. In rural Alberta for much of our agriculture, other industries, and other businesses the business is done by cellphone while moving down a rural road where traffic is at best minimal or where the only traffic there is that one person on the road.

Mr. Speaker, I can honestly say that all of us at one point or another have gotten distracted while operating a motor vehicle, and from personal experience I want to say that many times it is not because of making a cellphone call. People don't use their vehicles anymore just as a simple transportation tool but, instead, almost as their home on the road. Nearly every day I encounter drivers who eat, drink, obsessively fix their hair, makeup, tend to their pets, have engaging conversations with their passengers, sing along with their favourite tune, discipline their children, and change the radio stations, all while driving. Are we going to ban teenagers and other amorous, romantic couples from holding hands and sitting too close together as well? It seems to be that some of them are closer to the driver and more distracting than a hand-held cellphone device.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, there are many distractions available to Alberta's drivers. An investigation conducted by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety into collisions caused by driver distraction, which, by the way, was included in the recently released report compiled by the former ministry of Alberta infrastructure and transportation, *Distracted Driving and Cell Phone Use While Driving*, found the following to be true. Nearly 30 per cent of drivers were distracted by an outside person, object, or event. Combined, interacting with passengers in adjusting the radio accounted for more than 20 per cent of driver distraction. Only 1.5 per cent of driver distraction involved cellphone use.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, these stats prove my point. Because cellphone use is only a small percentage among the many other driver distractions which Albertans encounter, it wouldn't make sense to isolate and legislate for it alone. Will we next legislate for glass booths similar to taxis to isolate the driver, or will we go to one-person cars to avoid distractions from within? I would hope that this Assembly is not prepared to legislate against listening to the radio, eating, or talking in the car either.

The other point I want to touch on in this debate is actually the practicality of this bill. To me, it is reacting to an issue that may be more of an urban issue but would have to be enforced province-wide. Are we going to have all drivers with hand-helds fill out

logbooks, then reconcile those with cellphone records? It appears as though there are still significant research gaps and a lack of empirical evidence as far as this bill is concerned.

Many questions arise in my mind with respect to the practicality and the enforcement, which this bill fails to address. Although I think this idea comes with the best intentions from a respected hon. colleague, I would need to have more clarity and see more thorough research conducted as far as the implementation in order to convince me of the actual usefulness and effectiveness of this piece of legislation. As I thought about this, practical questions about enforcement of Bill 204 came to mind. Would police officers be required to seize the hand-held communication devices from offending drivers? Would the police be required to obtain search warrants of subscriber records to prove usage at the time of a charge? What other proof would the courts require to prove that a driver was using a hand-held communication device while operating a motor vehicle? These are just some of my questions.

Our government over the years has put significant emphasis on ensuring that the safety of Albertans is maintained while travelling on Alberta's roads and highways. When will we learn that the more we legislate, the less people use their own common sense? Don't answer or dial the cellphone in busy traffic, whether it's hands free or hand held. You can't legislate common sense, but you can take it away through legislation.

I'd like to point out the fact that current provisions outlined in the Traffic Safety Act facilitate successful enforcement of fines with respect to careless driving in our province, something that this legislation in essence tries to accomplish. Section 115(2)(b) stipulates that drivers in Alberta can be charged with careless driving if, for example, they are found speeding and weaving while using a cellphone, a charge that carries a penalty of \$402 and six demerits.

Mr. Speaker, to me it doesn't make sense for additional rules and regulations to be created around cellphone use while on the road when there is already enforceable and effective legislation in place. Since there is already a penalty system for careless driving in place under the Traffic Safety Act, perhaps a greater emphasis should be placed on driver education in this province or strengthening the enforceability of the current act. As a former rural councillor and reeve many times accident reports cited road conditions as cause when clearly it was speed or distraction. Would this just be one more law in the huge litany of laws that we don't or can't enforce?

I think this issue is an extremely important one as it discusses the safety of Albertans, one of our government's top priorities. However, I think driver distractions are so numerous that they almost fall under the realm of personal choice. That being said, I would be glad to see more public awareness raised about the importance of implementing driver safety, safer driving ambitions in order to enlighten our citizens on the dangers of some of their personal choices. Also, with the ambiguity and lack of conclusive research surrounding driver distraction, with the immense amounts of other types of distraction as well as lack of clarity or even practicality surrounding enforcement of this legislation, I cannot support Bill 204 at this time. However, I do look forward to the rest of the debate and hope for more conclusive research to be done in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Benito: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to support and speak on Bill 204, which urges the government of Alberta to restrict the use of hand-held communication devices in vehicles. This bill demonstrates our commitment to improving traffic safety by generating a safer environment for all users of Alberta highways and roads.

