



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, June 2, 2008

Issue 28

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

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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. 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[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, June 2, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. We give thanks for Your abundant blessings to our province and to ourselves. We ask for Your guidance with our deliberations in our Chamber and the will to follow them. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we'll now participate in the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau, and I'd invite all here to participate in the language of one's 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. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour to introduce to you and through you to all the Members of our Legislative Assembly Consul General of the Republic of Indonesia Mr. Bunyan Saptomo and his wife, Mrs. Lia Saptomo, and Mr. Singgih Yuwono, Consul for Information, Social and Cultural Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. I had the pleasure and honour of hosting these fine individuals today for a special lunch.

Mr. Saptomo has served in his role as consul general since 2005, but, sadly for Alberta, Mr. Speaker, we've learned that Mr. Saptomo is leaving for a new position as director of North and Central American relations with the Department of Foreign Affairs in Jakarta.

Indonesia is a valued and growing trading partner for Alberta, and I should add that over the duration of Mr. Saptomo's office our trade with Indonesia has grown by 30 per cent. Over the past three years Mr. Saptomo has worked hard to strengthen Indonesia-Alberta relations. Even though Mr. Saptomo was located in Vancouver, his work has been evident here in the province of Alberta. As you may recall, donated into your hands and that of our Lieutenant Governor, the Hon. Norman Kwong, were pieces of furniture donated by the government of Indonesia to our Assembly.

At this point I would like to ask Mr. and Mrs. Saptomo and his colleague to rise and receive a traditional welcome to our Assembly and a heartfelt thank you for the work that you have done for western Canada.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure to introduce a school group that I have visiting today from the Trinity Christian school. They're in my riding, and they're a very intelligent and great group of kids. They have many parent helpers with them. Their teacher is Cheryl Barnard. The parent helpers are Wendy Clay, June Toscani, Marj Troy, Margaret Strandberg, Dave Hooze, Tana Zacharias, Joyce Verhoeff, Jeanette Reich, Joe Groeneveld, April Pitts, Aileen Garrett, Bernice Schleppe, Bev Paulhus, and Bob Schmidt. I'd ask if they'd all rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a group of young and bright grade 10 students from the International School of Excellence in Calgary-McCall. Accompanying them are their teachers, Mr. Jamie Parkinson and Mr. Martin Kovacic. I would like to ask all the students and their teachers to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly 26 individuals who are visiting not only today but for the rest of the week from McCauley elementary school. This group of students and teachers are participating in the School at the Leg. program. I am looking forward to visiting with them on Thursday morning. This delegation is led by their teacher, Mr. Mark Campeau, who is assisted by another teacher, Ruth Calder, and a parent helper, Aileen Tayler. I would now ask this polite and enthusiastic group, who are in the public gallery, to please rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am wild, wild with enthusiasm. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you eight Albertans who have been our guests today as we launch our new community website, My Wild Alberta. My Wild Alberta will be the first stop on the Internet for hunters and anglers in Alberta. This website is a joint initiative between Sustainable Resource Development and many of our partners in the fish and wildlife community. These partners are represented here today by eight individuals. I'd like them to rise as I call their names and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. Please hold your applause until I've introduced all eight.

From the Alberta Conservation Association are Mr. Todd Zimmerling and Mr. Ken Kranrod, from the Alberta Fish and Game Association Mr. Martin Sharren, from the Alberta Professional Outfitters Society Don Ayers, from Ducks Unlimited Mr. David Kay, from Hunting for Tomorrow Ms Kelly Semple, from the Alberta Trappers Association Mr. Gordy Klassen, and, finally, from Trout Unlimited Mr. Patrick Boyle. Please welcome our guests here today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you

and through you the staff from my constituency and legislative offices. Deana Simkin, who was my volunteer co-ordinator during my campaign, is my constituency office manager. Deana also sits with me on the board of our community association and our constituency association and acts as our treasurer. We have our STEP student, Laura Robinson, who is with us this summer and has just finished her first year of political science studies at Queen's University. Also, we have from our legislative office Mat Stepan, who has joined us recently from the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta; Sheryi Mazankowski, who we welcome back to the building after taking eight years off to raise her family; and Heather Malekoff, who has been with us in this Legislature Building for over 20 years. We're happy to have them. Ladies and gentlemen, they are seated in the members' gallery, and I ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community visiting our Legislature. Founded in 1889, Ahmadi Muslims endeavour to exert the constructive influence of Islam through social projects, education, and health services. The world headquarters of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community is in London in the U.K. The Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Alberta is completing construction of a very large community centre in Calgary northeast, and many of our hon. members have been invited to its grand opening this summer.

Sitting in the Speaker's gallery today are Mr. Nasim Mahdi, head of the Ahmadiyya community in Canada, who is from Toronto, and Mr. Mohammad Ashraf Arif, the head of the Ahmadiyya community in western Canada. They are also joined in the public gallery by several members of the Ahmadiyya leadership in Alberta: from Edmonton Mr. Naimatullah Khan, Dr. Athar Nadeem Mian, Dr. Mirza Mohyuddin, Mr. Sayed Mobarak Ahmad, Mr. Khurram Bajwa, Mrs. Samina Mian; and from Calgary Mr. Naeem Bashir Chaudhry, Mr. Mubashir Ahmad Khalid, Mrs. Amtul Mateen Khan, Mr. Naeem Ullah Khan, and Wahid Hussain Khan, the young son of Amtul and Naeem Khan, who are my constituents. I would like to invite our guests to rise and receive the warmest welcome from the Assembly.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly some special guests from my constituency: George Dytyniak and his wife, Mary, daughter Julia, and George's mother, Maria. I'd like to make special mention of Evhen Dytyniak. Evhen is a page here at the Legislature. In fact, I believe he is working today. I'd like to congratulate Evhen. He has graduated from grade 12 from Archbishop MacDonald this year. He plans to continue his career by going to the University of Alberta in engineering, so perhaps one day when Evhen's done building this province, he'll return to this Chamber and maybe take over from the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and do what we do here. George and his family have been members of the Edmonton-Meadowlark community for the past 25 years. They are actively involved in the Ukrainian and Canadian communities. I extend my best to them, and I ask that they rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Seniors' Week

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to invite all Albertans to celebrate Seniors' Week, which runs from June 2 to 8. The theme for Seniors' Week 2008 is Our Seniors: Building a Stronger Alberta, which reflects the valuable role seniors play in our province today.

I encourage the members of this House and all Albertans to recognize the seniors in their lives for their contributions that have made such a difference. Older people provide us with a wealth of experience and knowledge. Families, individuals, and organizations depend on seniors in communities across the province, whether they are caring for grandchildren, helping neighbours in need, providing support and expertise to volunteer organizations, or just helping us young MLAs here in the Legislature. Our seniors helped to establish the values that shape and define our province, and their hard work will continue to benefit Albertans for generations to come.

This annual celebration of seniors is led by the Seniors' Advisory Council, which I currently chair, Mr. Speaker. Seniors' Week was launched this morning at the Calgary Zoo with seniors and Albertans of all ages taking in the festivities. The Minister of Seniors and Community Supports and other dignitaries also joined in the tribute to Albertan seniors. As well, many more events are being held across the province to celebrate Seniors' Week. Information on these activities is available on the Seniors and Community Supports website by following the Seniors' Week links.

Please join me in recognizing Alberta's 370,000 seniors by taking part in Seniors' Week activities across this province. Your participation will show appreciation to Alberta's seniors for their invaluable contribution to our families, communities, and province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Students in Free Enterprise

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I would like to pay tribute today to a group of students from Mount Royal College's Bissett School of Business and their program chair, Vance Gough. A few weeks ago the students became the teachers during a trip to CFB Wainwright to teach entrepreneurship and business skills to a group of soldiers who will be deployed this September to Afghanistan to serve with Canada's provincial reconstruction team in Kandahar.

The students taught the soldiers how to generate business ideas and how to analyze those ideas to determine their feasibility. The soldiers, in turn, will share that information with the citizens of Kandahar. The students also provided guidance on how the people of Kandahar could export what they make and the resources available to help them do that.

These Mount Royal students are members of Students in Free Enterprise, or SIFE, an international student organization that teaches community groups entrepreneurship, business ethics, and personal success skills. What they taught the soldiers at Wainwright is based on SIFE's mommy money program. It teaches entrepreneurship skills to young mothers to make a positive economic impact on their lives.

The weekend tutorial was organized by Mr. Gough, a reservist who has himself done a tour of duty in Afghanistan with the KPRT and who noted that a number of the soldiers who had done prior tours in Kandahar mentioned how they valued the information and wished that they'd had it for their earlier deployments.

Mr. Speaker, what happened at Wainwright will change some

people's lives for the better, and remembering that our troops are in Afghanistan not only to fight but also to rebuild, I believe it is entirely in keeping with Canada's traditional role of providing aid to those who need it and ultimately bringing peace to troubled lands.

I hope all members of the Legislature will join me in saluting students Mason Brookwell, Jennifer Lewis, Lesley Dovichak, and Casey Bray; program chair Vance Gough; the Bissett School of Business; and the innovators at Mount Royal, all of them, for yet another job well done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dreamspeakers Film Festival

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems like a only a generation ago that an aboriginal actor, director, or filmmaker was considered a novelty in the entertainment industry, but thanks to a compelling desire among aboriginal people to tell their stories with a fresh and unique perspective and with help from a growing support infrastructure, of which the Dreamspeakers international aboriginal film and television festival is a part, the indigenous presence in film is no longer considered an exception to the rule. Today aboriginal participation in filmmaking, television, and new media is increasing by leaps and bounds, and I'm happy to announce that Dreamspeakers is boldly backing this growth by showcasing their achievements.

This year Dreamspeakers will be showing more than 30 films created by aboriginal filmmakers from across Canada, the U.S., New Zealand, and Sweden as audiences bear witness to the fruits of their labour and the passion that was poured into each frame. From Gerald Auger's *Honour Thy Father* and Georgina Lightning's *Older than America* to Sandor Lau's *Squeegee Bandit* and Tom Hamilton's *Turquoise Rose*, each film offers insight into the hearts and minds of aboriginal people from all over the world and from both sides of the camera lens. As well, the festival's youth day will offer audiences a taste of what's in the minds of the next generation of aboriginal filmmakers.

The Dreamspeakers experience isn't just cinema. The first-ever international speakers series offers professional advice and perspectives on everything from animation and high definition to opportunities in new media and international distribution. There are also workshops, a pitch café, and the first-ever world film awards to round out this four-day event.

The Dene Tribe didn't have a word for filmmaking but use an endearing allegory to describe their craft. Years ago a Dene elder commented that a person making a movie was in fact talking one's dreams, hence the name of this festival. I'm happy to say that for the next four days you'll encounter the realization of a lot of dreams from a group of people who definitely have a lot to say. We invite everyone to come and enjoy the experience.

The Speaker: On a footnote to that last statement hon. members may wish to know that a number of scenes from the very excellent movie *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* were filmed in this Alberta Legislature Building.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

One Simple Act Program

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. June 1 to 7 is Environment Week, and earlier today I attended a special environment commemorating the occasion in our Legislature rotunda with our Premier and our Minister of Environment, who were showing just how easy it is to be environmentally friendly.

Our government's one simple act program, which was launched this morning, encourages Albertans to make small changes in their lives to help protect the environment. The premise, as you would expect, is quite simple: if Albertans will commit to one simple act such as using cold water more often to wash clothes or utilizing reusable bags while shopping, the cumulative impact of these changes would be enormous.

1:50

Albertans can commit to their own act on the web at www.onesimpleact.alberta.ca. The website will feature additional ideas for simple acts, photos of Albertans who have joined the cause, including the Premier, and a running total of the impact we've made together on behalf of Alberta's environment.

Mr. Speaker, at today's event the members of the Alberta Conservation Team were introduced. They are a number of young professionals and are very enthusiastic. I met a number of them this morning. I know they're going to do a tremendous job, including at community celebrations in each of our ridings throughout the summer. A big part of what the team will do will be to spread the word across the province about one simple act, and today's event inspired me to get involved. Last year my wife and I planted 10 dozen trees and shrubs, and this year we commit to doing all we can to keep every single one of them alive, which is a tall order for someone with a black thumb rather than a green thumb, but I'll do my best.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to challenge each member of this Assembly to make their own commitment, and I encourage them to be creative because 83 different acts would be a great start for the program. There is a pledge sheet on each desk in the Assembly. After each member has given it some thought, they're invited to leave the completed pledges on their desk for the pages to collect, which I'll report on later today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Nuclear Power

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a surge of interest in nuclear power, but the cost to the taxpayer can be staggering. The simple fact is that without massive public-sector subsidies, nuclear power plants are too great a risk for private investors. In the U.S., for example, there are public loan guarantees for up to 80 per cent of the cost of construction plus tax credits plus public coverage of insurance for project delays and liability. My question is to the Premier. Was nuclear power discussed with the government of Saskatchewan last week, and if so, what was the nature of the discussions?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, last week at the Western Premiers' Conference the Premiers talked about issues related to environment, trade with Ambassador Wilkins and Governor Freudenthal. We also talked about further progress on aboriginal education and issues tied to aboriginal health. There were a number of other items. At the closing news conference it was mentioned that all provinces will be looking at alternative energy sources and that the discussion centred around nuclear energy will be, of course, one of the discussions in terms of alternative energy sources for western Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Again to the Premier: can the Premier assure the people of Alberta that there will not be – not be – provincial loan guarantees to nuclear power plant developers in Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can guarantee that because we have significant legislation, passed in the early '90s, that prohibits any loan guarantees on behalf of the provincial taxpayer.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Again to the Premier: given that the nuclear industry faces huge insurance issues for both safety liabilities and completion delays, can the Premier assure Albertans that this government will not put the people of Alberta on the hook for these kinds of costs for the nuclear industry?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the government's Minister of Energy has appointed a five-member committee, five experts in the area of nuclear energy. They'll be bringing forward to government, to this House, their recommendations on how we approach Albertans with respect to the discussion of nuclear energy and all of the issues associated with making a decision, whether we support it or not as Albertans.

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

Northern Air Quality

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Rapid growth in the oil sands mining in Wood Buffalo threatens groundwater, surface water, and air quality along with the health of plants, animals, and humans. Albertans are deeply concerned about the impacts of our industrial activity in the province, especially in this area, where there's been weak investment in monitoring the long-term health impacts. People want to know that the government takes very seriously their responsibility to monitor and enforce limits. To the Minister of Environment: has a cap on total emissions in the Wood Buffalo region airshed been established for hydrogen sulfide, oxides of sulfur and nitrogen, and particulates?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, that cap has not been established. That doesn't mean that there will not be one. Just as we have announced in the Industrial Heartland, where we have a heavy concentration of industrial development, a cap that will apply for development in this particular airshed, we are in the process of developing a similar kind of cap that will apply in the oil sands in the Fort McMurray area.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. How many times in the last year, Mr. Minister, have measurements exceeded regulations in that region?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't have the exact number, but I can tell the hon. member that, quite frankly, there are instances where hydrogen sulphide has resulted in an exceedance, and in such cases orders have been issued. There are a number of reasons why these exceedances occurred. I don't want to get into all of the detail today, but, needless to say, we find this to be unacceptable, and we are taking the necessary initiatives to make sure that it doesn't happen.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope the minister will table in the House the number of prosecutions that have been made.

My final question: how many prosecutions have resulted from these exceedances?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, orders have been issued. In some cases prosecution is not always the best way. It is a system that we have in place that is not unlike many other laws. If someone is exceeding their requirements, we advise them to find out what the problem is, to correct it, and if they do not or cannot correct it, then a prosecution may proceed.

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

Cancer Services

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been very few details given yet on how the dissolution of the Alberta Cancer Board will impact the expertise found within the organization. As the Cancer Board was one of the most highly sophisticated organizations of its kind, we need to know that this status will be maintained as it is folded into the new Alberta Health Services Board, the new health superboard. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: will the Cancer Board merge into the Alberta Health Authority, or will it continue to operate as a separate organization reporting to the Alberta Health Services Board?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the delivery of cancer services will be integrated into the Alberta Health Services Board. However, currently there is no change in the administration of the Alberta Cancer Board nor in the research dollars that they are incurring and investing. What has changed is the fact that the interim board for the Alberta health services authority is now the board of the Alberta Cancer Board.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If what the minister says is correct in terms of what is coming down the pike, can the minister ensure that the changes in terms of delivery in placing that under the Alberta Health Authority will not impact the day-to-day operations of the people doing the actual work of the Alberta Cancer Board?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, in fact, what will happen when it's an integrated service is that it will actually improve the patient flow. We know that those delivering cancer services are of the highest quality, and we want to maintain that in Alberta.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. I can't resist that opening. How, Mr. Minister, will it improve the delivery and the flow of cancer patients through the system? How will it work? Details, please.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I don't deliver health services in Alberta. That will be the responsibility of the Alberta Health Services Board working with those who are currently employed by the Alberta Cancer Board to ensure that that happens.

