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First Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

First Session

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[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, October 21, 2008

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 7

Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2008

[Debate adjourned October 21: Mr. Mason speaking]

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. I appreciate this time to get on the record regarding Bill 7, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2008. This bill, as I understand it, will align the legislation with the recently approved roles and mandates policy framework. I also believe that this bill will make changes to the Universities Co-ordinating Council regarding the academic qualifications of the professionals who are members of professional associations. This bill also makes some housekeeping – I understand that there are language changes and updates. We were briefed, I believe, by the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology in the spring session. As far as I know, Mr. Speaker, there may be the necessity for amendments to this bill, but I think that in light of what has been discussed in the past, this is an acceptable amendment, Bill 7.

Certainly, when we look at the Post-secondary Learning Act, the bill is designed, as I said before, to align the act with the recently approved roles and mandates policy framework. The framework is the base policy to shape the further direction of Alberta's advanced education system to meet the needs of students, taxpayers, and society. This new framework will enable sound decision-making to strategically and effectively invest public resources to address critical skilled labour shortages while at the same time creating a more educated society. How all this unfolds is yet to be determined.

There are a number of groups who have contacted this member who have suggested that this bill is very good and that it is what they have been waiting for. Now, I'm not sure if this is going to do everything that's needed to address our labour shortages. I hope it does, but there's a lot of work to do. There's a lot of planning to do. We see that in some parts of this country, as the economy slows down, there are now significant pockets of unemployment or underemployment. I would hope that the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology would be willing to sit down and discuss with his counterparts in other jurisdictions how they could solve the labour problem together, and maybe this bill will help them do that.

These amendments, as I understand it, will also further the Campus Alberta concept, ensuring that Albertans have an opportunity to participate in learning opportunities through a co-ordinated and integrated system approach. I certainly hope we don't privatize further our education system with this bill. There are any number of examples of the privatization of our postsecondary system. The former minister of education laughs over there as he plots and plans how to privatize our health care system in his current job.

I certainly have noticed that whether it's hairdressing, whether it's any number of occupations or professions, there seems to be a tendency and an interest in privatizing so many of our postsecondary delivery programs. If I thought for a moment that Bill 7 was going to facilitate that, I wouldn't support it.

Dr. Taft: Would you give them the benefit of the doubt?

Mr. MacDonald: I certainly am, hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, going to give the government the benefit of the doubt on this one, and we will see what happens with this bill.

Those are my comments at this time, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member want to speak on this bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a third time]

Bill 8

Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2008

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise this evening and move third reading of Bill 8, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2008.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in third reading to Bill 8, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2008. A number of my colleagues have spoken to this bill in second and in committee. Yes, I'm the designated closer here.

Essentially, this was setting up a delegated authority to manage this fund. The fund itself was set up last year through a different bill. I had put on the record my concerns about delegated administrative organizations and the way the government tries to get out from answering questions and taking responsibility for it, but I think I had done that when we were in committee.

It is also repealing some clauses in the existing bill which referred to establishing emission intensity targets and is now substituting the new mechanism. Oh, this government. You gotta love them.

An Hon. Member: Alberta agrees.

Ms Blakeman: Yes, but they love me, too, so there you go.

Dr. Taft: Feel the love.

7:40

Ms Blakeman: Isn't that wonderful?

It also did allow a director to specify an emission intensity limit for the purposes of determining a specified gas emission's intensity in a particular undertaking and a further mechanism for a director to reclassify an operation and make that reclassification undertaking subject to specific emission intensity limits.

Essentially, there were a number of issues that the Auditor General raised on climate change in his most recent report. Again, we had put a number of those concerns on the record. I, in fact, had gone through and pointed out the numbered and key numbered recommendations that the Auditor General had made. I might recommend it to people following along at home. In that October 2008 report from the Auditor General he's got a very thorough section on this, and I encourage people to actually go and read that.

I know that we've got a Minister of Environment that's very fond of saying that Alberta has a strong climate change plan, but we in the Official Opposition continue to challenge them to prove that. We don't think that is the case, certainly not when we look at places like California or, frankly, even the federal government, which is a bit of an irony. The idea that we can't even really measure our progress or if we're on target until we're well on our way to both a 2020 and a year 2050 goal: we have serious considerations about the whole climate change plan.

Essentially, what's being suggested and covered under Bill 8: I mean, it's a pretty narrow bill. It's not a very big bill. It's one of those delightful sort of two-pagers. Oh, three – I'm sorry – three-pagers. It really doesn't do that much. It allows for a section that basically gives them authority to pay salaries and fees while they're performing the function of the minister, that the minister can make payments out of the fund, and then repeals a clause that gets into that specified gas emissions level that I talked about earlier.