On an international level cellphone involvement in accidents is currently the subject of major debate and research. Such devices are widely used and can be a significant distraction behind the wheel. Every year nearly 400 people die and more than 27,000 people are injured in motor vehicle collisions in Alberta. This represents a monetary cost of \$4 billion to Albertans and an invaluable loss of life to Alberta families. Currently 45 countries have nation-wide bans on cellphone use while driving, setting the precedent that driving should not be combined with distracting tasks.

Mr. Speaker, in Australia cellphone bans have existed for over two decades. Cellphones were introduced in 1987, and within one year the state of Victoria banned cellphone use while operating a motor vehicle. Further to this legislation, some jurisdictions in Australia created additional restrictions for beginner drivers, with penalties ranging from fines to demerit points. This is a logical step because new drivers need to pay more attention as they gain the experience, skills, and maturity required to operate a motor vehicle safely.

In 2003 the United Kingdom prohibited the use of cellphones while driving, though hands-free devices are still permitted. Fines in the United Kingdom are approximately \$120 Canadian, and drivers who challenge the charge in court risk a penalty of up to \$2,000 Canadian, a significant incentive against tying up the legal system as a result of the law. Meanwhile, in the United States 28 states and the District of Columbia have legislation relative to cellphone use while driving. Out of these jurisdictions six carry legislation restricting all drivers from using cellphones. However, in many states a complete ban affects only novice drivers and/or school bus drivers.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, in Canada in April 2003 Newfoundland and Labrador was the first province to restrict the use of cellphones while driving, with popular support, of course. Before the ban was put into place, the government of Newfoundland and Labrador conducted a survey of its residents and found that 95 per cent of the people believed that cellphone use by drivers was a serious safety problem. On April 1, 2003, Newfoundland's Highway Traffic Act was amended to ban the use of cellphones while driving, though hands-free devices are still permitted. There are similar restrictions in Quebec and Nova Scotia.

Endorsing Bill 204 is a step to enhancing our drivers' and pedestrians' safety alike. Our society has to a great extent allowed multitasking behind the wheel. Most vehicles come equipped with cup holders, radios, and sound and navigation systems, and drivers eat, apply makeup, discipline their children, and use cellphones, of course. Mr. Speaker, these are excellent examples of accidents waiting to happen. Our drivers are not much different than those in Nova Scotia, Quebec, the United States, or Europe, but what sets us apart is our busy, hustle-and-bustle environment. It's time we took charge and reinforced the fact that driving is not a right; it is a privilege and one that shouldn't be taken lightly.

4:40

It's important to consider all the research and information available as well as the experiences of other jurisdictions. In doing so, the trend is clear: the use of cellphones while driving is a deterrent on driver attentiveness. Reducing the threat of driver distraction will benefit Alberta and its citizens, insurance costs could potentially lower, and we will see a decrease in road collisions.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 brings to light the fact that distraction is a common occurrence in a motor vehicle and that cellphones are a

common contributor to driver distraction. We put so much emphasis on improving the quality of life in this province, particularly on ensuring that all Albertans feel safe and secure in their communities and homes, but what about their vehicles? Should Albertans not enjoy the same rights in their vehicles as they do in their homes? By eliminating one of the most common driver distractions, we are setting a precedent and reinforcing the importance of driver attentiveness. We must seriously consider the merits of Bill 204. The restriction of cellphone use while driving reinforces the importance of staying attentive while driving and the associated improvement in safety on Alberta's roads.

As such, I'm in full support of Bill 204, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise this afternoon to speak on Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Hand-Held Communication Devices) Amendment Act, 2008. I commend the intention of this bill. We all would agree that public safety is important to Albertans, and our legal system exists for this reason. However, the bill is in some respects misplaced. The very principle of regulation is one of balance, and we need a balance between regulation and freedom. It is important for those who create rules to recognize that limits are thereby placed on freedoms and liberties. Once a liberty is rid of, it is very difficult to relegate it.