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

Lieutenant Governor's Residence

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Thousands of Albertans are living on the street, and Alberta taxpayers are about to get stiffed with a \$10 million bill for a posh new mansion for the Lieutenant Governor. Just before the election plans were shelved, no doubt to defuse a potentially damaging election issue. Last month in the estimates debate the Premier admitted that after scrapping these plans, the Tories are quietly planning to get the money train rolling again. My question is to the Premier. At a time when the most recent counts show that more than 6,000 men, women, and children are homeless in the province of Alberta, why is this government planning to spend \$10 million to build a mansion for one person?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the cost of the house for the Lieutenant Governor is going to be. The Lieutenant Governor did have a residence in the city of Edmonton. It is quite a number of years since I was Minister of Infrastructure, but I know that it was on a number of lots. We have sold some of the lots. We're looking at building a new home for the Lieutenant Governor at a different location. In terms of the plans and the costs I'll defer to the Minister of Infrastructure.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, we know that this is going to be very, very expensive, indeed. My question is to the Premier. It's going to be millions of dollars. You can pretend you don't know the exact figure, but how can you spend that much money on a mansion for one person when there are thousands of Albertans with no home at all?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the residence is not for the individual that currently serves as the Lieutenant Governor; it's for the office of the Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta. The Lieutenant Governor hosts many individuals that come to this province, hosts many people from Alberta on very special occasions recognizing volunteer service, fire service: just a whole host of different activities. I firmly believe this is a worthwhile investment. On the other side of the coin, with respect to housing for Albertans that's why we did put \$285 million into the budget. We are catching up with the needs for new homes, affordable housing in the province.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is trying to throw dust in Albertans' eyes because he knows as well as I do that Government House is available to host those functions, and that's what it's for. My question is this: given that the Saskatchewan government houses their Lieutenant Governor in a three-bedroom condo worth about \$400,000, why is the Premier insistent upon building a multimillion dollar palace on the taxpayers' dime?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government has a tremendous amount of respect for the role of the Lieutenant Governor. I'm not about to stand and tear down tradition of this great province. I know that there is a healthy history with respect to the Lieutenant Governor. I believe that in about 1935 one of our former Premiers shut off the power and the water over some disagreement over legislation that was passed in this very same Assembly. But it is tradition. I hope we don't turn back so quickly on the past 100 years, in which Albertans have achieved so much in this great country.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

One Simple Act Program

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today in the Legislative rotunda the Premier and Minister of Environment launched the one simple act program and challenged Albertans to be good environmental stewards. My question is to the Minister of Environment. No doubt this program is a step in the right direction, but I'm curious to know how he thinks taking a shorter shower or planting a tree will have any tangible result on improving Alberta's environment in the bigger picture.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, it's a very good question. If only one person took a shorter shower or planted a tree, it would have very minimal impact, but this program is a province-wide program that we're encouraging all Albertans to participate in. If thousands of people take shorter showers and thousands of people plant trees, the cumulative effect is dramatic. That's what this program is all about. We'll be maintaining that accumulator on our website so Albertans will be able to see the progress that they're making.

Mr. Johnston: Mr. Speaker, my only supplemental is to the same minister. You're saying that these pledges will add up, but how do you expect 3 million Albertans to know about this program?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, along with the announcement of the one simple act program this morning I also had the pleasure of introducing the Alberta Conservation Team. This is a group of young people, four different teams of young people, that will be travelling all around the province over the summer visiting community events, fairs, rodeos, trade shows with the information at hand, with the pledge forms at hand. If the weekend that I spent with that team in Medicine Hat is any indication of the enthusiasm that they have as well as the warm response that the public gave to that team, I think this program is going to be one of the most successful we've had.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

School Nutrition Programs

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Decisions taken last week show that this government is clearly feeling generous with taxpayer dollars, so I want to once again raise a concern for hungry schoolchildren in this province. This government, to my knowledge, alone among provinces, refuses to target any funds specifically to the thousands of Alberta schoolchildren who are at risk for hunger. My question is to the Minister of Education. Does this minister agree that hunger is a real problem for thousands of schoolchildren in Alberta?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, hunger is a problem for any child who goes to school without having the opportunity to have a breakfast or who doesn't have the opportunity to take a lunch. Whether that affects thousands of schoolchildren across the province is not something that I have numbers at hand, but certainly we have to make sure that in every school there's an opportunity for children to be ready to learn, and that means having access to appropriate food.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the evidence is clear that thousands of kids do go to school hungry every day in Alberta through no fault of their own, and many of them are four, five, and six years old, and given what the minister just said, will he do the right thing and go to bat in next year's budget for funding for school nutrition programs in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not so simple as a school nutrition program for every school in Alberta. Obviously, we want to encourage schools to have nutritious snacks in their machines and those sorts of issues, but we also need to encourage communities. This is not about government paying for everything, government organizing everything. This is about how communities come together to meet essential needs. When I was minister of intergovernmental and aboriginal affairs, I saw a wonderful program in Red Deer, for example, where the community came together with initiatives from the community to make sure that children at that particular school in Red Deer had a lunch, that there was a hot breakfast on a Monday morning. These are initiatives that can come from the community and be specific to the needs of the area.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, I feel like this minister and this government is willfully ignorant, willfully blind on this issue. Given that this government has refused for years to act on this issue, how can the people of Alberta convince this government that hunger in schools among children as young as four and five years old is a serious problem?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, this Wednesday right here at the Legislature we're going to be celebrating with a group of students in a school that won an award for the program that they have which promotes school nutrition and promotes the idea of children being able to have the food that they need so they can be ready to learn. This is the type of thing that a community can do. Government doesn't do everything for everybody. People come together to make sure that needs in the community are fulfilled, and government's role is to be there to backstop that, to be there to encourage that, to be there to make sure that the resources are there to do it. And if anybody is willfully ignorant or ignorant at all, it would be the people on the other side.

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

Deerfoot Trail Noise Abatement

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased with the construction of ring roads and the improvement of Deerfoot Trail in Calgary. Recently I received an announcement from the Ministry of Transportation for the Deerfoot Trail interchange improvement project at Barlow Trail and Peigan Trail in my constituency. Last year I had raised this noise barrier at this intersection. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Transportation. How can my hard-working constituents request that a noise barrier wall be constructed to reduce a persistent and unbearable traffic noise affecting their life at home after long days at work?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have completed a noise study at that location in February of this year, and the study found that a noise wall is warranted. We plan to hold an open house within the next month or two to explain options to the residents. We'll also be

getting their feedback, which is very important, and if a strong majority of affected residents want a noise wall, we'll start on the design and get the project on the construction program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The answer from our hon. minister sort of nullified my next two questions. Thank you very much.

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

2:10

Northern Air Quality

(continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's no secret that Alberta is among the top polluters in Canada in greenhouse gas emissions. These are clearly correlated with other pollutants: oxides of sulphur, nitrogen, and particulates. Five of the top 10 emitters in Canada are right here in Alberta. A number of scientists, Albertans, and, increasingly, our markets believe we are not protecting the environment responsibly. This government is spending \$25 million in a greenwashing campaign that will now focus on individual behaviour change. To the minister: given that your own government's report indicates this week that hydrogen sulphide concentrations, a potent neurotoxin, have doubled in the area since 1999, what are you doing about it?

Mr. Renner: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear: the \$25 million that the member refers to is not in my budget. The program that I introduced today has nothing to do with that. This is a program that I believe, that my ministry believes, that Albertans believe is important. Albertans want to take a role and play a part in protecting the environment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A spokesman for the Environment department stated that hydrogen sulphide is a problem as it leaks out of the tailings ponds. Not only do these ponds contaminate groundwater, but they're also leaking hydrogen sulphide. What is the government doing about this today?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, H₂S is an issue, and there are issues that we're dealing with. One of them is by issuing compliance certificates. We talked about that earlier. The other is through CASA, the Clean Air Strategic Alliance. This organization has been more than successful. In fact, they're recognized world-wide as an organization that has solved a huge number of air issues. This is the latest project that they're working on, the H₂S issue, as well as ambient air quality issues in the Fort McMurray area.

The Speaker: The hon. Member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the seriousness of the conclusion of your own reports, will you admit that the failure to set a cap on emissions in the Wood Buffalo region is risking the health of Albertans?

Mr. Renner: No, Mr. Speaker. The report that this member refers to is the background information that was prepared for CASA so that they can begin to do what so successfully has been done in other

areas in the province; for example, the dealing with flaring has been tremendously successful. We expect the same kind of success to take effect when they review the overall issue in the Fort McMurray area and ambient air qualities in general. We'll be implementing this in very quick order.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans woke up this morning to some very disturbing reports in the media about declining air quality in the oil sands region. I would like to ask the Minister of Environment this afternoon to talk with us specifically about the clean air strategy. To the minister: what action has been taken to update the clean air strategy since its implementation in 1991?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, there's one area that I think we need to be clear on. The member talked about the poor air quality, the deteriorating air quality in the Fort McMurray area. Clearly, the report that the member is referring to talks about the increasing air quality in other parts of the province and those similar kinds of increases in quality not being seen in the Fort McMurray area. So let's not assume that we have bad air quality in Fort McMurray; we're just not getting the improvement that we're seeing in some other places in the province.

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, just one supplementary to the same minister on this issue. The clean air strategy is the primary mechanism by which the government of Alberta provides assurance to Albertans that air will be clean now and in the future. Notwithstanding the minister's comments about the Fort McMurray region in particular, can the minister please share with the House what specific issues he expects the review of the clean air strategy to address?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The clean air strategy that the member refers to has not been updated for some time, and we've asked CASA in the course of their business to have a review of that strategy and to make recommendations to us on improvements that need to be made. In the meantime I think we have to distinguish between ambient air quality and the specific instance that we're dealing with with respect to hydrogen sulphide. This is an issue that is very localized in nature, and we're taking immediate action to have it dealt with.

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

Learning Resources Centre

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Learning Resources Centre purchases textbooks and other resources involved for sales to schools, saving a significant amount of funds, which can then be directed to other important services and programs at schools throughout the province. The centre is able to access greater discounts than schools can and also incurs the shipping costs. However, the projected value of goods being sold by the centre this year is less than what was sold last year. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Given the savings that this centre generates, why are fewer goods being sold this year?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I have absolutely no idea. It's not a policy question; it's a question about a function and a business

process. A proper approach for the hon. member would be to write to my office if he's really interested in that or to put a written question on the Order Paper. But asking for detailed information about a specific business operation is not the purview of question period.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Well, thank you. That was not only a sidestep; that was three steps back.

This was a point that was brought up by the Auditor General, who considered it a concern because thousands of dollars, millions of dollars can be saved by the government's own discounting policies. Given that purchases made through the centre are direct cost savings to schools, is it the case that schools are not being informed and encouraged by the government to use this centre? When I was teaching, this centre provided a 40 per cent discount.

Mr. Hancock: No, Mr. Speaker. The school boards are being encouraged to use the centre.

There could be any number of reasons why less goods were purchased this year than last year if that's in fact the case. It could be that they might have needed fewer goods this year than last year. It might be that they bought more last year and had some left over for this year. There are all sorts of reasons why you could buy less this year than last year. It might be prudent budgeting. It might be better use of resources. There are a number of explanations, and if he wishes to persist in this area, I could give him a list of the potential explanations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was always a hardship every year in my classes to have textbooks for each child.

Since the Auditor General has made repeated recommendations to periodically evaluate the savings generated by the Learning Resources Centre, will the minister work to ensure that as many schools as possible use this centre to ensure the maximum amount of savings for schools?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we will work to ensure that school resources are available and that bulk buying opportunities are available. We'll work to ensure that the Learning Resources Centre can ensure that school boards and schools can acquire the resources they need at the lowest possible prices. But we will also respect the local autonomy of school boards and schools with respect to the decisions they make with respect to where they're getting their resources and how they're getting their resources. We would assume that they would buy them from the Learning Resources Centre because of the discounts that we can provide because of the bulk buying value. But we don't mandate that because, in fact, we have locally elected school boards with the right to make their own decisions.

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

Northern Air Quality

(continued)

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For decades this government has given priority to corporate profit over the environment and health of Albertans. In the northeast the air quality is so compromised that people in the Fort Chip area talk about tasting it if you forget to breathe through your nose. The government's own report

projects air pollution to go to three times the 2005 level by 2015. To the Minister of Environment: why won't the government stand up for the health of Albertans, stop allowing damage to the health of our citizens, perform its own simple act, and impose real emission reduction standards?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what the cumulative effects agenda is all about: establishing what the ambient air quality objectives are and then making decisions on a project-by-project basis, that will lead in the long run to the desired outcomes. What the member fails to realize is that we have some of the most stringent laws in place in North America right now. We need to do it better, we need to plan better, and we are.

Ms Notley: Well, I don't think we can wait much longer for the long run. The minister's staff appear willing to allow Syncrude to wait at least a year before reducing sulphur dioxide emissions. Why has it taken so long for the government to act on this, and why do Albertans have to spend another year breathing toxic air when this government has known about the problem for years?

2:20

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, sometimes it takes time to make the necessary investment and construct the necessary equipment to have significant impact. With respect to H₂S, hydrogen sulphide, construction is under way, and in 2009 Syncrude's emissions of sulphur dioxide will drop by over a hundred tonnes per day due to the upcoming construction of additional scrubbing equipment. Those are the kinds of significant investments that have to be put in place and are being put in place. Albertans will see significant change as a result.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Well, my final question is to the minister of health. The Wood Buffalo Environmental Association is expected to assess human exposure to air pollutants, but Alberta Health and Wellness still hasn't released the 2006 data for Fort Mackay and Fort McMurray First Nations. Why is the minister dragging his feet and withholding this important health information that residents of the northeast need to see?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the report will be released within the next month. There's no dragging of the feet and all of the other preamble comments that the member makes. It'll be out in the next month.

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

Occupational Health and Safety Code

Mr. Elniski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, as a member of the Canadian Society of Safety Engineering I'm always interested in how government keeps up with the changing needs of society, especially as it relates to workplace safety. I notice that a public consultation on revisions to the occupational health and safety code is under way. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Revisions to the code were made not long ago. Why are we doing it again?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is committed to workplace health and safety, and we try to stay on top

of technology changes, the emerging trends, and the various issues that are out there. The occupational health and safety code took effect in April of 2004. We are responding to stakeholder requests for more timely reviews, and as part of that response we established a process of biennial reviews. Revisions from the first review took effect in February 2007, and our current one will be completed at the end of this coming year.

Mr. Elniski: Can the minister give us specifics when it comes to some of the revisions being contemplated?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the review process starts by receiving stakeholder suggestions for changes. We have working groups – including industry, labour, and government representatives – that review and assess the various suggestions. Then they will develop the recommendations. Right now they're draft recommendations that address over 200 suggested changes to provisions of the code along with revisions to exposures for limits for nearly 150 chemicals that are out there. I won't go through the list. Those are available on the website, and I'd encourage everybody to have a look at them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is again to the same minister. What is the deadline for Albertans to submit their thoughts on the draft recommendations?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the period for public comment will come to a close on Monday, June 30. The working group will reconvene after that. They'll review the comments and finalize their recommendations. Those recommendations then go to our Occupational Health and Safety Council for review and then are finally submitted to me for a decision. I look forward to that whole process, one that really encourages Albertans to get involved and eventually make Alberta a healthier and safer place to work.

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

Gaming

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Much like casino owners in Las Vegas, the Alberta government continues to roll the dice with further expansion of gaming in the province. That said, as the government continues to organize more crap games, the economic well-being of many Albertans continues to come up snake eyes. As part of the responsible gaming strategy for 2005-2006 AADAC recommended offering training and intervention programs at financial institutions and other nontraditional points. Can the Solicitor General provide an update on the status of these innovative approaches?

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

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* I'd just want to explain that we're not planning on further expansion to any casinos in the province at this particular time. In regard to social responsibility we have an organization in the province called AGRI, which we fund, that does a lot of gaming research. We have requested them to focus on the social responsibility side for us this year, and we will have a number of projects implemented for them to report back to us on to ensure that gaming in Alberta continues to be managed in a socially responsible way.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the Solicitor General for bringing up the research dollars spent. On that note it comes to my attention that about \$1.6 million a year is spent on research, yet a large portion of the \$1.5 billion raised in this province comes from problem gambling. The question is to the Solicitor General. Do you think we could see a commitment to more research dollars going into these programs to help many Albertans who are dealing with addiction issues through gambling?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, AGRI is only one of the agencies that we fund and one of the directions that we take in regard to social responsibility involving gambling. Within the AGLC we also have a number of initiatives, again, to encourage people to gamble responsibly and to enjoy their time when they are in our casinos. One of the recently launched initiatives was around setting a limit and staying within it. It's more than just AGRI. We also have social responsibility centres within our casinos as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's share of gaming revenue has skyrocketed, like I said, to in excess of \$1.5 billion. A high percentage of revenue does come from problem gamblers. How about prohibiting ATMs in any premises containing a VLT that is not a casino, as has been recommended by many in AADAC and others?

Mr. Lindsay: Again, Mr. Speaker, in regard to lottery revenue this money does go back into Alberta communities and benefits them immensely.