We don't think this is really taking us that much closer to a very strong climate change policy, but I think this is the best we're going to see. It's not as strong as we would've liked to see. Considering all the things the government could have done to move forward a climate change plan, did they do it in Bill 8? No. You know, what are some of the things that they could've done to make this a much stronger plan? A big part of that and one of the things I talk a lot about in here because the government gives me so much ammunition to talk about it is around monitoring and enforcement. That is an area where this government is consistently weak in just about every department you look at. I'm backed up on this one by the Auditor General, who points out that Alberta has no way of knowing if it can achieve even the modest targets that it has set for itself.

I have to wonder if there's any plan for how the funds collected from a carbon tax could possibly be strategically allocated to technology which supposedly would reduce climate change. How would it even begin to measure this? It has no other standards for measurement in there. As I said earlier, we can't even measure our success on the 2020 or even the 2050. All of that is backed up in that Auditor General report that he put out just a couple of weeks ago.

The delegated authority that's anticipated in this act is critical to that measurement process, and who gets onto those delegated authorities becomes really important.

Mr. MacDonald: Now, who do you think might get on there?

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. Who might get on there? Well, if you look at a couple of different recommendations or projects that the Auditor General has done, one of them is to say that this government has got to get away from appointing Tory friends to all of these various agencies, boards, and commissions. They have got to. There are other Albertans that are qualified to do these jobs. They have to be looking to solicit and recruit from a wider talent pool, a wider gene pool, if I may say that, and not just appoint Tory friends.

What will be the job description and the qualifications that they will be seeking when they go to recruit people to sit on this delegated authority? We need to take this seriously. That's one of the ways I'll be measuring the success of the government on the implementation of this particular bill. Who do they start to put on this? Is it a pretty good cross-section of people in the community that have some expertise in this, or is it once again fairly limited?

You know, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research was a really smart idea, and here's why: it recruited highly qualified scientists to Alberta to work on projects that were funded by the Alberta heritage trust fund for medical research. That in itself has

started to generate its own cluster of economic activity because we sort of have industries that are clustering around it that feed into and actually make, build things that the scientists need to use in their work. Also, it brings in other scientists who want to work with those names that have been recruited.

Part of that, of course, and in my mind linked fairly closely to it is the Alberta Research Council. Again, there's another body that is carrying forward some of that important work. Are we going to look at appointing members of that Research Council or people associated with that Research Council to this delegated authority? There's an expertise background that you could be pulling from.

Our universities. The University of Alberta in Edmonton, the universities of Calgary, Lethbridge, and a number of other ones around the province also are attracting people with very good minds and a lot of expertise in this area, particularly when you want to look at things around climate change and the oil and gas sector. We are the experts here. We have lots of people to pull from. Are we going to see the government go out and recruit those people to sit on this delegated authority, or are we just going to go back to the same old Tory membership list? It's not that there aren't nice people on the Tory membership list. I'm sure there are. There are probably some scientists there. But, please, we have to pull from a wider pool than just that list. I'm not the only person saying that. I have backup from other unimpeachable sources.

Part of the frustration here is that we haven't developed an overall criteria for selecting projects to fulfill the 2008 survey that they actually did. If I can pull as an example the fact that the ministry hasn't set the maximum amount that it will pay per tonne of emissions reduction. There's a very simple but basic starting point where we don't know how the government plans to proceed. I don't even know if the government knows and is just not telling us or if it actually hasn't decided that. They don't know what effect the actions will have on the GDP or unemployment, and we've got no corroboration that the actual actions will help achieve that 2050 target.

It's not that there's anything wrong with this one bill, which is one tiny little step, Mr. Speaker. It's that overall strategy that I'm finding increasingly frustrating in that it doesn't all seem to pull together, and we can't see the whole plan laid out in front of us. As I've said, a big piece of that is, you know: what are the action plans you're going to put in place? What are the monitoring and enforcement pieces of that? Who are the people that you're going to put into key positions? As we've found out in this province, that really matters. If you've got people with credibility, they're going to be able to do much better in carrying forward those projects with integrity. If you have people that don't, you've got a lot more problems.

I'm going to leave this debate to other colleagues in the House. I'm willing to vote in favour of this. Certainly, the direction we were given by our critic was to support this bill. It's just frustrating that we keep getting pieces and that none of the whole picture is very clear.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in third reading to the anticipated effect of this bill. I very much appreciate it, Mr. Speaker.

7:50

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and speak on this bill, which I will do quite briefly. I rise, actually, to indicate, at best, very cautious support with respect to this bill because there are a number of difficulties with respect to it.

As has already been pointed out, of course, and which simply needs to go on the record, the bill is premised on enhancing the work of an act which is fundamentally flawed. You know, it is building on the fact that we have an emissions intensity program here in Alberta, which, of course, everybody except a few, probably not all, of the people over on the other side of this room understand to be a completely ineffective mechanism for actually addressing the issues of greenhouse gas emissions and climate change.