There are a number of potential distractions that could be considered alongside cellphone usage, as have already been suggested. Eating or drinking food is a distraction, we all know, if done while driving. Despite this, nobody is in a rush to ban such things while driving; rather, negligence is captured by other, more appropriate regulation inherent in our rules of the road. When we talk about distractions, we often forget that anything we normally do could be a distraction. Children or adult passengers, the car stereo, or even pedestrians on the sidewalk can all be distracting. Stereos, DVD players, and devices such as OnStar are all possible distractions, yet we consider these and other things to be reasonable, and nobody has argued that they should be removed.

We have had communication devices in cars for decades, whether they be CB radios, car phones, GPS units, or even the modern cellular telephones we have now. Some cars are equipped with extremely advanced navigation and cellular technologies which if they become commonplace will not be nearly the assumed risk which this bill indicates. Logically one must assume that technology will improve over time. Just as cellphones no longer weigh a number of kilograms and require a suitcase to operate from, smartphones which are being developed will make legislation like this obsolete.

Mr. Speaker, comparisons have been made to the legislation which Albertans endorsed many years ago with regard to seat belt legislation. I would suggest that this legislation is not comparable to that legislation. In short this bill may soon become outdated. As modern fashion, technology, and convenience change, cellphones will also change. Like the municipal bylaw in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, dictating that you cannot tie a horse to the parking meter, smart technology may soon outdistance legislation. Communication devices will change to reduce potential distraction while we use them. Smart technology is just that, in that it is progressive, and nobody knows how we will use communications technology five years from now. Like the horseless carriage of the 1920s, the cellphone of today will not be the phone we use in 2015 or 2025.

Need we make a law like this? The problem with banning cellphones while driving is that it ties up the system while the legal system catches up. Quite honestly, I am dubious of the law surviv-

ing a legal challenge. Why are we singling out communication devices when we should instead be focusing on positive ways to promote road safety? We should be focused on driver training and ensuring that new drivers receive training in the fundamentals of driving and defensive driving. Smart driving is not only accident avoidance; it involves prevention of harm to all parties and safety in their actions and on how their actions impact others. Is it smart to detract from the many positive values of having access to a communications device while driving when you consider that there are many other more dangerous distractions?

Education and awareness must be part of the public strategy, not narrowly focused enforcement. We must ensure that people recognize all aspects of driving as a possible source of harm to themselves and others if they are not diligent with their actions. Commitment to a set of rules must be instilled in the active minds of drivers while they learn to drive and continue to drive, not something that we need to enforce through legislation. The University of Montreal performed a 2001 study and found that, all things being equal, cellphone usage on most occasions was a negligible risk. This study was conducted on behalf of Quebec's provincial auto insurance authority. In general, the other distractions of the road proved to be a greater problem than cellphone usage.

We need smart driving, not necessarily more heavily regulated driving. Drivers need to be proactive about responsibility and their use of technology, eating, talking with other passengers, movement, and other distractions. All require good judgment while driving. We cannot legislate common sense. I leave you with one final thought. If we ban cellphones while driving, where do we draw the line? Should we ban all distractions? Defensive, proactive driving will always be challenged by distractions. One cannot regulate all of them, nor at this point in time can we know what they will be. We cannot put the driver in a glass box. I do not feel this bill addresses the problem. I think it is overly restrictive, and therefore I cannot support it. This matter is better addressed through education, driver training, and common sense.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to start by thanking the MLA for Calgary-Nose Hill for assisting with the research on this speech. It is a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Hand-Held Communication Devices) Amendment Act, 2008, proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, and I'd like to compliment him on the work that he's put into this very important piece of legislation.

I'm supportive of this bill because I believe it will increase the safety of driving in Alberta. Every year over 400 Albertans lose their lives to traffic accidents, many due to speed and inattentiveness or driver distraction. Driver distractions can take many forms – traffic, pedestrians, and surrounding objects – thereby affecting driver response times to situations on the road. According to Human Factors, experts cited by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration in the United States, there are basically four kinds of driver distractions: visual distractions, which involve the driver looking away from the road and their direction of travel; biochemical distractions, which include manipulating controls and are associated with visual distractions; auditory distractions, which include the driver being startled by sounds or fixing their attention on sounds; and finally cognitive distractions, where one's conscious attention is misdirected, being lost in thought, for example, where a kilometre or two can pass by without the driver being aware of what has happened on the road in that distance. These distractions all take

away from the driver's attention, reduce reaction time, and increase the likelihood of an accident.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 seeks to address all of these factors to some degree. It brings forth the point that mobile communication devices may present a serious and multidimensional distraction to drivers, one that warrants our attention. Using a mobile hand-held communication device is a measurable distraction while driving. Many studies serve to reinforce this. It is estimated that between 20 and 30 per cent of accidents are caused by driver distraction.