Recruitment Fees for Foreign Workers

Mr. Xiao: With Alberta's shortage of skilled labour, Mr. Speaker, employment agencies are actively recruiting people from other jurisdictions to work in our province. I've heard of a number of occasions where some employment agencies are forcing foreign workers to sign agreements requiring them to pay thousands of dollars in recruitment fees, a practice which is illegal in Alberta. My questions are for the Minister of Service Alberta. What are you doing to stop this practice?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To put it simply, in most cases it is illegal for an employment agency to charge a fee for helping someone find work in Alberta. An agency may charge a fee for services such as resumé preparation, but it cannot force anyone to purchase these services. As well, an employment agency must be licensed by Service Alberta. Most employment agencies are following the law, but in cases where they aren't, we most certainly will investigate.

Mr. Xiao: My first supplemental to the same minister: has legal action been taken against any employment agency to stop it from charging recruitment fees to foreign workers?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Mr. Speaker, the department has a number of investigations under way in response to consumer complaints about employment agencies. There is a range of steps that Service Alberta can take against an employment agency. Its licence could be suspended or cancelled. We could issue a director's order which stipulates changes the agency must make and the consequences for

not making them. It could also prohibit the agency from operating in Alberta until it becomes licensed and operates within the law. Finally, charges can be laid against an agency for violating the Fair Trading Act.

Mr. Xiao: My final supplemental to the same minister: what is your department doing to inform foreign workers that they don't have to pay recruitment fees to employment agencies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are working closely with our counterparts at Employment and Immigration and the federal government to ensure that employers, workers, and employment agencies are aware of our regulations and requirements. We're also connecting directly with representatives of immigrants and foreign workers to ensure that they understand our regulations. We want to make sure that workers who come to Alberta are treated with fairness and respect by employment agencies, and we're working hard to achieve that.

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

2:30 Land Titles Examiners

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Land titles examiners perform a very important function for Albertans. They perform a legal examination of all land-related documentation to ensure compliance with applicable legislation, case law, policies, and procedures. However, these public employees are classified as administrative support by Service Alberta and are paid on that scale. To the Minister of Service Alberta: can the minister explain how corporate human resources came to the conclusion that land titles examiners are to be classified as admin support and paid on that scale?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are working very hard with corporate human resources to review the pay of land titles examiners to ensure it is in line with other public- and private-sector employees performing similar work, which goes across all government departments. In the longer term we are undertaking a detailed classification review of the position to ensure that the classification and pay reflect the training, skill level, and importance of the job. This will take time, but we are also looking for an interim solution that will work until the classification review can be completed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the minister would go so far as to commit to an independent job audit for land titles examiners.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know there was a comprehensive study that was done with respect to the land titles examiners that was released. We are working very hard with the examiners, corporate human resources, and the staff to ensure that the outcome treats them equitably and that what they get is fair and that they are recognized for the hard work they are doing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Then if it is determined that land titles examiners should be classified differently, with a higher rate of pay than administrative support, will the minister commit to appropriate compensation with retroactivity for several years of being underpaid and undervalued?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to comment on retroactivity. The concern to me is that we are working with them on a day-to-day basis trying to resolve this. Since I became minister, this has certainly concerned me, and I am prepared to reach a conclusion as soon as we can and to make sure that whatever we do is fair and that it reflects what's happening across all Alberta departments.

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

Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every one of us here today is concerned about the environment, especially those who work in the agriculture industry as farmers were the first environmentalists. The challenge has always been to balance sound environmental stewardship with the financial bottom line. This is becoming more and more important as domestic and export markets are looking for green products that are made in an environmentally friendly way. My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. What is Alberta doing to support farming that is both environmental and sustainable?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, we certainly have been active, and Alberta agriculture has implemented several programs that contribute to environmental stewardship and sound farm managing practices. We have the agriculture environmental programing, we have environmentally sustainable agriculture, we have the Alberta farm stewardship program, and we have the environmental farm plan. These programs continue to evolve to ensure that the agriculture industry is profitable.

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: can you please explain how these programs are changing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you. Through the environmental partnership we continue to co-ordinate environmental strategies and initiatives as part of the land-use framework, and we certainly look to the climate change action plan and Water for Life initiatives. Producers are rewarded for their involvement in these programs. For example, producers can sell their carbon credit offsets. Another key to our approach is the recently announced Institute for Agriculture, Forestry and the Environment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: can you please explain what this institute is and what it will accomplish?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, this institute will increase stewardship by ensuring that the market recognizes environmentally friendly agriculture and forestry practices. Two of the key deliverables are to develop a framework

where producers are rewarded for environmental goods and services and to enable producers to demonstrate to customers the environmental value of their products. This reflects what farmers have always known: taking care of environment is just plain good business.

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

High-speed Rail Link

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall the Ministry of Transportation was supposed to receive the results of a study about the feasibility of a high-speed rail link between Calgary and Edmonton. Here we are many months later, and Albertans have yet to see or hear anything. Albertans are suffering under high gas prices, and there's widespread support for public transit alternatives. My questions are to the Minister of Transportation. What is the holdup, and when will the results of this study be released to Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was a very good question. We did get a report. I don't know when it came in, but it came in a little while ago, and we've got it in our department. We're analyzing all the results right now, and when we're ready, we'll release it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: can the minister guarantee to this House that this is not simply another example of government studying an issue to death so as to avoid actually addressing it?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I will agree with the hon. member that we do a little extra studying every now and then, but I don't think this particular one is one of those. I think that there are a lot of different things within that report that have to be analyzed, and we'll get the report out in due time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day we wait, it becomes more difficult to put together the land required for this rail link, so why isn't the government doing that one step as soon as possible?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we do have a process within this government, and we always follow process. Right now my department is looking at different transportation utility corridors within the province. As you know, we established the ones for the Edmonton ring roads 30 years ago. I think that in the next 30 to 40 years we're going to need outer ring roads. We're working on a process right now so that we can take it through our cabinet policy committees. We're going to do the same thing with our high-speed rail corridor.

Education Programs for Immigrants

Mr. Benito: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is welcoming thousands of new immigrants each year, and the challenge is for them to adjust to life in Alberta. They have different skill levels and face language barriers, age differences, and a wide variety of learning back-

grounds. Will the Minister of Education consider a separate school that would focus on immigrant education?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question of special schools would actually fall to a specific school board, and they are certainly welcome to initiate schools if they believe that that's the best way for them to serve their school populations. School jurisdictions in other provinces are considering those types of schools, and we'll certainly watch their progress.

Right now provincially we focus on the ESL, English as a Second Language, programming, the purpose of which is to facilitate the integration of students into a regular school program. The range of language and literacy proficiency of ESL students is increasing, including refugee students with complex needs and limited formal schooling. We recently held a research seminar, and the three residential universities in the province participated. We'll be posting the results.

Mr. Benito: To the same minister. A particularly at-risk population that needs special attention from our educational system is the young children of immigrant families. What is the minister doing to improve educational outcomes for children who have had no prior exposure to formal education?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we do know that language development is a cornerstone to learning, and young children gain experience with the English language by focusing on communication and literacy. This approach will enhance their later school success. We do recognize that students who come from homes that are non English speaking or where minimal English is spoken need special support, but that support goes beyond language. We do need to also co-ordinate resources from a health perspective, from a children and youth services perspective, in fact the types of wraparound services that are necessary when a child is adjusting not only to a new language but to a new culture and a new cultural climate. There's a lot of work that can be done. We do need specifically to focus on our early learners.

2:40

Mr. Benito: I appreciate that there's a lot of good work being done, Mr. Speaker, but it seems that much of it is piecemeal. Will the minister commit to pursuing a broader strategy for immigrant education to ensure that these new Albertans also benefit from our world-class educational system?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker. There are two areas where we are working on comprehensive strategies. The first, of course, is with the English as a Second Language programming. We're working on a comprehensive strategy for K to 12 English as a Second Language, and that will be available to schools right across the province to help integrate immigrant students into the classroom and have them develop an early facility for the use of the language.

The other area where we need to have better co-ordination is in the amassing of resources in the community – the health resources, the community resources, and the educational resources – to make sure that at-risk students have the support they need to be ready to learn.

Crime Reduction and Safe Communities

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's robust economy is generating many good initiatives, but there is also a downside in an increase in crime, and many Albertans are expressing concern over safety and security in their neighbourhoods. While police continue to do an excellent job of law enforcement, the hard fact is that there are currently about 200,000 outstanding warrants in Alberta, and about 8,000 of these involve serious or violent crimes. My questions are for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. What is being done to bring these fugitives to justice?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Safe and secure communities are certainly a priority for this government. This February we implemented two fugitive apprehension sheriff support teams – each team has five officers – one working out of Calgary, one out of Edmonton. They work closely with the local police. These teams target offenders with outstanding warrants to get them off the streets and prevent them from reoffending and revictimizing Albertans.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: have these teams been having any success in clearing outstanding warrants?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to report that more than 400 warrants have been cleared between February and the end of May. We will soon launch a website to let Albertans know which fugitives are at large so that they can contact a team if they have any tips or information on how to locate these fugitives.

Mr. Dallas: To the same minister. Reducing and preventing crime is a collective responsibility and should not be left solely to police. What can Albertans do to help?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, all Albertans have a role to play in reducing crime. I encourage anyone to call Crime Stoppers if they believe a crime has occurred or if they know the whereabouts of someone who is unlawfully at large. Albertans can also help by reporting suspicious activity to their local police, making sure their homes and property are secure, and getting involved in local crime prevention programs.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 105 questions and responses today.

In 30 seconds from now we'll go back to our Routine with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

My Wild Alberta Website

Mr. Berger: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to speak today about the launch of My Wild Alberta, a new website dedicated to Alberta's hunting and fishing communities. My Wild Alberta is an outgrowth of our passion as Albertans for hunting and fishing and an expression of the value we place on the province's hunting and fishing communities. As we strive to ensure that the proud traditions of hunting and fishing continue to thrive in Alberta and as we seek to promote understanding of these traditions among the public, having a strong community is as important as it has ever been. The goal of My Wild Alberta is to provide a website where hunters and anglers across the province can find useful information and where they can build community connections. In creating this site, the government

of Alberta and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development aim to foster the growth and continuation of hunting and fishing, traditions that have spanned many generations.

In addition to community building, My Wild Alberta is strongly focused on the conservation and responsible stewardship of Alberta's fish, wildlife, and land resources. Hunters are among the most committed conservationists in Alberta, and as the self-admitted wild guy the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View is fond of saying: a lake without a fisherman is a lake without a friend.

Congratulations to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development for spearheading this innovative website. No matter where you live in Alberta, whether in a city or a rural community, everyone has a little bit of My Wild Alberta in them and the ability to access My Wild Alberta both on the web and in real life.

Thank you.

Canadian Skills Competition

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, the Wednesday before last marked the start of the annual provincial skills competition, a two-day Olympic-style event that allows students and apprentices to demonstrate their top-notch trades and technology skills in a countless multitude of areas. Every year this event draws participants from across the province, and this year was no exception, with more than 600 of Alberta's most talented high school and postsecondary students and apprentices competing in more than 40 different areas of trades and technology. Areas of competition ranged from welding and graphic design to auto services and from landscape gardening to the culinary arts.

This year is an exciting one because Alberta also hosted the national skills competition, which ran from May 27 to May 29. This competition drew participants and spectators from across our great country as well as delegates from other countries. The winners from this year's Canadian competition will become part of Team Canada and will go on to represent our country in September 2009, when Alberta welcomes the world to the international competition, WorldSkills Calgary 2009.

Mr. Speaker, I must note that Alberta's students certainly demonstrated to all of Canada their skill, passion, and success. Our secondary and postsecondary competitors won a combined total of 31 medals: 11 gold, 7 silver, and 13 bronze.

Skills competitions are also important because they demonstrate how students can connect learning and work. Today's students are tomorrow's workforce. The provincial and national skills competitions help to ensure that our students are well prepared to leave school, ready for the world of work and higher learning.

I'm pleased to rise today to honour this initiative, the many talented competitors, Skills Canada, Skills Canada Alberta, and the hundreds of volunteers dedicated to making this competition a success.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of Ms Denise Costigan of Edmonton. Ms Costigan is concerned with the level of funding allocated to lung cancer research in comparison with funds allocated to other types of cancer research. She has invested considerable time and effort to engage and educate Albertans about this important issue. Ms Costigan has collected 1,114 signatures, 448 of which are in appropriate form to be presented to the House today.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by Albertans from many constituencies in both Calgary and Edmonton. The petition reads as follows:

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

Thank you.

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

Mr. Dallas: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition that started in Red Deer and is signed by 28 people from across the province. The petition urges the government to "implement pre-, peri- and postnatal Midwife service as a core health care coverage under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan for all Albertans."

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon a petition, which reads:

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

This petition is signed by citizens from Taber, Alberta.

Thank you.

2:50

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to present a petition signed by a number of people from Calgary, Edmonton, and Okotoks urging the Legislative Assembly to in turn urge the government to commission an independent inquiry into the government's administration of or involvement with the LAPP, the public service pension plan, and the Alberta teachers' retirement fund.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think I'm coming down the home stretch here because I just have people signing this petition from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, and Beaumont. They are asking for the government to convene an independent inquiry around the local authorities pension plan, the public service pension plan, and the Alberta teachers' retirement fund.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, present some petitions 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." This petition has been signed by people from Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan, and Sherwood Park.

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have four petitions here signed by concerned Albertans from Calgary, Edmonton, and other places. It reads:

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

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have an additional 180 signatures, bringing the total to over a thousand, this time from Calgarians calling upon the Legislative Assembly to "pass legislation that will prohibit emotional bullying and psychological harassment in the workplace."

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 18 pages of signatures from Albertans all across the province petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to

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

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have petitions signed from Albertans from Calgary, Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan, and Sherwood Park asking that there be a public inquiry into the government's involvement with the local authorities pension plan, the public service pension plan, and the Alberta teachers' retirement fund.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 23 Weed Control Act

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 23.

The Weed Control Act currently provides authority to deal with native and introduced weed species that impact agricultural production. The rewriting of this existing act provides cohesiveness to the legislation through reorganizing, updating, and clarifying provisions. Clarity is provided in detailing the legal obligations, notice provisions, inspection powers, appeal mechanisms, and enforcement provisions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 23, the Weed Control Act, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 74.1(1)(a) I would move that Bill 23, the Weed Control Act, be referred to the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment for its review and that this committee report the bill back to the Assembly in the fourth week of October 2008.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Bill 24 Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 24, the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

This new act will replace the Dependent Adults Act, which was first enacted in 1978 and went to extensive review in 2005-2006. More than 4,300 people shared their views during the review, and the government has listened.

Bill 24 introduces new safeguards to protect people who need help making decisions about their well-being or finances, including a new screening process for co-decision-makers, guardians, and trustees and new investigative powers for the office of the public guardian and the office of the Public Trustee. It also provides for a continuum of options, increasing the number of choices available to adults who need help making decisions. In addition, this bill introduces a new capacity assessment model that will provide standardized guidelines for professionals completing assessments. The legislation balances the protecting of adults who are unable to make decisions for themselves while preserving their autonomy as much as possible.

I'd ask for support.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 74.1(1)(a) I would move that Bill 24, the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act, be referred to the Standing Committee on Health for its review and that this committee report the bill back to the Assembly in the fourth week of October 2008.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 25 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2008

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure today to seek leave to introduce Bill 25, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2008.

By tradition, Mr. Speaker, miscellaneous statutes contain typically a number of provisions which are noncontentious. I'll just briefly list those acts which are affected by this particular bill: the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Act, the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities Act, and the Police Act.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a first time]

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

**Bill 26
Labour Relations Amendment Act, 2008**

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 26, the Labour Relations Amendment Act, 2008.

Mr. Speaker, this act will protect public safety by prohibiting strikes or lockouts and introducing compulsory arbitration for ambulance operators and their employees. This act will also restrict the practices of salting and market enhancement recovery funds in the construction industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of the final report of the Government Committee Reviewing Labour Relations in the Construction Industry. The committee included government MLAs and members of the unionized and non-unionized construction sectors. We examined the practices of salting and MERFing and consulted with stakeholders and the Alberta Labour Relations Board.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you. I have two tablings, Mr. Speaker. One is five copies of a letter from a music student at the U of A, Craig Goueffic. Craig writes very clearly about his concerns with the department of music's and fine arts' deteriorating infrastructure. He noted that this year during the snow melt the roof leaked on many musical instruments and damaged them. He also writes about the number of locker break-ins, lack of funding for adequate security, and the condition of the department's practice rooms, pianos, and noisy heating units. The list goes on. It's time we invest in the fine arts.

Secondly, I'm tabling five copies of a letter from Lynn Webber. Lynn is concerned about the Department of Sustainable Resource Development's approach to reducing the wolf packs in the Clearwater area, west of Rocky Mountain House. She cites human development, not the wolves, as the primary reason for declining numbers of elk, moose, and other animals.

Thank you.

3:00

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of letters written to me by David Gurnett, Daniel Kautz, Celeste Fleming, Marika Sidoruk, Jason Wolfe, Michael Lewis, Marg Hayne, Chris Klitbo, Louis Webb, and Janine Descoteaux. They're all writing with their concerns and requests that Alberta's labour law should be changed with five changes, including first contract legislation and outlawing the use of replacement workers among others.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. I have five letters to table

this afternoon. They're from residents of the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. They are writing, encouraging the government to treat all workers in Alberta fairly. They would like to see five significant changes to the labour laws, and it has nothing to do with Bill 26. They are Tom Trotter, Ben Bartok, Duncan L. Macdonald, Glen McMurray, and the last individual to write is Clifford Lukowitch.