At this point, for instance, we're looking at having \$15 a tonne of greenhouse gas emissions being paid into this fund. Given that it's calculated on the basis of intensity of emissions, it is in fact closer to \$3 per tonne. We know, of course, that the world average at this point is roughly between \$30 and \$45 per tonne, and we know that the cost of carbon capture and storage is, at its lowest, \$45 per tonne. Clearly, this is not really geared towards preventing the increase of greenhouse gas emissions by industry, nor is it geared towards funding the cost of remedying the outcome of that greenhouse gas emission.

Having said that, though, probably the two primary concerns we have with this bill, one which was discussed yesterday, I believe, relate to the potential for the funds to be used around the development and/or support of nuclear energy. I believe that has been discussed at some length already, and of course we would be opposed to that being allowed in any way, shape, or form.

The other concern we have, as well, that was just mentioned, is the manner in which members of this body are selected and the organizations from which they will come to this body. We believe that if, truly, this organization or this entity, with whatever underfunding it has at its disposal, is going to engage in substantive and effective and helpful efforts to develop renewable sources of energy within Alberta, it needs to include representatives from all areas of the province and, in particular, from the environmental movement and from advocates and organizations who are not necessarily just associated with industry. It's not clear the way this bill is constructed at this point whether that is, in fact, what will happen. Not knowing whether we'll have an adequate representation or appointment process for this entity means that we're very, very concerned about whether or not it will be able to do the work it's asked to do or theoretically is going to do.

Of course, the other concern we have, as well, is that there is truly not a significant number of criteria that are laid out with respect to how the funds in this entity will be administered. Essentially, we have industry paying \$15 a tonne to emit notwithstanding that the cost of addressing that is, at best, \$45 to probably twice that to actually ameliorate the outcome of that action. Meanwhile, they get to pay themselves out of that fund for sitting on the committee and then maybe pay it out in a way that may reduce greenhouse gas emissions or may not. We really do not know how the money will ultimately be administered.

Again, we just want to re-emphasize that the committee should not simply be stacked with oil and gas industry representatives. If that is what happens, the very meagre steps forward represented by the creation of this entity, notwithstanding its dramatic underfunding through the ridiculously low contributions that are being made by industry, if the membership of the committee is not properly established, then whatever value might come forward will be abandoned. We urge the government to ensure that the entity is properly represented and reflects a broad range of opinions of groups who have vested interests in this issue; in particular, the people of Alberta and environmental groups and other NGOs.

At this point I believe I will end my comments. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member who wishes to speak on the bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a third time]

Bill 21

Heating Oil and Propane Rebate Act

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and move third reading of Bill 21, the Heating Oil and Propane Rebate Act.

This will repeal and replace the Natural Gas Rebates Act. This initiative will remove redundant legislation enacted for programs that are now expired. It's a housekeeping initiative with no substantive policy changes being proposed. I appreciate the support received from many hon. members and anticipate their continued support at third reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, if there's one thing you shouldn't say to me, it's that this is a housekeeping bill because then I start digging. But in this case it actually is a housekeeping bill. [interjection] Yeah. It's always worth my digging. It's always interesting what I come up with. Seriously, this is replacing an out-of-date bill.

The one thing that I had done with it was to try to bring in an amendment, which would strike out section 3(c), which was the Gary Dickson memorial. Well, actually, it was worse than that because it's bad enough to have the Gary Dickson memorial amendment about not putting things in regulations which should be in legislation. This was worse because it's that new clause the government started to use that says, "any terms and conditions the Minister considers appropriate." So if they want to paint everyone in candy stripe, they can do so, and the legislation allows them to do that. But, no, I couldn't convince my hon. colleagues in the House to remove that section.

What we do have are some fairly specific sections in here. Sorry. Just let me go back very briefly one more time. Providing rebates is not good economics, and it's not good conservation. I just have to say that one more time. I recognize that the Member for Battle River-Wainwright, someplace out in the country, spoke very passionately about how much this was needed and how important this was to people in rural areas. I understand that. For anybody that's in a remote enough rural area that you're using propane for heat or you're using some kind of heating oil, it's important. I understand that. You know, at 30 below, it's important that you have that.

8:00

It's still not moving us away from the situation where we are in effect held hostage by this. Providing rebates for it does not change people, the way they are operating. It doesn't have them move to solar or wind or any other possible, more energy-efficient forms of energy. Any economist will tell you that rebates are really bad economics. I just had to put that on the record one more time so we see this in context. Okay.