Anyone who has driven our highways and streets in recent years can give anecdotal evidence of seeing someone doing something stupid at the wheel only to discover that, sure enough, they're talking on their cellular telephone. This is something any driver on our roads sees every day, and I do not doubt that many of us have used a mobile phone a number of times while driving.

Alberta's car accident injury rates and fatality rates are higher than the Canadian average by all measures. These rates will continue to climb with more traffic due to our large influx of new population unless we take measures to reverse the trend. Safer highways, reducing of speed, and discouraging driver distractions are three ways we can work to reverse this trend.

While other distractions exist – the radio, CD player – what is different about telecommunications devices is that one's attention is more fixed on the message. As the person with whom we are communicating is interacting with the driver, they expect an intelligent response on the other side of the conversation. As well, it encompasses all facets of driver distractions that I mentioned earlier: auditory distraction if the phone rings, visual distraction by reaching for the handset and dialing, and extended auditory or cognitive distraction during conversations.

This is as true for drivers in Alberta as it is for drivers elsewhere in the world. Mr. Speaker, many other jurisdictions have implemented restrictions on the use of hand-held cellphones while driving. These laws remain in place for these jurisdictions and have been found beneficial in enhancing traffic safety. Surveys show that the anecdotal evidence of Albertans when driving has conditioned them to favour by a large majority the implementation of a ban on cellphone use while driving.

Opponents may point out that there will be enforcement and compliance issues. However, the same could be said when seatbelt compulsory use was legislated. The law proposed by Bill 204 would not only implement an obvious fine distinctive to cellphone use while driving; it would also send a clear message to Albertans regarding the use of cellphones while driving. It could raise awareness of driver distractions in general, and admittedly there remains much to be examined regarding the issue.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that Bill 204 is one small step for improved traffic safety, and I urge the members to support this bill in second reading. Thank you.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In speaking to Bill 204, I'd like everybody just to close their eyes and pretend they're at home at 2 in the morning and they receive a phone call from the hospital about one of their family members being in a car accident. Only now it's not 2 in the morning; it's 2 in the afternoon. Having worked on the front lines in the emergency departments, car accidents have been a major cause of morbidity and mortality, deaths and disability.

This bill is about more than just cellphones and driving a car. It's

about injuries and deaths, and it's about a major public health issue in Alberta. Injuries are the number one leading cause of death in Alberta between people from the ages of one to 44. For every Albertan who dies due to an injury, there are 36 hospital admissions and 284 emergency department visits. Sixteen hundred Albertans die as a result of injury every year in Alberta. That's four deaths a day. Twenty-five per cent of those deaths are due to motor vehicle accidents. More than 27,000 people are injured in 127,000 motor vehicles collisions in Alberta every year. This is a monetary cost of \$4 billion a year to Albertans.

We all talk about money. What we don't talk about is the senseless suffering, the pain and suffering and loss of life. For those people who haven't lost their life, there are tens of thousands who live the rest of their lives with a disability that their family has to support, that society must support. Motor vehicle related deaths account for thousands of admissions and tens of thousands of visits in an already overburdened and very busy health care system.

Bill 204 is intended to generate a safer environment for all users of Alberta highways and roads and to reduce accidents caused by drivers using hand-held communication devices. The hand-held devices are a new phenomenon here in the last 15, 20 years. The problem is that in Alberta we have more hand-held phones than anyone else in the country. If you look at any intersection when you're driving, there are numerous people on their cellphones.

The cellphone was one thing. Many of the studies were based on just cellphones. Now people are texting. Now we have BlackBerry devices. The biggest problem is our young people. They're the biggest market for cellphone users, and these young people are all going to drive.