Thank you.

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 the May 27 city of Edmonton Ahmadiyya Day proclamation, celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Khilafat in Canada. The Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Edmonton and around the world is marking this anniversary to celebrate its commitment to peace and understanding.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four sets of tablings today. The first is from the graduating ceremonies that were held at William Aberhart this past Wednesday morning in the Calgary-Varsity constituency, Closing Ceremonies/Cérémonie des finissants. This was the 50th year of celebrations being held at the Aberhart high school in Calgary-Varsity.

My second tabling is from the Poverty Reduction Coalition presentation this past Friday. It was attended by myself, the Member for Calgary-Currie, and the Member for Calgary-Mackay. It's talking about Myths: The Truth about Affordable Housing in Alberta and Calgary.

Also, from that same presentation there were a number of groups and individuals working on solutions to affordable housing. One of the groups is Momentum, and I am tabling their 2007 report. They note: "In 2007 over 3000 low-income individuals, struggling to make ends meet in a boom economy, received services from Momentum."

My final tabling is a follow-up to the letters I brought from my constituents, I believe 150 in total, about fixing Alberta's labour legislation laws. We met with representatives from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees as a Calgary Liberal caucus on Friday, and their five concerns are first contract arbitration, full bargaining rights, one labour law for everyone, automatic certification, and the removal of replacement workers.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of my letter and cheque dated March 1, 2008, to the Lethbridge Food Bank as per my pledge that half of my indexed pay raise is donated monthly to a food bank in southern Alberta until AISH is similarly indexed. In 2007 the Lethbridge Food Bank distributed food to 6,561 adults, 4,376 children, and they added 620 new people requiring help.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Mr. Blaine Greenwood of Lethbridge, raising concerns about the tailings ponds in the Fort McMurray area: their growth and the failure to reclaim at a reasonable pace.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation annual report 2007.

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 questions 13, 15, and 16.

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

Nursing Program Spaces

Q11. Mr. Taylor:
For each of the fiscal years 2007-2008 through 2011-2012 how many additional spaces will be created in Alberta's nursing programs broken down by institution and program type?

Medical School Spaces

Q12. Mr. Taylor:
For each of the fiscal years 2007-2008 through 2011-2012 how many additional spaces will be created in Alberta's medical schools?

Hospital Beds for the Mentally Ill

Q14. Mr. Taylor:
How many beds in each health region are designated specifically for patients with mental illness, and how many days between April 1, 2006, and March 31, 2007, were these beds operating at peak capacity?

Children and Youth Services on Aboriginal Reserves

Q17. Mr. Chase:
What programs has the Ministry of Children and Youth Services initiated and with what anticipated goals for the amelioration of service delivery to children, youth, and families living on reserves?

Student Loans

Q18. Mr. Taylor:
For each of the academic years 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007 what was the total dollar value of Alberta student loans received by students while attending a postsecondary institution or private vocational school in Alberta broken down by the last postsecondary institution attended by the student?

Student Loans

Q19. Mr. Taylor:
For each of the academic years 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007 what was the total number of students who received Alberta student loans while attending a postsecondary institution or private vocational school in Alberta broken down by the last postsecondary institution attended by the students?

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

Hospital Accommodation Fees

Q13. Mr. Chase asked on behalf of Mr. Taylor that the following question be accepted.

What is the total amount broken down by health region that the Department of Health and Wellness has collected each year in accommodation fees charged to patients waiting in a hospital for a bed in a continuing care facility from April 1, 2003, to March 31, 2008?

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. May I proceed, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: A brief explanation.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Unfortunately, seniors have been given the term "bed blockers" when they are taking up hospital beds, and basically since the government put forward its commission in 2005 to investigate concerns over long-term care, there has been very little resolution of the concerns that were expressed there in terms of the quality of care and the availability of care facilities, whether they're in the form of long-term care or assisted living.

What my hon. colleague the shadow minister for health is asking of the government is a specific statistic from that period April 1, 2003, to March 31, 2008, which will be providing that statistic not only provide the dollars but also provide the number of individuals who have basically been placed in a holding pattern, waiting to get into long-term care.

It's a very costly holding program both for the seniors and for Alberta taxpayers in general because to have a senior occupying a care bed in a hospital means that not only can other people not access that particular hospital bed, but the fee for maintaining a senior who is not in any type of emergent stress is approximately \$1,000 a day. That money could better be used to assist seniors, especially those on fixed incomes, in a long-term care facility which would meet their needs rather than requiring the staffing of several doctors and nurses, orderlies, and so on in an institutionalized circumstance as opposed to being accommodated in the privacy of a long-term care facility.

3:10

It is for this reason that my hon. colleague from Calgary-Currie has asked for the figures for the accommodation fees charged to patients waiting in a hospital for a bed dating back to 2003 through to 2008. We're trying to track progress, if progress has been made, from that period a couple of years prior to 2005, when Auditor General Fred Dunn did his inquiry and was then followed up by this government in terms of visiting constituencies throughout the province, trying to come up with a handle, an understanding, and therefore hopefully a solution for seniors forced to wait extraordinary amounts of time in hospitals.

It is that hope plus concerns over this new administration of the health systems, which apparently provides the accountability and transparency one step further removed. We no longer have the results broken down by health regions, but we will have this large, centralized health centre which will be providing the statistics, and we're very concerned that the bureaucracy associated with that statistic compilation will be lost as well as local autonomy; therefore, my hon. colleague from Calgary-Currie has put forward this request. I look forward to hearing the health minister's explanation as to why these figures can't be provided or what other figures would potentially be provided in their place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, nice speech by the Member for Calgary-Varsity but typical: it has nothing to do with the question.

The question asks about accommodation fees collected by the Department of Health and Wellness. The Department of Health and Wellness doesn't collect any fees. So I accept the question. The answer is zero.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. That solves the question very quickly. I gather that the wording of the question should have asked for hospital fees as opposed to accommodation fees. Therefore, if the minister could provide us with what he has indicated should have been the correct question, that would be appreciated.

We know, Mr. Minister, that a tremendous amount of money is being paid out on a daily basis for seniors who are being accommodated in hospitals as opposed to in long-term care facilities. So if the minister could provide us with the amount of money that has been paid out on behalf of seniors who have unnecessarily taken up bed space in hospitals throughout the health regions from April 1, 2003, to March 31, 2008, if that's a more appropriate question, I would look forward to receiving that answer.

The Speaker: No. I'm sorry; it doesn't work that way, gentlemen. Please. We have a written question that's published on the Order Paper. We have a motion that was moved. We have a response. We have a conclusion. The question will now be asked in the Assembly.

[Written Question 13 carried]

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

Provincial Grizzly Bear Population

Q15. Dr. Swann asked that the following question be accepted. What are the Department of Sustainable Resource Development's statistics on the actual number of grizzly bears in the province from April 1, 2000, to May 6, 2008?

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question to the Department of Sustainable Resource Development relates to statistics for grizzly bears and the population between the years 2000 and 2008. Growing numbers of people concerned about the encroachment on habitat and the threats to species in Alberta are asking questions about how we're monitoring, especially, some of our major wildlife, and the grizzly is certainly one of those that has been a signature species for Alberta. Albertans are confused, frankly, by some of the different numbers that we're getting. I think it's a straightforward question to the minister to try to give us a sense of how the grizzly bear population has changed over the last eight years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This written question should be rejected for two reasons. Our website already contains detailed reports on the province's grizzly bear population based on the DNA sampling that's been done from 2004 to 2007, and all new data collected will be posted on our website and available to the public. Since DNA sampling began in 2004, inventory data collected prior to 2004 is not of the same standard. As such the most recent grizzly

bear population information is already publicly available on our website at srd.alberta.ca/fishwildlife/wildlifeinalberta/grizzlybear-management.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View to close debate.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's good news. I guess some of the elements of the previous data collection would be helpful for us to try to assess the degree of change over the last eight years. Admitting that the earlier data may not be quite as reliable, it would still be important as a basis for establishing what changes, if any, have occurred in the last eight years. I would appreciate it if the minister would provide some of the previous data, from 2000 to 2004, for us to gather some more information about the changes.

Thank you.

[Written Question 15 lost]

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

Seismic Testing Damage

Q16. Dr. Swann asked that the following question be accepted. What evidence does the Department of Sustainable Resource Development have to show that there was no damage caused from seismic testing on 34 bodies of water performed from April 1, 2002, to March 31, 2007?

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question to the minister relates to seismic activity on bodies of water and the evidence for its safety. This came up very significantly last year in relation to Marie Lake and great concerns over the licensing of heavy oil drilling and access underneath that lake and the need, therefore, for further clarification of the resource by seismic activity. We have seen evidence that seismic activity on lakes does have some significant effect on the living biota in the lake, particularly fish, on their spawning and on their offspring.

Having made that case along with a number of others, it was interesting that the Premier decided to stop development underneath that lake and, I think, recognized that there were some significant areas of lack of information or some serious questions about the impacts of seismic testing, depending on what technology was being used. The basis for my question has to do with not only some evidence in research literature that there is an adverse effect but also a significant policy change in the government of Alberta that reflected similar concerns about whether we know enough to be continuing with development underneath this pristine Alberta lake.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This written question is rejected. All testing information related to seismic exploration is completed by the project proponents and is submitted to Sustainable Resource Development in confidence. This confidential submission is provided for under section 50 of the Mines and Minerals Act. As such we cannot respond to this written question.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View to close debate.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an unfortunate comment from the minister given that there is information, that there is research that indicates that in some cases there is damage done to fish and other biota. The fact that this particular company did some research and showed no impacts should really be beside the point. The point, really, is: how well is this government addressing environmental impacts from industry activities? That's under serious discussion in this province these days with oil sands activity, so much so that the present Premier decided to stop development there. It's singularly surprising to me that the minister would not be willing to table results of any research associated with seismic activity on bodies of water. The implication of his response is that there has been no evidence of damage. Well, clearly, that's not the case, and we can produce some research papers to the contrary.

I find it disappointing and I think many Albertans will find it disappointing that the government is not prepared to table the evidence on which they based their decision initially to proceed with development there. Again, it seems to contradict the Premier's own position, which acted to intervene and stop the development in this lake area.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Written Question 16 lost]

3:20 Motions for Returns

The Clerk Assistant: Pursuant to temporary Standing Order 34(3.1) motions for returns are deemed to stand and retain their places with the exception of MR 6 and MR 7.

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

Provincial Land-use Framework

M6. Dr. Swann moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents, including but not limited to reports, studies, correspondence, presentations, and evaluations, pertaining to the provincial land-use framework from January 1, 2005, to May 6, 2008.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a motion to try to gather as much information as is reasonably possible to address some of the questions around the land-use framework, which has recently been released in draft form. This is a fundamental change in the way we manage our province. It has profound implications for water, land, and air quality in the province. It's important for all Albertans to know who supports and who does not support this new framework and what some of the reasons behind that might be.

I think Albertans deserve the openness and transparency that this government has spoken about so often, and in this most fundamental change to our planning in this province it's important for us to get a sense of where the pressures are and where the barriers are to implementing very quickly, in a very timely way, this most important and positive change in the framework of planning for this province.

I look forward to receiving these documents in order to help us inform Albertans about where some of the barriers and facilitators are in this important land-use development.

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

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This motion for a return is rejected for the following reason: almost all of this information is publicly available. Most of the information being sought by the hon.

member is already available to the public on the land-use framework website, www.landuse.gov.ab.ca. That includes not only the draft land-use framework but the comparative jurisdictional reviews that were done, the stakeholder working group reports, and the public feedback surveys both quantitative and qualitative. If the hon. member is seeking specific information not available on the website, it is recommended he submit a new motion for a return, narrowing the specifics of his request.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View to close debate.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 6 lost]

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

Confined Feeding Operations

M7. Dr. Swann moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents, including but not limited to reports, studies, correspondence, presentations, and evaluations, pertaining to the investigation of complaints and violations at confined feeding operations from January 1, 2001, to May 6, 2008.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This particular motion for a return has to do with the increasing number of concerns that are expressed to me about confined feeding operations, their impact on air quality, water quality, and certainly some of the land quality issues, including water consumption. This is clearly an issue that increasing numbers of acreage owners and small holdings adjacent to confined feeding operations are growing increasingly restive about. Their quality of life is diminished. Their surface water impacts in some cases are significant. There is a question in many cases, especially where there are large feedlots and where they are flood irrigating, where there is a failure to monitor, and if there is monitoring, there is a failure to stand up to these big companies, these big corporations, and change their practices so that neighbours are not affected by air, water, and surface disruptions.

I think it's important for us to demonstrate transparency, again, with the public, demonstrate through the number of investigations, the number of enforcement orders, the number of changes that have been made in some of these confined feeding operations that reflect a commitment to the public interest.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This motion for a return is rejected for several reasons. There's already a great deal of information covering the seven years in the motion, and much of the information being sought is already publicly available. The information that is not publicly available cannot be released because it is confidential. Information relating to confined feeding operations, including applications, compliance matters, board decisions under the Agricultural Operation Practices Act, and also court decisions relating to confined feeding operations, is already available on the Natural Resources Conservation Board website. That website is nrcb.gov.ab.ca.

That you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View to conclude debate.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 7 lost]

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

**Bill 205
Traffic Safety (Used Vehicle Inspection)
Amendment Act, 2008**

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise in the Assembly today as the sponsor of Bill 205, the Traffic Safety (Used Vehicle Inspection) Amendment Act, 2008. My reason for this bill is simple: to help keep the province's roads and highways safe for all Albertans.

I believe that the best way and the easiest way to do this is to prevent unsafe vehicles from reaching the roads in the first place. We seem to be speaking a lot these days about the role of prevention, usually in regard to our health care. However, much of that can be identified here as well. I believe very strongly that proper vehicle inspection is a key part of prevention. Proper vehicle inspection allows us to ensure that vehicles that are going to be travelling on Alberta's roads and highways are safe to both the driver of the vehicle and all others on the roadways.

Most of us understand on some level the importance of vehicle safety, but we do not often stop to consider the very real complexity of the mechanics involved and, therefore, the need for thorough inspections. I'm not going to be dwelling on the mechanics of it, Mr. Speaker, but my years of experience in this area have taught me two important things that I would like to impress upon you today: the vital role of vehicle inspections in ensuring public safety and the need to make sure that those standards are as high as they need to be. Albertans deserve no less.

Detailed inspections will help us to identify problems in vehicles before they hit the roads, allowing them to be repaired or removed. In so doing, we prevent vehicle failure from causing collisions that lead to injuries and deaths. This is not something we often consider when we think about public health, but how is this any different from adopting a healthy diet and active lifestyle to prevent heart disease or wearing sunscreen to prevent skin cancer? Frankly, I think it's not. Prevention is prevention, and where we can save lives by reducing risk, we do so, and we will. This is why we continue to be the province that looks ahead, that leads by example and continues to set the bar high.

Now, the standards for vehicle inspections in Alberta are outstanding when it comes to out of province and salvage vehicles. All vehicles last registered in another jurisdiction or declared salvage by insurance companies are required to undergo a thorough inspection after necessary repairs and before they can be registered in the province of Alberta. Licensed technicians perform an inspection on all vital aspects of the vehicle at licensed vehicle inspection stations, usually an automotive repair facility or a service station with a repair shop. The mechanical fitness portion of this inspection is particularly vital because of how extensive it is. It involves virtually every vehicle component, from fuel and exhaust to steering and brakes. Once completed, a certified journeyman licensed through the province signs a certificate of mechanical fitness to indicate that a

thorough inspection has taken place and that the mechanics are sound.

3:30

Some may ask: if we are doing this, why are you asking for something which already exists? As with most things the devil is in the details. The trouble is not with the nature of the inspection, nor is it with how, where, and when inspections take place. Rather, it is with who. Mr. Speaker, the trouble here is that for a vehicle inspection that is not performed on out of province or salvaged vehicles – in other words, for the basic, everyday inspections that used vehicle dealers perform – we do not have quite the same standards. In this case determining the person who not only performed the inspection but also signed the certificate of mechanical inspection is left up to the discretion of the dealer.

Now, this isn't to suggest that dealers are inherently sloppy or negligent. It's not to suggest all dealerships are simply getting anyone who happens to be walking by to sign off the inspection or that these inspections are not being performed. Certainly, we can acknowledge the importance of independence and impartiality in any system that needs to ensure safety, security, and accountability. In this case we are talking about matters of utmost safety. We are talking about real lives: yours, mine, and our children's and families. I don't think we need to apologize for wanting to keep Albertans safe.

Let's be clear about what this bill is asking for. It is not increasing regularity burden, nor is it unfairly targeting business and business owners. It is simply addressing a gap that exists in safety by requiring that the certificate of mechanical inspection be signed by a qualified and licensed technician in all cases. This allows us to ensure that the standards of safety are equally and reasonably applied. To be fair, inspections for out of province vehicles and those performed at the discretion of dealers are not exactly the same because by their nature they address different things. This bill is not designed to make them the same. What the amendment would do is close a gap that at present doesn't allow us to be as safe as we could be and should be.