Having said that, we've now got a rebate act for natural gas, we've got a rebate for electricity, we've got rebates for all kinds of things, so this is to be fair and square to especially those in rural areas, so they're now going to get rebates on their propane and their

heating oil. Fair enough. I guess that if you're going to have a bad idea for most of the people, you have to extend it to everybody. I have no wish to penalize people that are in remote enough areas that they can't get access to this stuff. But, man, is this bad economics. I wish the government would look for a better way of doing this.

We will support the bill because we don't want to see people truly left out. But please, please, please, with all the brains that the government has tucked away in all those researchers and all those scientists on the payroll, surely to God we could come up with a better way of doing this and other ways of incentives to get people to switch to different kinds of energy consumption than just helping people pay their bills.

You know what? It doesn't change the individual's approach at all, and all it does is continue to give a whole whack of money to an energy company.

Dr. Taft: Public money.

Ms Blakeman: Public money. That's right. They give a whole bunch of public money to private companies.

Now I'm going to get a whole bunch of nasty letters from private companies saying: how dare you pick on us? But, honestly, you know, if they're in private business, they shouldn't need our help to do this. They should be able to compete in that wonderful marketplace everybody talks about.

So okay. Fine. That's it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on this bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a third time]

Bill 14

Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2008

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise tonight and move third reading of Bill 14, the Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2008.

The debate on this bill has been encouraging, and I'm pleased by the comments that have been made. I am confident that it will meet the needs of Alberta's masters in chambers, who are an important part of the administration of justice in this province. This will ensure that, where appropriate, the provisions that apply to judges under the Provincial Court Act will also apply to masters under the Court of Queen's Bench Act, which will give masters more options and flexibility when making their decisions and undertaking their work. It would also help to improve Alberta's justice system as a whole by improving the efficiency of our courts and access to justice for Albertans. I want to thank all the hon. members who took part in the discussions on this legislation.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I didn't get to speak to this bill in second or at committee, but the critic in our caucus, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, has asked us to support the bill. He clearly agrees with the Minister of Justice. It is

allowing for the masters in chambers, an important part of our system, to have greater choice in their careers. It does give us more flexibility in how to deal with incapacity, however that comes to us, an illness or for whatever reason that a master is not able to perform their duties. Whether they've retired or they have resigned or they're ill at the time, we need that flexibility. It is offering educational benefits for those who are serving the administration of justice.

It looks like everybody had a great time debating this. I'm not going to prolong the debate. I just wish I'd gotten in on it earlier. But we are happy in the Liberal caucus to support third reading of Bill 14, Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2008.

Although I'm always a little interested in why there is such criticism of the bench from a number of individuals on the government side, including one today that was a fairly forceful criticism of judges, yet we have bills like this. So I guess we have to look to the good common sense of the Minister of Justice and hope she's going to prevail here.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you very much. I also rise to speak in favour of Bill 14. I want to thank the Attorney General for taking the time to brief me on this and her other bill. I appreciate that opportunity to ask her questions. I can't remember what it was I asked you about way back when, but I do recall that I thought this was a very good idea.

We've heard lots of discussions in the Legislature in this session and in other ones about all the various ways in which the shortfalls in the justice system impact Albertans in a way that is not helpful, and there are a lot of actions that need to be taken to fix that. As I think we've talked before, obviously, probably court services ultimately needs more resourcing and more funding.

Having said that, though, this is certainly a smart way to try to move things along within the system. It does of course allow essentially for us to get the benefit of more work out of the current masters. I find it interesting that as the economy rolls along the way it does and as our demographics roll along the way they are, it seems that in every sector we're always trying to find ways to help people work longer and retire later, which does appear to be what's going on here for the most part. Nonetheless, it does allow for there to be some merging, creating similar rules between the masters and the judges, and also it does allow for increased efficiency in terms of ensuring that matters dealt with by one master can be concluded by them rather than having to have additional hearings or starting all over and all that kind of stuff.

We appreciate all efforts that are made to respond to people who work within a particular system when they request ways in which to make their job easier, and that appears to be a lot of what's happened here. Again, efforts to increase the efficiency and efficacy of our courts are always much appreciated because they play a very critical role in our province. I certainly support whatever we can do to help them do that job better.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member who wishes to speak on the bill?

The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to close debate.

Ms Redford: Agreed.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a third time]

8:10

Bill 15
Family Law Amendment Act, 2008

Ms Redford: It is my pleasure to rise today and move third reading of Bill 15, Family Law Amendment Act, 2008.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, my pleasure to rise and speak in third reading to the Family Law Amendment Act, 2008, a second justice bill I didn't get to speak to in second reading or committee.

This is an important bill to me because I worked on a lot of changes to the Maintenance Enforcement Act and to the implementation of it with the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud when he was the Minister of Justice. This is an issue I started working on when I was with the Advisory Council on Women's Issues. Interestingly, when it first started, it was identified very much as a women's issue because it tended to be women who were the custodial parents of children.