From personal experience and recent Canadian research which indicates that distraction from cellphones can increase the risk of collision by 38 per cent all the way to 400 per cent depending on the study that you look at, one of the challenges is that this is a number that's underreported or misreported. No one who gets in a car accident ever tells a police officer: yes, I was using a cellphone. They tell their doctor when we ask, on the front lines. The most significant negative effects of using a cellphone while driving involved increasing a driver's reaction time. Milliseconds are the difference between life and death in a T-bone collision in the intersection or on a rural highway.

The Coalition for Cellphone-Free Driving is a leading organization in the fight against cellphone use while driving. Their partners include the Alberta Public Health Association, St. John Ambulance Alberta Council, the University of Alberta School of Public Health, and the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research. Recently, the Alberta Medical Association endorsed a resolution that recommended that the government of Alberta look at legislating a law that suggests that we no longer use cellphones while we drive.

A further component of the bill restricts drivers participating in the graduated drivers' licensing program from using any type of communication device, hands-free or hand-held, while operating a motor vehicle. Punishment from the offence would be in line with their current GDL penalty rates of \$100 or two demerits. Alberta introduced a GDL program because statistics revealed that 48,000 new drivers entering the licensing system each year have a much higher collision risk than experienced drivers. Driving is a demanding activity that requires due care and attention. The GDL program affects all new drivers regardless of age. One must hold a learner's licence, a class 7, to move on to the probationary stage of the GDL program.

You must be a minimum of 14 years of age to obtain a learner's licence. Nearly 82 per cent of the drivers who obtained a class 7 licence between April 1, 2007, and March 31, 2008, were between

the ages of 14 and 24. A study conducted by the Canadian Automobile Association indicated young drivers are more likely to be regular users of cellphones while driving than older drivers. New, inexperienced drivers especially should be free of as many distractions as possible, and that includes using hands-free or hand-held communication devices. While people of varying ages obtain drivers' licences, a large majority of people obtain them at a young age. We are at a time when many young people have cellphones. These young people are Alberta's future.

Now, the hope of this bill is not just about cellphones; it's about driver attention. It's about people having a sense of personal responsibility for others on the road and for their family members in the vehicles in addition to themselves. We have had education programs for years, but there comes a time when we have to say that in the absence of good education programs that haven't worked, we have to look at legislation. I believe that most Albertans are responsible drivers. I believe that most people who use cellphones are responsible drivers and use their cellphones responsibly. However, it's the few that don't pay attention that contribute to those numbers I mentioned previously.

5:00

I congratulate the member for bringing this discussion and debate to this House. It's a discussion that needs to be had. I support any measure that aims to limit the number of injuries, that aims to reduce the morbidity and the mortality, the deaths in Alberta, especially that reduces the number of visits to emergency departments and admissions to hospitals so that we can get our health care costs down.

I look forward to the discussions. I support this bill, and I thank all the members for participating in this debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to thank the Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing this forward. My constituents have been very interested in this issue, and I've been getting quite a few calls and letters from my constituents on the issue.

I think that I'm like many people in this House: I consider myself an excellent driver. I've been driving for decades. I was actually one of the first people – I actually had a cellphone in my car back in '88. So I've had 20 years, just about, of using a cellphone in the car, and I've always considered that, yeah, I'm capable of doing this. You know, I can use a cellphone and drive at the same time, and in actual fact I've never had an accident when I've been using my cellphone.

But earlier this week I went and sat down at a driving simulator – I talked about it in the House – the DUMB car, and I actually experienced what the difference is in terms of my driving ability when I'm driving just concentrating on driving versus at that point where you're answering the telephone and reaching for the telephone and fumbling with some buttons. Meanwhile, the phone is ringing and ringing, and you want to catch that call. I saw the difference between what I was doing when I could concentrate on that and when I had the distraction of the telephone.

Now, there were some other distractions that we also tried in terms of getting a CD out of the pack and inserting a CD, and it was very similar to the situation with the cellphone. So, you know, a couple of points. One, it's been brought up that perhaps we should not just legislate against cellphones because there are all of these other distractions. I don't see that as a valid argument against it because if cellphones are one problem, I think that that is a problem

that we can solve. I myself will react very well. As a person who thinks I'm a really good driver, as a person who thinks that I know cellphones – I've been using them for 20 years – there's no problem there. I myself will react by not driving while using a cellphone. I will stop if there is legislation, like most everyone in this room will stop if there is legislation in place that says: hey, we're not to do it anymore.