Part of my role as a member of this Assembly is to go beyond identifying problems to include solutions that address these problems in the most effective and efficient way, to close loopholes to ensure accountability, and to draw attention to issues that my experience tells me are important ones for Albertans. Mr. Speaker, I believe that the best solutions are often the simplest ones, and I believe that Bill 205 fulfills both of these requirements. I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I rise in support of the intention of Bill 205, the Traffic Safety (Used Vehicle Inspection) Amendment Act, 2008. The idea of standardizing the mechanical inspections to the highest standard, which in this case is a federal standard from the motor vehicle standards act, makes ultimate sense. Alberta has become and will continue to be, until this piece of legislation is enacted, a potential dumping ground for vehicles that have not passed inspections in other provinces, have been written off by insurance companies and then pieced together by unscrupulous individuals from a variety of crash statistics. I'm not suggesting that the block numbers or registration numbers have been changed, but what we end up with is frequently a mishmash of unacceptable parts with a brand new paint job left to unsuspecting Albertans. So this bill that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie put forward is certainly appropriate at this time for Alberta, to bring us up to the level of other provinces and to that of the federal government.

I have some concerns with regard to the enforcement, or the policing, of this bill. For example, in 15(1)(d) it basically suggests “a statement that the certificate expires 14 days after the date on which it was issued.” My concern would be that duct tape and binder twine can hold things together for potentially a two-week period. If the certificate expires after 14 days, which is a very short time frame, then the buyer-beware aspects of the program are rather limited. I’m not sure why that certification couldn’t last for a lengthier period of time. I’m certain that the details of the mechanical efficiencies or the shortcomings will be noted, and there will potentially be a report card to go back to, but I’m wondering if that 14 days is rather short. When you get most work done at an auto dealership, you have a 90-day sort of minimum guarantee. I’m just wondering about the 14 days, if everything would be caught.

Also, we’ve had experiences in this province of problems with drivers’ licensing, whereby firms basically were paid a certain amount and stamped that the individual had passed their licensing requirement and were then allowing people on the road that hadn’t had the training or the supervision that was absolutely necessary. Since we have lost provincial control through Alberta motor vehicles, that the government formerly controlled, and since the testing has been put out to so many other licensing facilities, I’m concerned about the certification that will be stamped or written onto these agreements. We’ve seen examples of registries – for example, one in Edmonton who actually had partial ownership with Hells Angels – forging drivers’ licences and unscrupulously gathering any information and then passing it off as a legitimate piece of identification.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has asked questions of the hon. Minister of Transportation about the fact that 40 per cent of trucks that are pulled over during spot checks fail. I would think that some of these mechanics who have indicated that these vehicles are fit for safety and for use on Alberta’s roads may be some of the same individuals who have indicated that 40 per cent of these failing trucks are legitimate and have been serviced. My concern is not with the intention, but it’s with the enforcement and the policing. What guarantees can the mover of this legislation provide that when the certificate is received, the certification is legitimate, there has been government oversight of the organization providing that mechanical certificate, and the fact that that stamp is there gives a certain degree of credibility to the purchaser of the vehicle that a proper and thorough mechanical inspection has taken place?

3:40

I very much appreciate the intent, but if the member could provide some assurance that there will be an examination of the mechanical organizations that are providing the certificate and that it will be a direct government verification of the qualifications as opposed to a second or third party passing out mechanical certificates. I don’t want this to be a money-making situation. I want it to be a safety-ensuring bill. I know that’s the intent of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. If he can indicate to me how he can assure that the certification is legitimate, I will be much more supportive of this bill. I am very supportive at this point. It’s just those fine details that I’m concerned about.

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

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 205, Traffic Safety (Used Vehicle Inspection) Amendment Act, 2008, which is currently before us. As I understand it, Bill 205 would help to raise the level of standard that we currently have where vehicle inspections are concerned. It seems that by

providing a certificate of mechanical fitness signed by an appropriately qualified professional, the objective of this bill is to increase consumer protection and safety regarding the buying and selling of used vehicles. A certified vehicle then may be considered one that has passed the appropriate number and level of inspection standards by a seller.

In the end, good used vehicle certification helps to bridge the gap between the new and not so new and to provide security for buyers. In essence, it means that the automaker or dealer has inspected the vehicle and is comfortable selling it to the general public. This raises a host of safety issues with respect to the mechanical state of a vehicle that we need to address to ensure that Alberta’s roads are populated with reliable and secure modes of transportation. To my mind this does indicate a need to create more regulation and more legislation to ensure the highest level of standard for Albertans. Mr. Speaker, I do not favour government regulation for its own sake. I believe that we always have to ensure that what we are putting forward in legislation is relevant, necessary, and justified. I think that Bill 205 achieves these criteria.

While some of the spirit of the bill is trying to shore up aspects of consumer protection and ensure that integrity is maintained in business transactions, my concern is geared more towards public safety. This is not to suggest that consumer protection is not an important issue, but ultimately I believe that as a government we are charged with protecting Albertans where we can from the potential of physical danger. This is why I believe that there is room to even expand the scope of what this bill addresses.

In doing so, I would advocate that we address the sale of all used vehicles, whether they are sold by dealers, individuals, or chop shops. Rather than only addressing the matter of certification of inspectors, we have an opportunity to create a more consistent and continuous process of inspections that would do more than simply capture moments in time. A regular system of inspection of all vehicles that would take place every two to five years, for example, would allow us to cast this net a little further and be even more effective in protecting the public from unsafe vehicles. It would enable us to capture vehicles at various stages of mechanical wear in order to see problems on the horizon.

An effective inspection also needs to be comprehensive and is part of what regularity provides. If we have a system in place that performs inspections at regular intervals, we would have in place a qualified team of experts that not only have a full understanding of what safety measures to look for but will have a level of expertise that only experience can provide. As is often the case, experience also brings efficiencies. In this way added regulation does not necessarily bring waste. When we consider the importance of a rigorous inspection process to bring vehicles up to certified safety standards, then we can see how it not only protects the consumer but also other users of our roadways, such as pedestrians, construction crews, other drivers, and passengers. But Bill 205 is timely for other reasons, too, Mr. Speaker. Considering that more and more Albertans are now purchasing used vehicles, we can see how this could impact the safety of people using our provincial roadways.

In conclusion, I believe that the intention of this bill is a good one, Mr. Speaker, and although I have advocated for a greater reach in some areas, Bill 205 helps to move us in the direction that we need to move. By ensuring that all dealers must require qualified professionals to sign certificates of mechanical fitness for used vehicles, we are taking the necessary first step. As it stands, I offer my support to this bill, and I urge all other members to do likewise.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 205, Traffic Safety (Used Vehicle Inspection) Amendment Act, 2008. I rise to support this positive move to ensure that vehicles not only meet Alberta standards but indeed the federal standards for vehicle safety. Clearly, with the number of injuries and incidents on our highways, deaths, and the tremendous suffering and loss of functional ability that people endure as a result of motor vehicle injuries, we must do everything possible to ensure the safety of our vehicles and our highways. This is a piece of legislation that purports to do that. Not seeing as much as I would like on some of the specifics of the inspection, it's not entirely clear how the inspections would differ from the Alberta inspections, but I'm sure that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie could provide that information.

Another dimension of this whole bill has to do with some of the financial implications. It would be interesting to know on average how the financial implications for changing some of these vehicles between the federal standard and the provincial standard might change, if he has any of those statistics.

It certainly is appropriate to harmonize our regulations with the federal government and standardize things across the country. We do want to make sure, then, that vehicles are safe and that used vehicles meet the same standards as other vehicles in our society. This bill tidies up some of the legislation that has been somewhat incoherent to this time. It's a progressive step to see this put into place in legislation. It's not clear to me yet to what extent we are actually going to intervene on those vehicles where there is evidence on the street that the standard of vehicle performance is inconsistent with health and safety, but I presume that that would be covered under the existing legislation.

Again, subject to some of the questions I have about the cost implications of this, I will certainly be supporting this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and participate in the debate on Bill 205. The bill intends to increase consumer protection through the creation of the Traffic Safety (Used Vehicle Inspection) Amendment Act, 2008, which will result in a comprehensive and enforceable process of safety and mechanical inspections for used vehicles. Prior to my election as an MLA I spent over 20 years working as a professional in the automobile industry, including several years as a General Motors dealer. As a result of this involvement and experience I'm very familiar with the significant benefits this proposed legislation could have for both automobile dealers and, most importantly, consumers.

I believe the enhanced consumer protection that will result is substantial and essential. Currently the levels of inspection for in-province vehicle inspections are undefined and vary from dealer to dealer due to limited standardization of the process. While they may be performed by licensed, certified journeyman technicians, the signatory on a certificate of mechanical fitness is not required to be a licensed, certified journeyman technician. This can lead to subpar inspections. There's no assurance in place that all the requirements of the certificate of mechanical fitness have been satisfied. The result may be unforeseen repairs and even safety issues. Ultimately, it's the consumers, often first-time or emotional buyers, who pay the price financially and emotionally when an inspection is not done by a qualified inspector.

3:50

On another note, the sad trend is that the individuals are often in lower income brackets, who are increasingly drawn to the affordable

price tags on bargain vehicles. Due to the condition and history these used vehicles can be prone to mechanical problems. Couple this with a vehicle that has not been properly inspected, and it can result in unbearable financial and credit issues. The vehicle can end up being parked as the cost of repairs is too high, yet the individual still has to make the payments and not even have a vehicle to drive. If the vehicle is the primary means of transportation to work, this can lead to job loss and a continuing downward spiral. Mr. Speaker, the increased consumer protection offered by Bill 205 is therefore an important and welcome action.

As I mentioned briefly above, the benefits to the consumer are numerous, and I feel it's important to mention several of them. Under this bill inspection authority will rest with licensed technicians who work for inspection stations, both of which are licensed by Alberta Transportation. This will ensure an increased standardization in the inspection process.

Currently for out of province vehicle inspections personnel must be licensed, certified journeyman technicians. As these technicians are licensed by MVIP, one can be assured that all the requirements of the certificate of mechanical fitness have been sufficiently addressed. Essentially, we require an out of province vehicle with 2,500 kilometres to be inspected by a licensed and certified journeyman technician while an Alberta vehicle, in-province, with 250,000 kilometres has no such requirement. Bill 205 will legislate that similar standards are required for in-province vehicle inspections.

It should be mentioned that most insurance companies require mechanical inspections of vehicles 10 years or older although the inspection requirement can vary from insurance company to insurance company.

The bill would also lead to improving safety on our roadways. Requiring that the certificate of mechanical fitness be signed by a licensed, certified technician will ensure that the consumer would have an accurate, complete record of the mechanical fitness of a vehicle prior to purchasing.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, consumer protection is truly at the heart of this bill, and requiring certified technicians to be the signatory on a certificate of mechanical fitness for in-province vehicle inspections is a move that will enhance this protection for Albertans. It is for this reason that I am strongly in support of this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to support this bill, but I've got some concerns here. What kind of financial implications is this bill going to have on the vehicle vendors? With this bill every time a used vehicle changes hands, will we be doing inspections, or will there be some inspection certificate issued that's good for a year or two years? We would also like to find out if the changes will allow used cars to be still sold as scrap junk.

There are lots of old clunkers, you know, driving around. They are bad for the environment. But I think this bill will strengthen road safety, and it's going to save lots of insurance costs, health care costs.

My biggest concern is with the private vehicle inspection stations. As of last week 40 per cent of the big trucks were pulled off the road, and that's only the tip of the iceberg. I think we should have stringent vehicle inspections done on used vehicles, and we should be doing, also, random checks on those private vehicle inspection stations, too, to make sure that all the vehicles inspected at those stations are roadworthy.

We want to ensure that all the used vehicles are safe on the roads,

and if the used vehicles match the standards required under the federal Motor Vehicle Safety Act, then we feel that they will be safe. I think that will also tidy up the legislation effectively, and we would hope that there would not be significant associated costs with that.

I still believe that the vehicle inspection stations should not be in private hands. There should be some kind of system in place where government inspection places are in place. I strongly believe in that. But if we can't do that, then we should still do random checks on these private vehicle inspection stations.

That was my concern: if the used vehicle is going to change hands, we do an inspection on that every time.

For those reasons, if the hon. member will answer those questions, I'm willing to support this Bill 205. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 205, the Traffic Safety (Used Vehicle Inspection) Amendment Act, 2008. On initially hearing from the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, I must say that I was absolutely shocked to find out that vehicles in Alberta that were being inspected weren't meeting the same standards as vehicles being brought into the province of Alberta. When the member explained to me what he was trying to accomplish, it was very difficult not to support this bill. The safety of our roads and of the people travelling on our roads, our families and our children, is of absolute utmost concern to all of us. I know that everyone in this House is very concerned with that issue, so to ensure that vehicles are properly inspected by licensed technicians in licensed facilities is critical. I think we all had assumed that this was the practice, so it's with great pleasure that we can support this bill.

When I was looking at the Traffic Safety Act – and it's administered under Alberta Transportation – they're very diligent in inspections on commercial vehicles and on the highways to ensure that all vehicles travelling on the roads are safe. I know that you see them set up in our community often, checking especially commercial vehicles but all vehicles and ensuring they are safe to be on the roads.

Needless to say, we want to ensure that when people go in to purchase a used vehicle, it will meet those high-quality standards and the people can trust and rely on the inspections that are done so that we can be absolutely sure that motor vehicles, when they are on our roads, meet the highest quality standards.

As the member said, these inspections include things like our brakes, like our steering systems on our cars. These are highly technical, and we won't get into them today, but needless to say, these must function, especially when you travel down the QE II and realize how busy and congested it is, how many cars are travelling, how many people are in those cars. Even at the posted speed of 110 kilometres an hour, you assume that all of the vehicles around you that are travelling are in the best possible condition so that we are safe. To think that through dealerships vehicles are being sold that may not be inspected effectively to make sure that our roads are safe is something that we're very, very concerned with.

I was very pleased to stand today and support the member very strongly in this bill. I would ask that all of the other members of this facility also support this bill and we move it through. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also stand today to support

this bill. I support it, I guess, for personal reasons. I'm going to share a story about a time in my life in the past. When I was going to the University of Calgary, where Professor Morton was one of my professors, I had the fortunate opportunity to have my parents pay for my tuition and to be able to live at my parent's house while I attended this school. However, one of the stipulations was that if I wanted my own vehicle, I would have to purchase that myself. Well, you know, being about 19, 20 years old, I set out to try to find a vehicle that I wanted to drive. I stumbled upon a Ford Bronco. I believe it was an '89 Ford Bronco or something. It was getting close to being 10 years old.

An Hon. Member: Was it O.J.'s?

Mr. Fawcett: It wasn't O.J.'s, but maybe that was part of my fascination with that type of vehicle. I don't know.

I stumbled across this vehicle and, you know, I'm 19, 20 years old, don't really know too much about the ins and outs of vehicles and some of the mechanics around that. I tried to get the best advice possible but ended up purchasing this vehicle for about \$10,000. I had somebody look at it, put a little bit of work into it, and went away. About six months later I started having major mechanical issues with this vehicle. I had to put another couple thousand dollars into it. By this time you're \$15,000 in the hole.

4:00

It happened that one night my father was watching the news, and there was a story on this place. This used car dealership that I had bought my vehicle from was under investigation for selling fraudulent vehicles. There was a contact number. I phoned the police. They did an investigation, and I found out that on this vehicle the odometer had been rolled back. When I purchased it, it was at I think 186,000 kilometres. After the investigation the city of Calgary police department found the original owner of the vehicle who sold it. At the time that he sold it, a few years before that, it actually had 350,000 kilometres on it. You could imagine the type of vehicle that I got, Mr. Speaker.

The issue was, you know, as a student \$15,000 in the hole for just having this vehicle, trying to get around. One could argue that maybe some of the choices that I made back then were not the best choices. But I think that to put a regular citizen in that position where they can be taken advantage of because they don't know the ins and outs of the vehicles and the maintenance and some of the things that you need to look at when purchasing a motor vehicle – I think that this bill certainly goes a ways to addressing that and provides assurances to consumers that may be less knowledgeable.

Let's be honest. It's not like you're going out and buying a pair of running shoes or something like that. There are some details that probably go beyond just regular common sense or beyond someone who just has a casual interest in having a vehicle to drive around. That's why I think this is an important bill. Hopefully, if passed, it will prevent some other person who has decided to purchase a vehicle from going through the same issues as I did. As well, I think there's considerable evidence in support of some of the safety issues that this bill might bring forward. Again, hopefully, it might save some lives or maybe prevent some future expenses in the health care system.

It's for those reasons, because of those logical reasons and because of my own personal experience in the past, that I certainly will be supporting this bill.

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

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we continue to discuss Bill 205, the Traffic Safety (Used Vehicle Inspection) Amendment Act, 2008, it's my pleasure to rise to add my comments to the debate as well. I believe that the bill addresses an area where we can make a big difference while requiring very little actual action.

I do not believe that the proposed amendments would be especially difficult for industry to achieve or administer. Mr. Speaker, this is because the amendments seem to be an extension of both the existing standards for out of province vehicles and their inspections on the provincial level as well as the spirit of those standards that exist on the federal level.