Actually, when the maintenance enforcement program was started, this act was called the income recovery program, I think, or something close to that, because essentially women were so poor after a divorce that they often ended up on social assistance. The government was trying to recoup the money they were paying to these single mothers caring for their children. So there was a requirement that they would have to say who the fathers were, and then they would chase the fathers down and get the back payments from them and repay the government for the money that they'd paid out in the social assistance to the mother and to the children.

The program has come an awfully long way from there. I think that is a very positive reflection of our understanding and of our value of children. One of the things that I had to keep saying to people who would get caught up in this is that this was about maintenance for children. This is not about an argument between the parents; this is about maintenance for kids. This is about kids' ability to eat decent food and live in a decent place and be able to participate in the rest of society like their friends that were coming from families that weren't looking at that same kind of breakup.

We've moved that program forward in certain, sort of, major increments as we moved forward. The first series of changes were really about how we chased down and got money out of chronic nonpayers. The legislation got adjusted a number of times and I think is working quite well now.

Then, interestingly, not that the tide turned, but I think we advanced enough in our society and in our understanding of the issues that it became more balanced. I used to feel sometimes that when the program actually found a paying father, they would turn him upside down and shake him until every penny fell out of his pocket. They actually had a guy who was co-operating, and they were going to get everything they could get out of him because there were a number of others who were involved in the program that you couldn't get anything out of. They hid their incomes. They quit their good jobs so that they could drive cab and not have a verifiable income. I mean, you could not believe that human beings would do this to avoid providing money for their children. That was the horror of what was going on.

I think we have managed to create a system in which it has become more fair. We have been able to figure out how to get at those chronic nonpayers through a number of ways, through income tax and GST reimbursement cheques but also through things like revoking drivers' licences. I was really interested to see how many people managed to come up with tens of thousands of dollars that

they had not had and couldn't possibly get, but their driver's licence was taken away, and they produced that money. That was money their kids had been going without. For a long time they'd been going without.

We did make the program fairer. Both custodial and noncustodial parents can voluntarily register in the program now. There are bank deposits and withdrawals for the payment and the collection of the payment. We really did work on this system, and it has become a lot better. I even ended up working with the minister to try and get enough office space for the staff to work in and a computer system that actually would be able to track how much money was outstanding because for the longest time we actually couldn't tell you how much money was still owed to custodial parents and, more importantly, to the children. They could tell me how many files were active, but if somebody had paid a penny, the file was active. Well, that doesn't tell us how much money was outstanding and was owed to children. So a very long way around to say that I am happy to see what's being brought forward in this.

The most important part of this bill, to me, is that the changes, the recalculation of child support orders, which we would call maintenance support orders, can be done through an administrative process and registered, and you don't have to go to court. That makes a huge difference, and it still makes a huge difference primarily for women who are the custodial parent of the child.

Women still have less resource to money. Women still tend to be working in jobs that have less flexibility for them, so for women to have to take off work to go down to the court to answer a change in an order that has been brought forward by the noncustodial parent, usually the father, is often a financial hardship or, at the very least, has financial implications that that mother will have to deal with. Likely she's working in an hourly wage job and will not get paid for the time, and she will have to pay her own transportation down there. She may well have to arrange for child care or after school care that she's going to have to pay out of pocket if she's not out of the court system fast enough.

This was a very real hardship for a number of women, so being able to recalculate the support orders and the assessments on that without going to court is really important. It doesn't sound like very much to people in here, who, you know, can work some flexibility into their schedules if they need to, but for many, many, many people in Alberta this was critical. I am very pleased that they do not have to appear before the courts for these issues. Interestingly, we're catching up to Newfoundland and Labrador, Manitoba, and P.E.I., so isn't that great? We've caught up to them. I'm so proud of us.

It's more than about justice; it's about the way we value our children, I think. It's definitely a streamlined system that helps us administer MEP payments. It places less demand on court resources to deal with family support awards and the issues therein. We know that it works in other jurisdictions because, as I said, now we're catching up to P.E.I. Isn't that exciting? I'm so proud of us.

Thank you for allowing me to sort of do that little – what does the Speaker call it? – historical vignette about what has happened to our maintenance program in Alberta. Just based on the number of phone calls I'm not getting from all corners of Alberta, I think we have done a good job in trying to get a handle on this, the whole concept behind maintenance payments and how we cope with chronic nonpayers and how we have streamlined the system overall by doing things like direct withdrawals and direct payments and allowing the other party to register the maintenance order or even an internal agreement that they have between them, to register that with the program. I'm quite proud of the work that we have done, and I'm proud of my role in pushing, cajoling, berating, and various other

mechanisms I've used to move us forward over the many, many years I've worked on this file.

Thank you very much. My congratulations to the minister.