There's also something else that's been brought up in this House, and that is the similarity between the seat belt law and the cellphone law. Well, I see those as very, very different issues. The seat belt law is something that says that you have to protect yourself with a seat belt. When we're talking about cellphones, we're not talking about you protecting yourself with a cellphone. What we're doing is talking about you protecting society from cellphone use while you're driving, and I see those as very different issues. Essentially, as I see it now, from my experience with the DUMB car, if you are both driving and using a cellphone, then you have an impact on society, not just on yourself. I just wanted to make the point that, hey, this is a situation where, yes, we should be legislating because it is a situation where what you are doing with that cellphone impacts society, that you are more of a danger driving with a cellphone than you are if you're not using your cellphone.

I look forward to our moving forward with this. If it is possible to somehow include some of the other distractions in legislation, you know, I think that we should look at that, but I don't think we should use the excuse that there are other distractions from doing what we know we really should do, which is saying: "Hey, come on, society. Cut it out. You can use your phone when you're not driving."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed an engaging debate on this bill, and it appears that members are quite divided on this issue. It's an issue that's quite emotion laden. Any time government attempts to introduce legislation that somehow inhibits what we perceive to be a normal part of our life and perhaps even somewhat of a right, to have a cellphone, to use it any time we wish, we get a little bit emotional about it. We find that legislation aimed at limiting our abilities to do what we want to do in the privacy of our own car – cars have become a bit of an extension of our home right now. We are very protective of what we do in that car and how we drive it and where we drive it. We get a little bit emotional about this.

Putting aside the emotions relevant to using a cellphone while driving a car, research on this particular topic, as it appears from what I'm hearing in the House as I haven't done my own investigating of the research – it appears that the research is also rather divided. I know the Minister of Transportation has tabled documents generated by Alberta Transportation ministry/department staff that indicate that cellphones, even though they do provide some form of distraction, don't distract the driver as much or more than other devices or other habits or eating or drinking coffee or other things that people do in a car.

It's amazing, Mr. Speaker, what people do in a car. I was just reading a bit of a funny commentary about our driving habits. It's intended to be a joke, but it's not really a joke. A driver says that he was looking over at the next car and saw a lady applying makeup while driving the vehicle, and that scared him so much that he dropped his shaver, dropped it in his coffee, and poured it all over his cellphone. As you can see, Mr. Speaker, nobody is laughing because most of us probably have done all of those three things in a car but maybe not at the same time.

Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, it's obvious that there is danger that stems from driving and talking on a phone. I found myself being distracted having spoken on the phone. You engage in that conversation. The person to whom you speak is not aware of the fact that you're in the middle of the traffic. A person beside you is in that same situation, so they can gauge their conversation by traffic conditions. If they see you passing a car or approaching an intersection, they may stop talking or not ask you any questions at that moment, but when you're speaking to a person on a cellphone, chances are they don't even know you're in a car. If they do know you're in a car, they can't adjust their conversation to where you're at. So obviously it's a distraction. Is it more so a distraction than other things? I am not so sure.

But there is one way to find out, Mr. Speaker. Under the leadership of our Premier and with your indulgence as the Speaker of this Legislature we have formed a new committee structure that is designed to deal with issues like these, where the science is divided, where members are emotional on the topic. It allows us to take a bill, take it out of this House and study it, take it to the public, find out what the public wants us to do – I know the public is also divided on this one somewhat – go out there, get the research, find out what science really says about it, what other jurisdictions have experienced once they limited cellphone usage. Has the accident rate really dropped at intersections? Has the running of stop signs decreased ever since they introduced the legislation? What is the real experience so that we don't have to reinvent the wheel in this Legislature? This vehicle that I'm referring to here, this legislative tool that we have, is our standing policy field committees, all-party committees that have been designated for that very purpose.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, at this point I would like to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Hand-Held Communication Devices) Amendment Act, 2008, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Hand-Held Communication Devices) Amendment Act, 2008, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on the Economy in accordance with temporary Standing Order 74.2.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'd ask that you just sit for a second while the pages circulate this amendment so that all members may have it before you continue.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, I think the amendment is in the hands of all members in the House. Please proceed.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This amendment will allow for a wider debate. It's a debate that needs to take place in this province; there's no doubt about it. You know, today we're dealing with a cellphone. Tomorrow we may be dealing with another gadget that will come out and will become available. Now, talking on a cellphone is becoming less pervasive as text messaging and sending various other forms, e-mails on the most recent generation of phones, are becoming prevalent. So if you can't talk on the phone, can you text message? Who knows what the next piece of technology that will become available to us will require us to do? In this way we can discuss in committee the possibilities of curbing, if necessary, such driving habits and then bring this legislation back into the House in a form that all of us are satisfied with to a larger degree and perhaps pass it to truly ensure safety on our roads.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Speaking very definitely to the amendment, I do not want to take away from the recognized quality of the standing policy committees. I'm very grateful for the fact that membership has been extended to all parties to be part of the standing policy committees. Nor do I believe that there isn't a collective wisdom available through the standing policy committee.