As has been pointed out, one of the most significant changes that will occur under this legislation is that the signatory on inspections will now have to be a licensed technician, similar to the requirements for out of province inspections. Indeed, for in-province vehicle inspections while they may be performed by licensed, certified journeyman technicians, Mr. Speaker, the signatory on their certificate of mechanical fitness may not be. As such, there is currently no assurance in place that all requirements on the certificate of mechanical fitness have been satisfied to a basic mechanical standard and that all motor vehicles in the province satisfy and maintain roadworthy conditions.

What the bill helps to do, Mr. Speaker, then, is provide the consumer with greater assurance that proper inspections have taken place every time by those who know what should be looked for. Licensed journeyman technicians are indeed extremely thorough and qualified professionals, so it can be assured that all requirements of the inspection have been sufficiently addressed. Since these licensed technicians are already licensed by the motor vehicle inspection program and managed by Alberta Transportation, the bill does not require the creation of an entirely new framework. In short, Bill 205 achieves much of its goal by expanding the purview of existing regulations that apply to out of province vehicles already.

In this way, Mr. Speaker, I believe that Bill 205 has drawn attention to many important considerations when it comes to vehicle safety standards. Failure to ensure that minimum standard levels are being met could lead to some serious vehicle concerns, safety concerns for those who purchase used vehicles in Alberta. Enhancing safety and reducing the possibility of accidents due to mechanical breakdown on our province's roads is important for all Albertans. As we are all aware, broken-down vehicles stationed in the middle of the road or even at the side of the road cause congestion, which leads to driver frustration and increases, by its very nature, the probability that accidents could occur.

As Alberta's population continues to climb – and it will continue to climb, Mr. Speaker – it means even more cars on the road and even more potential for congestion and eventual accidents. Therefore, it is even more important that we remain vigilant in these efforts. This allows us to maintain the confidence we have in our own industries and businesses and to be able to continue to promote the Alberta advantage in all aspects of quality of life, including safety on Alberta's roads. The proposed amendments for the vehicle inspections provide tangible, expedient requirements that address the issue of safety without being overly complex or cumbersome, and ultimately they ensure the safety of passengers and commuters on Alberta's roads.

There's also much to be gained from the perspective of consumer protection, Mr. Speaker, as has been mentioned by other speakers and commentators in this House on this bill, which is also of vital concern to every single Albertan. We cannot underestimate the value of consumer confidence and measures that enhance both quality and safety, as Bill 205 is designed to do, perhaps two of the best ways to achieve this.

Mr. Speaker, requiring the certificate of mechanical fitness to be signed by a qualified individual would ensure that the consumer would have an accurate and complete record of the vehicles prior to their purchase. This allows the consumer to be more fully aware of any mechanical problems, allowing them to make a more informed decision and allowing them to decide for themselves if the vehicle fits their financial needs; that essentially means maybe not just the cost of the vehicle but the vehicle repairs themselves.

It is important to know that vehicles are not stolen or rebuilt from stolen parts, as well, Mr. Speaker, and qualified, complete, and thorough inspections help to identify these very things. It allows technicians to cross-reference serial numbers and even advise police if serial numbers don't match so that people who are chop shopping vehicles together or are putting stolen parts on vehicles get caught quickly.

As the saying goes, Mr. Speaker, knowledge is power. The better we arm ourselves with standards of quality and accountability, the better knowledge we provide to Albertans, all of which helps to keep us safe on and off the road. I think that Bill 205 is clearly a step in the right direction, and I support its passage. I ask all of my colleagues in this Assembly to support it as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to rise today in this Assembly and speak to Bill 205, presented by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. As a voice for Albertans living in our constituency, it is our job as MLAs to pursue legislation that improves upon the safety and consumer protection of our constituents as well as the well-being of all Albertans as a whole.

Now, on the safety issue. As a doctor on the front lines I can say that one of the leading causes of death in Alberta of people between the ages of one and 45 is accidents, motor vehicle accidents being one of those major causes.

On the other side, on consumer protection, I'd like to relate a personal story. My brother had bought a 10-year-old vehicle a few years ago, and it didn't have the appropriate designations for inspection. Shortly after he purchased the vehicle, it required a three and a half thousand dollar engine. Even after repairing the vehicle, it was worth less than he had actually paid for it.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 does these things. It addresses important issues in our province: safety on our roadways and protection of our consumers. Currently in Canada there are high standards for new and imported vehicles under the federal Motor Vehicle Safety Act. Included in the act are rules and regulations regarding the manufacturing standards for all new vehicles prior to being sold to Canadian consumers. The Alberta Traffic Safety Act also protects Albertans by outlining rules and regulations for potential issues arising from cargo securement, commercial vehicles, bus safety, general rules of the road, driver training, driver exams, vehicle equipment, seizure, demerits, and inspections.

Of course, with Bill 205 the inspection of vehicles is what we are most concerned with. In this regard, Mr. Speaker, the Traffic Safety Act grants power to Alberta Transportation in order to maintain the motor vehicle inspection program, which enforces the standards of safety for all vehicles in operation and ensures that Alberta highways are safe for all motorists. This provincial inspection program works in accordance with both the Motor Vehicle Safety Act and the out of province inspection program so that new and/or imported vehicles Albertans drive will fall under the highest safety standards.

The problem, though, is that these same high standards of safety are not necessarily applied to all used vehicles that we purchase. In fact, other than for imported vehicles and those vehicles written off as salvage, Alberta does not really have a standardized set of rules and regulations pertaining to the safety and condition of all used vehicles prior to sale.

Mr. Speaker, some safeguards do exist such as a certificate of mechanical fitness offered by most car dealerships or certified preowned vehicle programs offered by car manufacturers. These programs attempt to address the uneasiness of purchasing a used vehicle and provide some peace of mind for used car consumers, but they don't go far enough. With certificates of mechanical fitness, for example, the signatory of the certificate itself can be left up to the discretion of the dealer performing the inspection, leaving open the possibility of an inexperienced mechanic performing the inspection if even a mechanic at all. In the medical world this is akin to practising medicine without adequate training or a medical licence. Therefore, in reality anyone at the dealership could sign off on the inspection without having proper credentials or having any knowledge of the vehicle in question.

Certified preowned programs also have some potential negatives, Mr. Speaker. To be recognized under a certified preowned program, cars must meet age and mileage requirements established by the manufacturer. They then undergo comprehensive inspections at the dealership. If any problems are found following the prescribed inspection, the vehicle is reconditioned prior to becoming certified, at which time the potential buyer may be offered financing and extended warranty options.

The problem is that, again, the intensiveness of this program is self-regulated. For instance, some manufacturer-certified programs fall under a 150-point inspection and reconditioning standards while others can be up to 300 points or more. It's all decided by the manufacturer. Here again lies the problem: there is no standardization. More importantly, none of these programs apply to private vehicle sales or nondealer sales. Mr. Speaker, perhaps we should consider further applying the concepts of Bill 205 to the sale of all used vehicles in our province, creating standardized province-wide inspection for all used vehicles prior to sale. Extending inspections for used vehicles could dramatically increase a basic standard of safety for used vehicles on Alberta roadways.

Mr. Speaker, by no means am I insinuating that a great number of used car salesmen or Albertans selling their used vehicles privately are deceptive or dishonest. Many times Albertans may simply sell their vehicles being unaware of the product that they're passing off to the person they're selling it to. Sometimes things deteriorate due to negligence, costing the new owner thousands of dollars in repair.

Of course, another possibility is that an individual may want to gift a car to someone else without paying for an inspection. What I mean by this is that sometimes friends or family gift a vehicle to someone else by signing it over for \$1. In applying inspections to the private sale of vehicles in Alberta, gifted vehicles should also be required to be inspected. For example, surely a gifted 1969 Camaro given from a father to his son so he can learn how to work on cars needs some kind of inspection before that vehicle runs down our roadways. We need to make sure the brakes work because there will be a family in that car. There's going to be a family in another car that that car may run into if there's a mechanical failure. This is perhaps a less common example, but these types of things happen.

If we're going to be comprehensive with safety, let's be truly comprehensive. Therefore, I'm simply advocating for the potential benefit of an all-encompassing program of this type and a need for standardization. If all used vehicle sales required a standardized inspection from a certified, licensed professional, all vehicles on

Alberta's roads would be subject to a higher safety standard. This would be in keeping with the Alberta value of being the best and having the best. This reduces the likelihood of consumers facing a substantial repair bill on a used car that they just purchased. On the health care front if we reduce the number of accidents, it's going to save us immensely in health care costs and suffering and will reduce the burden on our overworked health care workers.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for presenting Bill 205 and shedding some light on an important concern with used vehicle inspections in Alberta. I think that this could be a great start towards improving the safety of Alberta roadways and enhancing and ensuring consumer protection. I think that's something that every member of this Assembly and every citizen in Alberta will appreciate.

Therefore, I will vote in favour of Bill 205 and urge all members of the Assembly to consider voting favourably for this bill, as well. Thank you so much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 205, the Traffic Safety (Used Vehicle Inspection) Amendment Act, 2008, proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. Bill 205 intends to further increase safety on Alberta's roadways by requiring that a certified, licensed technician inspect used vehicles being sold in the province. With an amendment to the Traffic Safety Act this bill would prescribe that a certificate of mechanical fitness be signed by a licensed technician. This certificate assesses the fitness of the steering, breaking, and drivetrain components of the motor vehicle as well as any other disclosure requirements and regulations.

Currently automotive dealerships are able to provide this certificate without necessarily having an accredited technician present. At the heart of this bill there's a concern for public safety on Alberta's roads. By ensuring that a qualified individual assesses the fitness of any used vehicle being sold, there's a greater chance for quality control measures. No one would like to have a vehicle that they just bought break down or find a myriad of other problems, endangering the safety of themselves and those around them, and the safety of Albertans is clearly one of the top priorities of the government of Alberta. From education to enforcement numerous safety programs and initiatives under the Department of Transportation have been put in place to address the safety of all Albertans.

While I support the continued focus on safety, I'm also concerned about the fact that the province's current labour challenges are already placing a burden on the trades industries in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. Bill 205 may inadvertently increase this strain. This is because the requirements of the bill would mean an increase in the number of qualified individuals necessary to now inspect each used vehicle sold in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, many industries across Canada are facing a shortage of skilled labour. While there has been somewhat of an increase recently, it may only be a temporary fix. In 2007 a survey conducted by Manpower Canada determined that 31 per cent of employers found it difficult to fill skilled positions. This is down from 36 per cent surveyed in 2006. While this suggests that employers are facing less of a challenge in finding skilled workers, it might not be reflective of the longer term. Indeed, Manpower Canada also suggests that the situation is set to worsen over the next 10 years. They note that falling birth rates, aging populations, and other social and demographic changes will in fact result in a skilled labour shortage. This is especially relevant to Alberta, where unemployment rates remain consistently low. With unemployment hovering

just above 3 per cent over the past year, this province could feel the pinch even further. Moreover, there is no guarantee that industries will be able to obtain and retain the amount of workers needed to run their businesses in a productive manner, let alone impose new requirements that stretch labour even further. While the government of Alberta has put forth initiatives that help confront this issue, skilled labour takes time.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, the used automobile industry is no exception. Bill 205 would require that certified technicians be available to assess the condition of the motor vehicle and sign the certificate of mechanical fitness. Finding enough certified, licensed technicians for this task could prove to be a cumbersome process. In order to become a certified, licensed technician, it takes time, effort, money, and skill. This ensures that the high standards for vehicle safety are met. These inspectors would have to know the mechanical fitness of any automobile, including the steering, braking, drivetrain, and other components. In light of Alberta's booming economy, trying to attract and retain even greater staffing requirements could become unmanageable for many smaller dealerships, which may lack the resources of the larger operations. Therefore, I would suggest that more consultation with industry stakeholders would be of benefit in order to discuss the impact of this legislation.

There are a number of used car dealerships, big and small, across the province that may be greatly affected by the proposed legislation. For example, would the merchant now have to have a certified technician on hand for every sale? What about auctions, not the monthly auctions – I would imagine they're all brought forward – but the farm auctions that come up? Would every vehicle there require this certification, including the grain trucks that probably never move? How would this impact the cost of doing business? The potential backlog of the vehicles to be inspected in Alberta could strain the dealerships' resources even further.

In short, Mr. Speaker, without understanding the potential impact this legislation may have, Bill 205 may inadvertently create an unnecessary burden on dealers in this province. While safety will always remain a top priority for the government of Alberta, there might need to be further investigation into the requirements of Bill 205. This could produce a result that will benefit both the consumer and the seller when it comes to used automobile sales in Alberta and will consider the impact on the industry.

Therefore, I am unable to support Bill 205 as presented at this time. Thank you.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to rise today and speak to Bill 205, presented by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. Now, recently I had proposed a question to the Minister of Environment on old cars. I'm not going to complain about that today. Rather, I just want to point out that this is an interesting, innovative idea for our province, and I applaud the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for presenting this bill for debate in the Assembly.

The safety of Albertans and the vehicles they use should never come into question. Further to any procedures which we should build upon, safety should be welcomed with open arms. Mr. Speaker, after my father retired from the military, he worked for Saskatchewan Government Insurance for many years, and I'll tell you for one that I've seen many, many things that can go wrong, not with Saskatchewan in particular, as pointed out to me by the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, but rather just on insurance and

vehicles and what happens when people do purchase bad vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 mentions the importance of the federal Motor Vehicle Safety Act legislation requirements that motor vehicles must meet after manufacture, import, and prior to being sold anywhere in Canada. Bill 205, however, goes further by reiterating that used motor vehicles can be sold in Alberta only if they have met these requirements of the Motor Vehicle Safety Act. First enacted in 1971 – I don't remember that far back – the Motor Vehicle Safety Act was designed to reduce the risk of death, injury, and damage to property, individuals, or our environment. It applied to both importers who bring new and used vehicles into Canada for sale to consumers in our country and the manufacturers of vehicles themselves.

This piece of legislation is very important, Mr. Speaker. It created a national safety standard regarding all vehicles either manufactured in our country or imported for sale here, ensuring the safety and piece of mind of Canadian consumers. For example, in accordance with the Motor Vehicle Safety Act,

a company that manufactures, sells or imports any vehicle or equipment of a class for which standards are prescribed shall, on becoming aware of a defect in the design, construction or functioning of the vehicle or equipment that affects . . . the safety of any person,

report this defect.

Today this type of mandatory manufacturer reporting is sometimes taken for granted, but the reality is that without the perspective of the legislation in place, Canadian consumers would be placed in harm's way by irresponsible or less conscientious manufacturers or businesses, as the Member for Calgary-North Hill pointed out earlier.

Mr. Speaker, the Motor Vehicle Safety Act also prescribes a great responsibility to the inspectors of the manufacturing facilities. In fact, "an inspector may at any reasonable time enter any place in which the inspector believes on reasonable grounds" that there is the potential for violations of safety procedures or standards in Canadian vehicle manufacturing or importation. Inspectors must also examine every vehicle, equipment, or component found in the manufacturing or importation area and may ask any person to produce for examination any books, records, test data, shipping bills, bills of lading, or other documents or electronically stored data that the inspector may feel is relevant in protecting the safety of Canadian consumers. In addition to that, if the inspector finds anything which is contrary to the rules or regulations as stipulated in the act, he or she may seize or detain any vehicle, equipment, or component in accordance with the act. It goes without saying that this piece of legislation places great emphasis on the responsibilities of manufacturers and importers of these vehicles and the important role that they play for safety. They supply Canadian consumers with transportation based on second-to-none safety standards and provide a peace of mind that all Canadians on our roads and highways deserve.

Another important aspect of the Motor Vehicle Safety Act, Mr. Speaker, is the Canada motor vehicle safety standards, CMVSS. These safety standards apply to all vehicles designed to operate on our public roads that are based on standard engineering practices. They are considered the minimum requirements that all road vehicles must comply with in maintaining Canada's high standards of safety. These safety standards range from regulations for brake fluid, anchorage of seats, bumpers, headlights, windshield mounting, and vehicle emissions, all to ensure the safety of Canadian motorists and improve the quality of our environment. Under this legislation importers are also responsible for ensuring that vehicles comply with the various safety standards, rules, and regulations of Canada. In fact, it is unlawful to manufacture a vehicle for sale in this country

unless it complies with all the applicable regulations under this act.

Also, to ensure that the various tenets of this act are followed, the Canada Border Services Agency collaborates with Transport Canada to both administer and enforce the conditions under which new and used vehicles may be imported at points of entry or customs. Transport Canada's registrar of imported vehicles program is especially important in this process, Mr. Speaker. It adds a national program of vehicle inspection and certification and also ensures that qualifying vehicles permanently imported into Canada are modified, inspected, and certified to meet Canadian safety standards.