8:20

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

Ms Notley: Thank you again. Second time in a row that I get to actually rise and speak, without qualification really, in favour of this bill. I do recall, again, the minister briefing me on this bill, and I actually remember me doing one of these lawyerly things and coming up with a hypothetical of a hypothetical of a hypothetical of a potential problem, but I can't for the life of me remember what it is now, so I will just forgo raising it and hope that it never comes up.

Nonetheless, this is a good bill because, as already mentioned, what it does is it helps deal with both women and children, who, as we know from the statistics, are most often the ones who will be living in poverty after there is a family breakdown. This is an opportunity to essentially improve their circumstances.

We've talked already previously about the need to streamline things and keep people out of court, and I believe that that was also discussed earlier today with respect to I think it was Bill 30, the apology legislation. This does the same thing. It minimizes the friction points and the need for people to go into court and to pay for lawyers and to take up the court's time and all that kind of thing, so that's a good thing. Then, as I say, it also just reduces friction points with respect to the relationships between the former spouses and ensures that the custodial parent or the noncustodial parent – it doesn't really matter which is which. There just doesn't need to be more opportunity for friction to arise and ultimately to undermine the overall health of the family.

It is a good thing that this is coming through. I have heard from people who work within the field of family law and have consulted with a number of them, and they also speak very highly of this amendment. Again, I want to pass on my congratulations both to the minister and also to any opposition members who have been working on this over a long period of time. I think that anything we can do through whatever mechanism of discussion that we have to improve the system – we know maintenance enforcement has always in many jurisdictions been a very difficult area, and to the extent that that can be improved with everybody's effort, that is great.

Again congratulations, and I'm pleased to support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions to the speaker.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the bill.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I, too, would like to stand and compliment the minister on what I consider to be this very important bill going forward. I probably wouldn't have been as aware of it if I hadn't been an MLA although I certainly saw some within my health profession. Some of the stories that have gone through my office have certainly made me very aware of how many children out there over the years have been neglected. What I still find because we can explain it through MLA offices – and I'm sure that many of you get the same sorts of constituent concerns – is that often the young mums that come in have lived in poverty to begin with, and now they're even more in poverty. They often really don't understand their rights, what they should be entitled to in terms of dollars to raise their children.

Another thing that comes up, unfortunately – and these women often don't have the money for it – is that the father, of course, will

deny paternity, and then they have to come up with the dollars for the DNA and sometimes the lawyers that go along with that. So there still are some unfortunate situations out there, but this bill goes a long way to help correct that.

One of the other things that helps with this bill and with the Maintenance Enforcement Act and keeps the fathers on their toes is that often fathers have gone along and started second marriages and second families. There's often a huge disparity between the half-siblings. So when I see things like that, no wonder our society is probably as mixed up as it is. There are often many great hard feelings about that.

I was in a licensing place once getting my own driver's licence, and a fellow was standing in front of me who had actually been refused having his licence renewed because of this Maintenance Enforcement Act. He was a small van/truck driver. He really did have a little meltdown in that place. When he went outside, of course, being nosy I had to follow him and talk to him. He had four kids under the age of five. I said, you know, that if you can't afford to make these payments, there are ways that you can go back and say, "I can't afford to make it right now; here's a little bit," whatever, but you just cannot walk away from four kids.

Again, I really support what's been going on here. When adults hurt each other and act like children, I really don't care about them, but I think it's very, very clear that our society going forward has to have good, solid, secure children who are going forward in an atmosphere of love. If they can't, they can't learn, and we will have more and more problems in our justice system.

I think that this bill is excellent, and I also think that in the long run it will cut down the effects that we may see further on down the line in social justice. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments.

Any other hon. member who wishes to speak on this bill? Seeing none, then I will call for the question on this bill.

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a third time]

Bill 16

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2008

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to rise today to move third reading of Bill 16, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2008.

The purpose of this bill is to provide clarity as to when a pipeline becomes assessable and to confirm the existing policy. This proposed amendment makes the assessment process clear for municipalities and for industry and confirms existing policy. This confirmation creates stability for industry regarding when they will pay tax and stability for municipalities on when revenue will start for a pipeline that may have been under construction for a number of years.

We've had a good debate in the House on this amendment, and over the summer we have responded to issues raised by municipalities as well as industry. That is why we are proposing the change. I therefore encourage all members of this Assembly to support the passing of Bill 16.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief because, as the minister has pointed out, we've had a fair discussion on this bill. I think it's certainly one that has been forthcoming for a period of time, and the minister has done a good job in identifying this. What it will do is put more revenue, of course, into the municipalities, where it belonged in the first place.