However, the first time this notion was brought up was in 2001, at least to my recollection. We've had numerous in-Alberta studies that have indicated that talking while using a hand-held cellphone is distracting, and it's not just the physical holding of the cellphone that's distracting. It's the communication that is causing the distraction. The Member for Calgary-Hays summarized very capably a number of recent studies, and to me it's time to get on with the action. The idea of pre-empting the discussion, as this amendment suggests, preventing it from going to Committee of the Whole, in fact cuts down the opportunity to discuss, and it further lengthens the process of putting Bill 204 into legislation and saving lives on Alberta's roads.

Therefore, I speak against the amendment. I would like to see this follow the procedure through to Committee of the Whole stage, at which time I would like to have the opportunity to put forward an amendment that would take it beyond just the hand-held but up to the next extent, and that's the hands-free. Because cellphones and smart technologies are limited by the intelligence or lack thereof of the individual employing the device, and arguments suggesting that the more technologically astute we become, the greater our lives will be, we're still responsible for creating and using that technology in an intelligent manner.

Therefore, I would speak against this amendment. I would like to see this bill be allowed to go to Committee of the Whole. After we've had the full debate in the open, transparent state of this Legislature, if it's the Committee of the Whole's wish at that point to refer it to committee, so be it, but I would suggest that at this point it's premature.

Thank you.

The Speaker: On the amendment. Others?

Mr. Hehr: I, too, would like to speak against this amendment. I think that sending it to the Standing Committee on the Economy – I reiterate the comment of my good friend behind me – just delays the matter. Let's face it, we could go to that committee, read the 47 reports that have all said that cellphone use is dangerous. We could then say: yeah, these 47 reports all say the same thing, that talking on a cellphone is dangerous.

This just delays the inevitable. I think we should get on with the job of doing what's right for the protection of citizens in Alberta. I believe that this should go to Committee of the Whole. We're all smart enough in here to know that this will save lives.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, speak against this amendment. As already stated, this effectively represents an opportunity to delay full and fair consideration of this bill. Committee of the Whole is the opportunity for us to further consider the kinds of questions that were raised in the prelude to the motion that was made.

We've already had extensive reference to a number of studies that have been conducted. Members of this Assembly are more than capable of reading them and talking about them in the course of a

full debate. While we refuse to act or fail to act, more accidents happen and more people end up in emergency rooms. I see this, really, as a failure on the part of government to take a leadership role or those who would, of course, choose to vote for moving this to the policy field committee. In fact, we know enough about it.

There are four other provinces that have already moved ahead on this, and we simply don't need to delay a further year or two before we get in line with what we know to be the facts. So I would speak very much against this amendment.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you're well aware, I brought this bill forward, so I would be in the position that I would speak for the amendment, though I understand the comments. We listened to a lot of good debate here, but I believe that with wider debate there's better understanding. Haste makes waste. So I'm speaking for the amendment, and I support it.

The Speaker: Are there others on the amendment? Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:20 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

5:30

For the motion:

Allred	Fawcett	Mitzel
Anderson	Fritz	Oberle
Benito	Griffiths	Ouellette
Berger	Hancock	Quest
Bhardwaj	Horne	Renner
Blackett	Jacobs	Sandhu
Calahasen	Johnson	Sarich
Campbell	Johnston	Sherman
Cao	Klimchuk	Stevens
Danyluk	Lindsay	VanderBurg
DeLong	Lukaszuk	Weadick
Doerksen	Marz	Woo-Paw
Drysdale		

Against the motion:

Chase	Kang	Snelgrove
Hehr	Notley	

Totals:	For – 37	Against – 5
---------	----------	-------------

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 204 carried]

The Speaker: The House stands adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:33 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Monday afternoon, May 26, 2008