As we can see, Mr. Speaker, Canada's Motor Vehicle Safety Act is quite comprehensive and takes the safety of Canadians in all provinces quite seriously. These strict regulations, though, only cover new and imported vehicles. A question to this Assembly is: what about vehicles already in Canada or, for that matter, already in Alberta? Enhancing parts of our own provincial regulations to the level of universality and comprehensiveness found in the Motor Vehicle Safety Act, as Bill 205 is designed to do, will allow Alberta consumers to purchase a used vehicle with even greater peace of mind. We need to ensure that when an Albertan purchases a car, be it new or used, he or she knows exactly what he or she is paying for and that what they receive in the end is safe. I believe Alberta car consumers should have full knowledge of what they are buying and should have no doubt that the used vehicle they have or may purchase is safe and is not an accident waiting to happen.

Mr. Speaker, no one in this House will accuse me of supporting a regulation unless it's necessary. I go back to my university days of talking about encouraging perfect competition: many buyers and sellers. Another thing in a perfect competition we have to consider as well is that this assumes perfect information. This bill, Bill 205, will provide further information to the consumer and encourage more competition in our used vehicle market.

Therefore, I will support Bill 205, and I urge all other hon. members here today to do the same. Clearly, the costs imposed by Bill 205 are definitely outweighed by the benefits.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to the Assembly today about Bill 205, the Traffic Safety (Used Vehicle Inspection) Amendment Act, 2008. Enhancing safety on Alberta's roads seems to be a priority for many hon. members, and it is one that most of us can agree is important to overall quality of life. In 2005 there were over 120,000 accidents in Alberta involving motor vehicles. These accidents can result in death, injury, and damage to personal property. Inarguably, these are serious consequences, so one can understand why there is a focus on continuing to ensure that Alberta's highways are safe. The difficulty, however, is that maintaining safety on our roads involves more than one issue and thus requires vigilance where we can see an opportunity to make improvements.

4:30

There is no blanket solution, Mr. Speaker. In short, continuing to improve the safety of our roads may require several small steps, but they are important ones nonetheless. It also requires co-operation on the part of both government and the public. One of the things that contributes to unsafe roads is unsafe vehicles. Vehicles that are older, in particular, tend to have an increased likelihood of malfunctioning and are more susceptible to mechanical failure.

One of the steps that we as a government can take is to increase the assurance that vehicles that are being driven are roadworthy.

Bill 205 proposes that we begin to enforce this standard by legislating that vehicles changing hands within our province undergo a routine inspection performed by a certified technician. Although this standard applies to vehicles that come from out of province, many exchanges within the province lack a similar regulation, particularly with regard to the sale of used vehicles by dealers. By legislating a similar inspection for in-province vehicles, we can improve the safety of our roadways and ultimately reduce the number of collisions. Mr. Speaker, this is the obvious advantage proposed by this bill.

However, Albertans stand to gain additional protection from Bill 205 that may be less obvious but no less important. This is found in the area of insurance. When individuals purchase a vehicle that may not have undergone a suitable level of inspection or is mechanically substandard, there is an increased likelihood of mechanical failure and vehicle-related accidents. This often results in the individual having to pay higher insurance premiums, a very undesirable situation, particularly for first-time car owners. Because they are first-time owners, they do not have the added advantage of experience-based knowledge about vehicle safety, experience that would help them to identify potentially hazardous properties of a used vehicle. For example, a used vehicle that has been in a collision is often less sound than one that has not. However, this knowledge is better known by an experienced driver. This kind of knowledge affords the consumer an added level of protection, distancing them from those used vehicles that are more likely to fail mechanically.

A new vehicle purchaser is, instead, more concerned about the cost of owning and operating a vehicle, how to pay for the purchase, what their insurance rates will be, and how many times within a month they will need to fill up the tank. As such, Mr. Speaker, increased premiums are an exceptionally unwelcome burden. This bill could offer a government-regulated level of protection for these consumers. Some insurers such as the Alberta Motor Association actually enforce a safety precaution in the case of older vehicles. For example, if the vehicle is 12 years or older, the owner must submit a passing vehicle inspection form. The bottom line statement on this form reads, "Is the vehicle roadworthy?" and it must be signed by a qualified mechanic.

Mr. Speaker, if individuals had to submit a passing vehicle inspection form when insuring a used vehicle, we could be certain that more vehicles on our roads would be roadworthy, and our roads and highways would become safer. In 2005 collisions due to vehicle malfunction accounted for less than 1 per cent of total vehicle collisions in Alberta, and only a portion of this 1 per cent, or 1,250 collisions, would involve vehicles that changed hands through a dealer. However, given that the most common defect was the braking system, a routine inspection would most certainly have caught this and likely helped to prevent several of these collisions.

While being committed to improving the safety of Albertans, we must consider each initiative and determine whether it is a worthwhile venture. In this case it seems clear that a small piece of legislation is likely to help reduce the number of collisions. Perhaps this reduction is minimal. Nonetheless, it is an improvement in road safety. In addition, it would offer an increased level of protection for the consumer, providing peace of mind when making a purchase as well as helping to keep insurance rates low.

Mr. Speaker, these are the kinds of things that can be done to improve the collision rates on Alberta's roads, and they all work in concert. Further, it stands to protect the consumer both from purchasing a mechanically unsound vehicle and from the susceptibility to increased insurance rates. As such, I think this is an important issue but one that requires further discussion. I look forward to more debate on Bill 205.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 205, the Traffic Safety (Used Vehicle Inspection) Amendment Act, 2008, proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. The proposed bill would increase the standard of safety in Alberta by specifying more clearly the required qualifications for those who perform used vehicle inspections. Currently the inspection of used vehicles in dealerships is quite discretionary. While some dealerships have the wherewithal to properly inspect the vehicle, there are those who may not have the full capacity to do so. In the absence of comprehensive inspections, a number of mechanical failures can result due to incomplete inspection standards.

Bill 205 intends to resolve this by tightening up the regulations and ensuring that only a qualified professional is able to perform and certify vehicle inspections in the province. In doing so, this bill will enact legislation that better confirms that the condition of used vehicles sold in the province are safe to drive on Alberta's roads. For direction on how this can be achieved, Mr. Speaker, we can follow the lead of the inspection standards applied to vehicles registered outside of Alberta. Before a vehicle can be registered in the province, those vehicles registered in another jurisdiction are required to undergo an out of province vehicle inspection within three months of being brought into Alberta. In addition, any restored antique, classic, home-built, modified, or street rod vehicles that were not previously registered must also undergo the same inspection.

The out of province inspection not only ensures that basic safety requirements are being met. They are also quite rigorous and maintain a high level of standard. A mechanical fitness assessment for out of province, for example, must be performed by a certified journeyman technician who is licensed by the Department of Transportation's motor vehicle inspection program. The role of these certified technicians in quality assurance and comprehensiveness cannot be undervalued, Mr. Speaker.

These professionals receive some of the highest quality education available. In Alberta the criteria to acquire a journeyman certificate in automotive service includes four years of apprenticeship, a minimum of 1,500 hours of on-the-job training, and eight weeks of technical training each year. This ensures that each automotive service technician graduates with the highest level of qualifications necessary to properly carry out their duties, including vehicle inspection.

When performing inspections of out of province vehicles, technicians conduct an assessment that involves virtually all vehicle components and includes fuel and exhaust systems, all electrical engine controls, powertrain, driveline, steering, suspension, braking systems, wiring and lights, tires, glass and wipers, and defrosters, an extensive list to be sure. Meanwhile, the stations currently used for out of province vehicle inspections are privately owned, generally an automotive repair facility or a service station with a repair shop. This makes them quite accessible across Alberta. In Fort McMurray alone there are over two dozen licensed vehicle inspection stations, and in the city of Lethbridge there are close to 30 inspection stations. In this way access is not a problem. Given the number of stations in the province, there are many opportunities to ensure that a proper inspection takes place.

Vehicles that do not pass the initial inspection have an opportunity to have another assessment without further charge. Those vehicles repaired and presented for reinspection within 10 days will be subject to verification of repairs only. These conditions allow for an up-to-date and comprehensive certificate being issued for each out of province vehicle.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, to be clear, it is not fair to say that Bill 205 would require that used vehicle inspections by dealerships necessarily mirror all aspects of out of province inspections. Practically speaking, they would not have to look for all of the same things, and we would run the risk of adding unnecessary duplication. What we can say is that Bill 205 would require that dealers follow inspection guidelines for used vehicles whose level of standard is as high. Indeed, this aspect is at the heart of what Bill 205 hopes to achieve.

Mr. Speaker, in this way I believe that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has brought forth a very important and perhaps overlooked area of consumer safety. The proposed bill has shed some light on an aspect of process within the automobile industry that requires our attention. By addressing this oversight, we help to reduce the likelihood of accidents due to mechanical failure and continue to ensure safety on Alberta's roads. Therefore, I am in support of Bill 205.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise in this Assembly to speak about Bill 205, the Traffic Safety (Used Vehicle Inspection) Amendment Act, 2008. I think I'm going to be probably echoing the comments that have been made by a number of my colleagues, but I want to reinforce them.

I also want to just refer to my colleague from Calgary-North Hill, who spoke of his experience with a vehicle, and probably all of us have a story like that. I also have one. I bought a 1965 Volvo as my first vehicle. As I drove it out of the parking lot, I noticed that there was a noise every time the steering wheel turned. It was the horn honking. Then I got home and closed the driver's door, and the handle on the passenger side fell off, and the story goes on and on. I took it and then traded it in, so somebody else probably inherited that vehicle from me. You know, I think that we don't deal with these issues just in a vacuum of our own experience. Some of these vehicles stick around for a while, and I think that's another argument in support of this bill.

It's not just about consumer protection, though. It's about ensuring safety, and that's been a recurring theme in this Assembly in my experience here in recent weeks. I think that our government as well as my colleagues remain committed to that goal, and I'd like to thank and commend the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for contributing to this goal and providing an opportunity for us to entertain solutions.

Bill 205 would require that used vehicle dealers ensure that all used vehicles undergo a routine inspection conducted by a licensed technician before being sold within the province. Often much of this process is left up to the discretion of the dealer, and the goal of Bill 205 is to bring more standardization to the process by requiring specific qualifications for those conducting the inspections. At present this requirement does not exist, and in the absence of this kind of regulation these standards can vary from dealer to dealer. This means that dealers may not have a complete picture of what has or has not been addressed in the inspection process, so they may be ill informed when authorizing a vehicle for use on Alberta's roads. As such, there may be times when used vehicles are sold within the province despite being mechanically deficient or where the potential for mechanical problems may exist. The goal, then, of this bill is to seek consistent vehicle inspection standards across the province similar to those applied to vehicles coming in from out of province. In general, these inspections tend to have a higher level of accountability as well.

Mr. Speaker, these measures are important when it comes to safety because malfunctions in these systems can be exceptionally dangerous. For example, mechanical failure may lead to cases where the steering wheel locks, causing the vehicle to venture across the centre line directly into oncoming traffic. We've probably all known of situations like that. Brakes are also significant safety features in vehicles, and our lives and the lives of others are dependent on the proper functioning of brakes. A properly functioning braking system, of course, is critical to the safety of pedestrians as well. For instance, at a crosswalk one can be surprised by having somebody venture out or, heaven forbid, not at a crosswalk. Then there are poor road conditions, ice, rain, construction, and other hazards. If the efficiency of the braking system is low, these situations can be exacerbated. As well, there may be times when children's play has unintentionally tumbled out onto the streets in school zones and in local neighbourhoods, and in many of these cases the children are not cognizant of the dangers around them.

The responsibility falls on us the vehicle operators, but I think we need some help with that, and I think that's where the dealers come in. We need the security of knowing that we can rely on our vehicles to respond as they should in these situations. There is also the issue not just of poor maintenance but also just vehicle age. As vehicles age, they also can develop problems. We have issues of our bad weather, harsh winters, and failures, again, can be made more dangerous by treacherous driving conditions, drivers being stranded, and so on, but the negative impact of these unfavourable conditions can be offset by routine vehicle maintenance inspections. That's a responsibility, again, that I believe is best shared by drivers and businesses alike.

In fact, Alberta's office of traffic safety reminds us that preparation is the key to safe winter driving, and as with many things prevention can be one of our best tools generally in avoiding mechanical breakdown. The office of vehicle safety points out the importance of checking everything from brakes and heating and cooling systems to battery and tire pressure. We have to ensure that all mechanical and operational components of a vehicle are in proper working order so that we can depend on these things working as they should.

Ultimately, by clarifying the legislation around vehicle inspections, we are going to help create this kind of uniformity. In this uniformity there will be security and the confidence that if I were to purchase a used vehicle, I would know that it's safe not only for me but also for other drivers, passengers, and pedestrians. I'd also have some confidence that if I traded it in, whoever gets it next would feel the same way. I want to know, Mr. Speaker, that when I'm driving through my neighbourhood, I could stop at a moment's notice if my neighbour's children were playing in the street. I want to be certain that when I'm driving on the highway, the steering won't fail, the brakes won't fail, and the car is not going to die on me in the dead of a winter snowstorm. If any of these things were not up to standard, I'd want to know that I could return to the dealer and have the issue addressed as well.

By providing a tighter level of safety and accountability in the inspection and sale of used vehicles, this Bill 205 supports our commitment to ensuring safety on our roads, and for that reason, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to participate in the discussion on Bill 205 to implement standards for

used vehicle dealers in Alberta. Having listened to my peers relate some of their horror stories, I am certainly of the opinion that people do need help in ensuring that the vehicles that they acquire are, in fact, safe. I have to admit that I am a bit of a motor head and a collector of cars that probably fall outside some of the bounds that are listed here today, but if anybody does have that '69 Camaro, I'll take it as is, actually.

At the forefront of this bill is a concern for the safety of Albertans as well as consumer protection. I think that in listening to what has been talked about here this afternoon, we can certainly see that folks that have not spent a lot of time pulling wrenches on vehicles may in fact not know necessarily what it is that they're buying. If sufficient checks and balances are not in place, it may be possible for some businesses with bad practices to deceive customers. In the used car business the classic dirt lots, as I believe they're often referred to, could be very much the source of the type of vehicle that consumers have problems with. You know, it's not always visible when someone will cover up or cut corners or fail to make a repair that may in fact be necessary for a safe vehicle to be purchased and acquired.

4:50

The challenge in the legislation, Mr. Speaker, comes in the availability – and it has been spoken to earlier – of vehicles from private sellers, particularly people that fall into the class of what I think we'd refer to as curbers. An awful lot of second-hand vehicles in this province's trade may or may not necessarily be what they claim to be and may in fact have no regulation attached to them at all.

Because people don't know a lot about cars, people buy the bling; they don't buy the thing anymore. Illegitimate businesses can take advantage of consumers. I used to believe that the less regulation you had in the world, the better place the world would be. I just bought a truck on eBay the other day, and I have to go to Oregon to get it, but not everybody can do that because not everybody has the skill, the will, the ability, or the desire to do those kinds of things.

I think it's appropriate legislation. I think it's time now for us to in fact accept some responsibility for the fact that the vehicles that are on the road in this province are part of commercial transactions. Where most commercial transactions offer consumer protection, I think the same thing needs to be extended to the used car business.

You know, the average driver, particularly with today's cars and the technology that's associated with them, may not necessarily understand what's wrong with the car or what's right with the car, and the challenge with that is that we push them to the edge of the envelope. We also, I think, in many cases are pushing automotive technicians to the edge of the envelope. I have a nephew who recently received his journeyman automotive mechanic ticket and who went through four years of school and did not actually ever learn anything about a carburetor. Of course, they haven't put them on cars for about 15 years now, but it kind of puts half my fleet out of commission, for sure.

It's really tough, even for the average mechanic, to understand what's going on under the hood. My wife drives a car that actually does not have a dipstick. The only thing you can do when you open the hood on that car is add windshield washer antifreeze. That's all you can possibly do. There's nothing on that vehicle that the average consumer can deal with.

Mr. Speaker, by implementing standards for the mechanical condition of used vehicles, we can mitigate this aspect of danger on our roads. Moreover, such standards would provide a new-found peace of mind for consumers in Alberta who might not be able to tell

otherwise. You know, a Neon with a great big exhaust pipe may look like a good deal, but it may not necessarily be, so all of this helps us mitigate risk. The direction of risk management taken by Bill 205 is consistent with the Alberta traffic safety plan, which the Department of Transportation has committed to in its 2008 to 2011 business plan.

The Alberta traffic safety plan's vision is that Alberta has the safest roads in Canada, and it's a specific goal to achieve a 30 per cent decrease in the number of road users killed or seriously injured. Safer vehicles are certainly a good place to start. Basic consideration of the operating condition of the vehicle, the condition of the tires, the condition of the glass: all those kinds of things are important considerations.

Your insurance company makes you do it if you buy a vehicle that's older than 10 years, but you do not have to buy a vehicle older than 10 years to get something that's, frankly, not worth buying. You can go to an auction sale or a commercial wholesale and save yourself a tremendous amount of money and come home with something that absolutely should not be on the road that can only be two or three years old.

If you want to target specific measures of traffic safety, including how you eliminate and reduce injury, you do have to start with the quality and the condition of the motor vehicles that are on the road. The driver's immediate environment consists of the vehicle itself and its various components. The safety of the driver's actions and the risk posed to other drivers is dependent to some extent on the mechanical fitness of their vehicles. Acceptable stopping distance and balanced braking forces can be assured if the brakes are calibrated properly and the pads are not worn. I think we've heard a little bit about that already today.