I just want to make sure that I'm on record as supporting it, once again, and thank the minister for the work on this.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member who wishes to speak on the bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a third time]

8:30 **Bill 25**
Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2008

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 25, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2008.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, contains noncontentious provisions pertaining to 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 third time]

Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 32
Meat Inspection Amendment Act, 2008

[Adjourned debate October 20: Mr. Griffiths]

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 32, the Meat Inspection Amendment Act. Now, this particular piece of legislation is relatively brief and in most ways is actually very simple housekeeping. There is, however, one particular section which really concerns me. That is section 3 of this act, which repeals section 3 of the preceding act.

Section 3 of the old act, the portion that by this legislation is being repealed, reads as follows: "All medical officers of health and all executive officers under the Public Health Act and the Regional Health Authorities Act are by virtue of their offices inspectors under this Act within the areas of their jurisdictions." That sentence that I just read is in the existing legislation. This bill will repeal that. Mr. Speaker, that is the crux of my concern with Bill 32. The rest of the bill, by and large, is just a matter of clarifying language or correcting language or becoming more specific.

There is one other clause of note here, and that is under section 2 of the act, 2(k), which reads: "'peace officer' means a peace officer appointed under the Peace Officer Act." It's basically, I think, changing the definition in the existing legislation from "police officer" and making it "peace officer," which feels like potentially a weakening of the legislation.

My biggest concern, and what I wanted to speak to at some length right now, Mr. Speaker, is this notion of eliminating the role of the

health department in meat inspections. I think it's important to set some context for our concerns. Many of us, maybe most of us here, at some point in our lives have suffered from food poisoning in one way or another, maybe travelling, maybe in a resort in a developing country, maybe right here in Canada. It could be from a restaurant. It could be from cooking at home. It could be from buying foods that are improperly processed. Of course, it's not just something that we experience in our lives as individuals; it's a broad and very serious concern.

In the news recently there has been a great deal of publicity around the listeriosis outbreak in processed meats, which is exactly the kind of thing that would be covered under this legislation. Now, listeriosis typically develops because of meat-slicing equipment or meat-processing equipment which is not cleaned adequately. The listeria bacteria gets into the meat and ultimately is ingested. This is particularly the case in processed meats. It is ingested by people who might buy it at a deli or buy it in a ready-made sandwich, you know, those prepackaged sandwiches, something like that, and then a few days later begin to experience severe stomach cramps, diarrhea, and all those symptoms that come along with food poisoning.

At times, particularly with young children or elderly people or people with compromised resistance, this can be fatal. In fact, with this listeriosis outbreak of the last three months or so in Canada, which was documented as the worst outbreak of its kind in the world, quite a number of people died. In fact, it's hard to determine exactly how many, but we're talking about seven, 10, 12, 15 people dying and many, many, many more people than that getting very sick because of improperly prepared food coming out of factories.

Of course, it's not just listeriosis we need to worry about. E coli crops up as well. In fact, there's an E coli outbreak occurring somewhere in the country right now. It seems to me I've been seeing the headlines. E coli outbreaks are also common. In fact, they're more common than listeriosis outbreaks. We've had E coli outbreaks in meat from meat processing plants in Alberta, both provincially and federally inspected plants, over the last number of years. Again, E coli for people who have weakened immune systems or for other reasons are frail can be fatal. It is extremely unpleasant even if you recover from it, and one of the things that needs to be recognized is that recovery is not necessarily one hundred per cent. These infections can leave permanent damage to people's kidneys or other organs, and so in some cases people never actually recover fully from food poisoning. So we have very, very serious health concerns and questions under this legislation, Mr. Speaker.

I lived in Britain in 1993 and 1994, and that happened to be the height of the BSE outbreak in Britain, which was, in fact, the worst in the world. The public fear was palpable. I remember once I was flying back to Canada, and while all of us have probably flown on planes where the attendants come along with the meal and they say, "Would you like chicken or beef?" to a person in this great big aircraft flying out of Britain to return to Canada, everybody said: well, is it British beef? And because there was some uncertainty of where it was from, everybody chose the chicken until they ran out of chicken and had all these trolleys filled with beef that nobody would eat. The fear was palpable about British beef.

The beef industry in Britain, which is surprisingly large for such a small place, utterly collapsed. They had to destroy a large percentage of the British beef herd, and there were actually in Britain – I'm forgetting the exact number – somewhere between 50 and 100 human fatalities from BSE. That was the beginning of that rolling BSE crisis that eventually engulfed Alberta about four years ago, five years ago maybe. Costs: to this day the estimates of the

cost to the Alberta economy are \$700 million in this year alone. It was, of course, billions more.

8:40

The public is very aware of health concerns with meat. Health concerns with meat can be used and abused by trade organizations to block trade. Many people felt that Alberta beef was unduly penalized by groups like R-CALF in the U.S., who used a very, very small number of BSE cases in Canada to shut the U.S. border to Canadian beef. Unfortunately, that then brought in trade sanctions as well from places like Japan and Korea and Mexico and elsewhere, and it's been a very long and difficult and extremely expensive process to recover Alberta's markets.