Introduction of Visitors	921
Introduction of Guests	921
Members' Statements	
Bill Rees YMCA Centre	922
High-intensity Residential Fires	922
Women Building Futures	922
Multiple Sclerosis Society	923
Augustana Faculty Convocation	931
Northlands Filly Pace	931
Oral Question Period	
Effluent Discharge into Athabasca River	923
Environmental Responsibility	923
Savings and Investments	924
Pipeline Leaks	924
Spring Flooding	925
Aboriginal Training and Employment	926
Commercial Vehicle Inspection	926
High-intensity Residential Fires	927
Child Care Worker Wages and Benefits	927
Temporary Foreign Workers	928
Family and Community Support Services	928
Smoking in Vehicles Carrying Children	929
WorldSkills Calgary 2009	929
Anthony Henday Drive Noise Levels	929
Trade Mission to China	930
Student Temporary Employment Program	930
Presenting Petitions	932
Notices of Motions	932
Introduction of Bills	
Bill 22 Appropriation Act, 2008	932
Tabling Returns and Reports	932
Request for Emergency Debate	
Gasoline Prices	933
Written Questions	
Overtime Pay for Registered Nurses	934
Full-time Versus Part-time Registered Nurses	934
Sick Leave for Registered Nurses	935
Hospital Ward Closures	935
Motions for Returns	
Crown Agreements with Suncor and Syncrude	935
Traffic Safety (Seizure of Vehicles in Prostitution Related Offences) Amendment Act, 2002	936
Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders	
Second Reading	
Bill 204 Traffic Safety (Hand-Held Communication Devices) Amendment Act, 2008	937
Division	949

STANDING COMMITTEES

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rogers

Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski

Amery	DeLong	McQueen	Olson
Blakeman	Kang	Notley	

Standing Committee on Community Services

Chair: Mr. Rodney

Deputy Chair: Mr. Hehr

Benito	Doerksen	Johnston	Notley
Bhardwaj	Johnson	Lukaszuk	Sarich
Chase			

Standing Committee on Health

Chair: Mr. Horne

Deputy Chair: Ms Pastoor

Dallas	Notley	Quest	Swann
Denis	Olson	Sherman	Vandermeer
Fawcett			

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Prins

Deputy Chair: Mr. McFarland

Blakeman	Lund	Marz	Notley
Campbell	MacDonald	Mitzel	Webber
Horne			

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Kowalski

Deputy Chair: Mr. Oberle

Elniski	Mason	Snelgrove	VanderBurg
Hehr	Rodney	Taylor	Weadick
Leskiw			

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Dr. Brown

Deputy Chair: Ms Woo-Paw

Allred	Calahasen	Forsyth	Quest
Amery	Campbell	Jacobs	Sandhu
Anderson	Doerksen	MacDonald	Sarich
Benito	Elniski	McQueen	Swann
Boutilier	Fawcett	Olson	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Prins

Deputy Chair: Mr. Hancock

Bhardwaj	Johnson	Notley	Taylor
Boutilier	Leskiw	Oberle	Vandermeer
Calahasen	Liepert	Pastoor	Weadick
Doerksen	Marz	Rogers	Zwozdesky
Griffiths	Mitzel	Stevens	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. MacDonald

Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund

Benito	Denis	Jacobs	Quest
Bhardwaj	Drysdale	Johnson	Vandermeer
Chase	Fawcett	Kang	Woo-Paw
Dallas	Griffiths	Mason	

Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services

Chair: Mr. VanderBurg

Deputy Chair: Mr. Kang

Anderson	Cao	MacDonald	Sandhu
Brown	Jacobs	Notley	Woo-Paw
Calahasen			

Standing Committee on Resources and Environment

Chair: Mr. Prins

Deputy Chair: Dr. Swann

Berger	Griffiths	Mason	Oberle
Boutilier	Hehr	McQueen	Webber
Drysdale			

Standing Committee on the Economy

Chair: Mr. Allred

Deputy Chair: Mr. Taylor

Amery	Campbell	Mason	Weadick
Bhullar	Marz	McFarland	Xiao
Blakeman			

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

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

Last mailing label:

Account # _____

New information:

Name _____

Address _____

Subscription information:

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

Price per issue is \$0.75 including GST.

On-line access to *Alberta Hansard* is available through the Internet at www.assembly.ab.ca

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

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