If the driveline components are not working properly, wheels can seize, potentially causing a driver to lose control. Fluids leak, defrosters don't work, safety systems don't work, seat belts are frayed, and airbags in many cases have been deployed in the past and are not present in the vehicle: these are all things that are vital to the proper and safe functioning of a motor vehicle.

If the vehicles on our roads are not operating safely, then other measures of traffic safety are severely limited in their potential as the driver's actions may not translate into their intentions on the road. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it is prudent to prevent these dangerous vehicles from being allowed on the road without the knowledge of the consumer or in some cases the seller. Proper assessments must be done. This carries two important points: a dealer must have access to a qualified person to do such assessments, and the assessment must be fully disclosed. With full information car dealers and, most importantly, consumers can make appropriate decisions about the safety of their vehicles.

I've been reading *Popular Science* and *Mechanix Illustrated* magazines and have almost a full set going back to the Second World War. About every three years a consistent theme reoccurs, and the theme is: how to buy a used car. What they tell you is, "Don't buy a wreck" and "Make sure the brakes work and that it doesn't smoke too much" and all those types of things. Unfortunately, now vehicles have gotten to the point where the basic checks for reliability are not sufficient for the average consumer. So it's entirely up to the dealer, and we are completely dependent upon the dealer for the type of vehicle that he's presenting to us and that, in fact, it is what he says it is and fit for the purposes for which it's intended.

Now, given the province's current labour challenges, it may be difficult for our dealers to have the individuals available that are best suited to do these particular types of inspections. Bill 205 will

require that a certified person do the inspections, maintaining one of the key pillars of traffic safety; namely, the cars we drive.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 will set a standard consistent with the goals of our traffic safety plan and the related business plan in other ways, too. For example, the business plan specifically states that the ministry will ensure that effective driver programs and services are in place. In this way Bill 205 proposes both a program and, more importantly, a standard which is crucial to traffic safety. Much of this is actually common sense. Diligence on the part of the driver is somewhat pointless if the car you're operating cannot be guaranteed to operate properly. When such things are preventable, we have a responsibility to act.

The dealer must be required to assess a full range of information on an automobile's condition, and this must be communicated to the consumer. Only then is there a clear and visceral rule which requires the dealer to disclose a full and accurate assessment to the consumer.

Therefore, I believe that Bill 205 would establish a vital foundation for traffic safety in Alberta by ensuring clarity and accountability. In many ways this acts as a necessary correlation to the goals of the Alberta traffic safety plan and the business plan of Alberta Transportation. It will also, I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, help us keep those nasty blue vans off the road.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and participate in the discussion on Bill 205, which, of course, seeks to increase inspection standards for used vehicle dealers in Alberta. I don't in fact have a similar story on a personal level as a number of other members have relayed in this debate this afternoon. My story is a little different.

My first car was a 1972 Datsun 110 that, in fact, contained more Bondo than metal. I purchased it in Ontario and actually had to have it certified, as required by law, and quickly learned that, at least in this particular case, the vehicle certification really meant nothing as far as the safety and reliability of the vehicle that I purchased. I have some fond memories, Mr. Speaker, of journalism school and coming out in between classes to dry the distributor cap of this vehicle with a hair dryer in order for it to be able to start and for me to be assured that I could go on my way when classes finished for the day. Of course, I was able to do that because I had no greater need for a hair dryer at that time personally than I do today.

In that spirit, Mr. Speaker, and along the lines of a few of the other speakers on this bill this afternoon I'd like to play devil's advocate just a little bit and perhaps highlight some of the unanswered questions regarding this bill in an effort to ensure that we have a full and frank debate on all the issues that were raised.

Mr. Speaker, the bill seeks to enforce qualification requirements for individuals who perform the inspections and assessments of used cars at dealerships, thereby ensuring that the consumer is afforded complete and accurate information. Overall, the intention of the bill seems to be focused on enhancing consumer protection, which is, of course, very, very important, and by extension the safety of the vehicles on our roads. The bill is no doubt well intentioned, but we must, I think, question whether the changes proposed are necessary, reasonable, and sufficient in achieving this intent.

5:00

More specifically, I question if any negligence in the inspection of used vehicles is not already sufficiently internalized. In other words, in theory, Mr. Speaker, do car dealers not already have

sufficient economic incentives to ensure that they thoroughly assess the condition of their vehicles? When a dealer certifies one of its vehicles, they are effectively declaring their standards of business and their level of integrity. The certification is presumably based, at least in part, on the completed inspection. Similarly, consumers expect these declared standards to be consistent with the actual outcome or condition of the vehicle. While some aspects of the overall condition of a vehicle are hard to detect, many in fact are not. With this in mind, consumers have the option to have another inspection done, which is something I regret not doing in the case of the purchase of my Datsun 110.

In some cases a more knowledgeable consumer may even have the required knowledge or savvy to spot any inconsistencies, as I'm sure the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder would. Naturally this puts significant pressure on the dealer to have accurate assessments done. It is in the dealer's best interests, then, to have employees with sufficient skills to complete these assessments accurately so as not to face a dissatisfied consumer. If a dealer is not able to complete thorough and accurate assessments, he or she could face a litany of problems, including lost business, a damaged reputation, and extensive legal costs.

It is not rational, then, for a dealer to set standards that they cannot meet with confidence as there is a great risk in doing so. Full information is desired by any business, just as it is desired by the consumer, and even in cases where a dealer may not feel that it is necessarily his or her responsibility to fix or replace certain components of rare models, they will tend to convey this to the buyer and price the vehicle accordingly. What remains important, Mr. Speaker, is that the entire condition of the car is disclosed to the consumer. This information is important for the dealer so that they know what it is they are selling and to ensure legitimate dealings with the consumer. Meanwhile, the consumer will know exactly what they are paying for and can address any necessary repairs.

In short, by and large dealerships recognize the value of good business practice, not that less than honest business practices are unheard of, and we've heard many stories of that in the debate on this bill. There may exist, for example, an incentive to sell vehicles that have been declared as salvage, meaning that they have been damaged in an accident, without disclosing so to the seller. Even worse, a vehicle may be sold when it has been deemed nonrepairable, meaning that it has been inspected and certified for parts only. To some, they see a great financial incentive in doing so. Then we would have to assume that the individuals in a shop who inspect the vehicles are complicit in the deception as well. But in the end creating a certification structure for them, as Bill 205 seeks to do, would not reduce the incentive to sell snake oil for those who are surely determined to do so.

Again, the problem is not one of information on the dealer's side. The dealer knows full well what they are selling. But such practices are ultimately incompatible with the success of a reputable business, and a disincentive for such practices exists because, again, there is a price to be paid. Therefore, adding regulation may not dissuade dealers or pseudodealers from circumventing the law or practising bad business. I think it's important that we acknowledge this reality, not to mention that there is also legal recourse in place for individuals that find themselves in these situations. This not only suggests that additional regulation is not perhaps required, but it also acts as a further disincentive for dealers to behave dishonestly.

The Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council also exists to address these issues, and upon receiving a complaint, they can take action of their own to eliminate unfair business practices. As they are self-managed, they work for the best interests of the industry as a whole,

both buyers and sellers, and enforce the automotive businesses regulation under Alberta's Fair Trading Act. The Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council also provides consumer education regarding best practices and strengthens consumer protection through reporting and investigation. These measures are intended to increase the cost of dishonest business practices in the used car industry, serving as a disincentive for dealers to certify mechanically unfit vehicles.

Whether it is the mistake of an unknowledgeable mechanic doing the inspection or the intended deception of the consumer, inaccurate certifications carry a very significant cost so as to dissuade bad practices. If there is a problem of unfit cars getting on our roads, then we should consider these kinds of incentives and disincentives in addition to the provisions in this bill and not simply the accreditation of in-shop inspection personnel.

Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting Bill 205, but I hope that a number of the arguments that I put forward this afternoon will cause all of us to take pause and ensure that, first of all, we are not creating a regulatory regime that exceeds what is required to address these issues and, secondly, that we've looked at all other avenues that can be made available to improve consumer protection.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to close debate.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During my years working in the province, I have learned many things about quality and maintaining high standards. Whether it was in the auto industry as a mechanic or as a teacher in our public school system, people expected to have the very best service possible. This is a good thing. When we demand the very best possible service or product and accept nothing less, the quality will naturally improve. In this way Albertans expect the same from any industry or service, which provides a continual motivation to produce the very best.

As a government we constantly work towards producing the best possible service for every Albertan and are accountable to produce the very best results. How we conduct our day-to-day government business is under the scrutiny of 4 million people in this province and millions across the country. Mr. Speaker, I feel that we live up to those high expectations each day, every day. Should we require anything less from industries that operate across the province? This is the reason for bringing Bill 205, the Traffic Safety (Used Vehicle Inspection) Amendment Act, 2008. I believe this bill is in keeping with the spirit of maintaining the standards and quality of life that Albertans expect.

When we consider that the automobile industry plays such a vital role in Alberta, high standards are of the utmost importance. This industry carries on its shoulders the lives of millions of people every day, and if one aspect of it goes not so well, the impact can ripple into so many other areas. Having worked in the industry myself, I understand that if one part of the vehicle is not working as it should, it can affect the operation of the entire vehicle. If one aspect of the auto industry is not functioning at the level it should, it can affect the other industries. As a result health care, infrastructure, and insurance agencies are just some of the potentially affected areas.

Bill 205 would require that used vehicles in this province are brought to such a condition that we can avoid many of these potential problems. Some detractors in the automotive industry may deem this bill as an imposition on the day-to-day conduct of their business, but the safety and well-being of Albertans must be

paramount. When the safety of Albertans is at risk, we should consider all the options available to reduce that risk. Requiring that industry maintains a high standard of service for the safety of Albertans goes a long ways to accomplishing this. Mr. Speaker, as we move forward together as a province, we should strive to continue creating the very best for all Albertans.

I would like to thank each member for their contribution to the debate and urge them to support Bill 205, the Traffic Safety (Used Vehicle Inspection) Amendment Act, 2008. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a second time]

5:10

Bill 206

Alberta Personal Income Tax (Physical Activity Credit) Amendment Act, 2008

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 206, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Physical Activity Credit) Amendment Act, 2008. Bill 206 rewards good behaviour by providing incentives in the form of nonrefundable tax credits for fees paid to eligible organizations and programs which are geared towards ongoing and sustained physical activity. This is a good-news piece of legislation, a carrot rather than a stick. It's designed to reward those who invest in their own health, and it's also geared towards increasing participation in physical activity amongst all Albertans, including children and youth and adults.

The bill furthers one of our government's most important objectives: to promote healthy living in our province. Mr. Speaker, increased physical activity plays a significant preventative role in health by helping to reduce health complications and, ultimately, the drain on our valuable health care resources. What has the reaction to the bill been? Well, media of all kinds across Canada have expressed great interest, and their reaction has been overwhelmingly positive. People on the street have been very excited and regularly ask when and how they can apply to be included. In a Pollara report presented to Fitness Industry Canada last March, more than 4 out of 5 Albertans believe that the federal children's fitness tax credit is a good idea. When it comes to extending this to Albertans of all ages, we've had extremely encouraging visits to the office. We've had faxes and phone calls and many dozens of e-mails, and I know that my colleagues have as well.

For instance, one of my constituents wrote: I want to express my support for the private member's bill regarding the fitness tax credit. I firmly believe that the benefit that exercise has on our society is not given enough credit. As someone who is very active and tries to lead a healthy life, it concerns me to see the rising number of overweight and unhealthy people we have in this province, especially children. If there were a tax credit to make sports and exercise more affordable, I think more people would take the opportunity to be healthier and be an example of healthy living for children. In my mind, the added benefit of a reduced load on the health care system comes second to promoting a healthier future for the children of this province. As a Calgary-Lougheed constituent I am proud that this bill is being proposed by someone I voted for and will continue to support. Keep up the great work.

To paraphrase a constituent from another riding: in March of 2004 I had to get an ambulance because my heart was racing. After receiving treatment, I vowed I would never have this happen again, so I started working out. To date I have lost 170 pounds and have

been taken off my high blood pressure medicine. I gave up a lot to make this happen, and I believe I am entitled to this credit. I am not a strain on the medical industry, like most people, and now work out twice a day to stay out of the medical system.

This next excerpt is from a physical education instructor who writes: I would like to congratulate you on sponsoring this new bill. I believe that you are completely correct in offering the tax credit to encourage people to live active lifestyles. I know that Albertans' participation rate in fitness/sports programs has decreased by about one-third over the past 20 years, and I think this is largely due to financial restraints as well as choosing to do other, nonactive leisure activities. This is a large part of what I am trying to accomplish in my job every day. If we can get people to be more active and consciously make healthy decisions, they will be less of a draw on the health care system in the future. Thanks for taking the time to do this. And he adds: if there is anything that I can do to help out with this, please let me know.

Another Albertan has this message: I commend you. Please don't give up on this despite the naysayers. I myself would like to join the local pool but lack the resources to do so. I have herniated two discs in my back, and the physiotherapist suggested pool exercises might help since I did well at the pool in the hospital as part of my rehabilitation. Before I was completely healed, I had to go back to work, with the proviso from the physio that I had to sit on a physio ball to keep my back mobile. I accepted the first job offered me, which is not in my line of expertise but just pays the bills. My first degree is in phys ed, and I firmly believe that exercise and fitness are essential for the well-being of all people. Besides the calorie buster that exercise is, it also helps with dispelling some types of depression with endorphins that induce a feeling of well-being. Well-rounded movement increases stamina, strength, range of motion, and joint flexibility.

Finally, my last quotation from reaction in Alberta to this. A pediatric physiotherapist stated: I think it's a fantastic idea. I was thrilled when the child fitness tax credit was created to encourage families to ensure their children are engaged in regular physical activity. I see the impact of inactivity and obesity in schools everyday, and I'm thrilled that our federal government is working to take action. I would like to applaud you for working to provide that same benefit to adults in Alberta who choose to live a healthy lifestyle. Thank you on behalf of Albertans.

Now, Mr. Speaker, these Albertans know that the numbers of those who are considered overweight and obese are climbing and that the numbers of people engaging in organized sports are plummeting. The World Health Organization warns that physical inactivity is a significant, independent risk factor for chronic disease that leads to – get this – almost 2 million deaths globally every year. That's just staggering.

A little closer to home. A 2004 Canadian community health survey commissioned by Stats Canada compared the results to data gathered in 1978 and 1979, and the results clearly showed that 23.1 per cent of Canadian adults, 5.5 million of us, are obese and another 36 per cent, more than a third, 8.6 million, are overweight. The number of adults considered obese back in 1978-79 was 13.8 per cent, more than 10 per cent less. Worse still Alberta was one of the provinces in which the obesity rate for men surpassed the national average. For children and adolescents the news is not much better. The percentage of youth considered overweight or obese has risen from 15 per cent back then to 26 per cent now, more than 1 in 4 for kids.

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada "two-thirds of Canadians are inactive, [which is] a serious threat to their health and a burden on the public health care system." It's time for Canadians to get moving. The increasing rates of obesity among adolescents

suggest that this condition will likely continue into adulthood unless this trend is reversed, and that happens through lifestyle changes, Mr. Speaker. We have a tremendous responsibility to ourselves and to our children, and perhaps even more importantly we have a tremendous opportunity.

Increasing physical activity is not simply an individual problem. It is a societal one. Mr. Speaker, being physically active is the easiest and the most natural way to improve one's health and also to prevent disease and injury, and it is not bound by age or social group or sex. Physical activity reduces the risk of too many diseases for me to list in the time we have allotted here today.

In spite of the fact that prevention is cited over and over as the major contributor to better health and increased life expectancy, studies of health expenditures indicate that less than 5 per cent of resources are devoted to prevention. In this way it is in the areas of policy where advocacy and action can matter the most.

The Department of Health and Wellness has done a tremendous job of raising awareness of the importance of physical activity to overall health. The Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation along with Culture and Community Spirit is tireless in promoting the numerous parks and sports and recreation facilities and community programs that make up the multitude of options available in Alberta to get fit and have fun. Initiatives like Healthy U and the framework for a healthy Alberta help set the tone and objectives for the goal. They provide specific strategies for eating better and exercising more and being the healthiest we can be. Without a doubt, Mr. Speaker, awareness is key, but that's just not enough.

With Bill 206 we take the next logical, necessary step. For better or for worse as human beings we sometimes need incentives to support and encourage us to make better choices, and in this respect the realm of health tends to be one of the most common. Mr. Speaker, an incentive may not be a magic bullet, but it is not intended to be. It's about reducing likelihoods and controlling what we can control.

5:20

I know that we're down to perhaps 30 seconds. Is that right, Mr. Speaker? I'll end on this note. We're told over and over again by all professionals involved in health that physical activity is the answer for the threats associated with inactivity. We have a clear mandate, and this is a preventive, positive opportunity for us here. I'll just read the end. As Albertans, as a government, we have stated in our objectives and our business plans that this is a major concern.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: This House stands adjourned until 7:30.

Mr. Renner: It would be so much easier if we did it that way, Mr. Speaker, but for some reason we have to have a motion. I will make the motion that we call it 5:30 and stand adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:21 p.m.]

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