So we have a really, really serious issue here. My concern with what this bill is proposing is that it fails to distinguish between the people who are there to promote meat and the people who are there to ensure that it is safe. An ideal system for this would have completely separate lines of responsibility for the people charged with producing and promoting beef and those ensuring that it is safe. In that system you would have a department of agriculture or some equivalent working with industry to promote beef and meat products, but you would have an arm's-length policing agency that was charged with ensuring that they were safe and had the authority and the courage, if need be, to shut down a plant in order to protect public health and in order to protect trade.

That's, I think, one of the crucial reasons that the existing legislation allowed medical officers of health and executive officers under the Public Health Act and the Regional Health Authorities Act to be meat inspectors. In other words, a medical officer of health, if she or he felt that there was a health issue, could actually go in with the full authority of being a meat inspector, take the swabs, collect the samples, do the lab work, and if need be, shut the plant down or otherwise order it to clean up.

Mr. Speaker, it is the medical officer of health or other officials in the regional health authorities who are typically the first to learn of an outbreak. Let's all think back to Walkerton. The Walkerton outbreak, which wasn't, thankfully, related to meat at all, was first detected by the local medical officer of health when he began getting all kinds of reports from physicians about this strange outbreak of diarrhea. That medical officer of health, as I recall, actually eventually suspected the water system and went to the people operating the water system. They initially denied there was any problem, and only when it became irrefutable and the number of people getting sick was in the hundreds and then in the thousands did the medical officer of health use his full powers and move in and shut down the water system.

Now, imagine if that medical officer of health had worked for the same people who were treating the water, the same people in that case who had a vested interest in covering their tracks and in covering up their incompetence and in continuing to sell their water. Would that authority have been exercised, and would it have been exercised as quickly? The public concern here is that probably the answer to that is no.

It's a very short extension from that example to imagining a case in Alberta where a medical officer of health begins getting reports from physicians about listeriosis or about E coli and wants to enforce and does the swabs and does the samples and finds the evidence and wants to close down a meat plant and under existing legislation has the authority to do that. Under this legislation, unless the minister is able to provide detailed notes explaining where I'm wrong, that would no longer be possible. The medical officer of health in Alberta under this legislation would not have the authority to do that because under this legislation the medical officer of health would no

longer have the powers of an inspector and therefore would not be able to do the job that was necessary.

Mr. Speaker, we have a real issue here. I will be bringing forward when we come to committee an amendment to propose to correct what we see as a real weakness in this legislation. I can't imagine a justification for this particular section, which will repeal the legislative basis for medical officers of health and regional health authorities to be meat inspectors. I can't imagine why that is justified. I look forward to hearing from the minister or the Premier or somebody on the government side what the justification is for that particular clause of this act.

Mr. Speaker, there's one other issue that I think needs to be brought forward, and that is a concern that has emerged most recently because of the listeriosis outbreak, that Canada, in fact, has a two-tiered or maybe an 11-tiered meat inspection system. That's because there is one federal set of standards and one federal system, which governs all meat that crosses provincial borders or international borders, and then another set of systems for each province, where meat that's processed within that province and stays within that province is in fact covered under provincial standards. There is a concern in many situations that provincial standards and provincial inspection and enforcement are lower than federal standards. In fact, many people in the industry are beginning to call for a single set of national standards.

I think that at some point we should be considering that. We should be looking at that and asking ourselves if that isn't in the long run the way to go so that whether you're in Alberta or Prince Edward Island or Manitoba or anywhere else, as a Canadian you know that the meat you're eating is processed – slaughtered, packaged, frozen, transported, and otherwise delivered – to exactly the same standards and that those standards are consistently enforced no matter where you are in this country.

I would be very interested to know how this bill, Bill 32, fits with federal standards or if it fits at all, if there's any attempt through Bill 32 for us to be harmonizing our provincial standards with the federal standards.

I know it was just the other day that the Premier was talking in this House about the need to harmonize Alberta's environmental and climate change standards with those in Ottawa. Not a bad idea. This government has talked about harmonizing with B.C. on trade and investment and labour issues. Not a bad idea. There are questions around the process, but why not? Maybe we should harmonize our meat inspection processes as well and have one federal system. I don't know why we wouldn't do that.

Mr. Speaker, just to wrap up here, this is a piece of legislation that addresses something very important to us, those of us who aren't vegetarians, those of us who eat meat. It's a piece of legislation that addresses something very important to the culture and history of Alberta.

Ms Blakeman: Are you saying that vegetarians are smarter?

Dr. Taft: No, I'm not saying that vegetarians are smarter.

But it does address an issue of important cultural and historic relevance for Alberta because of our beef industry and our ranching industry. It obviously addresses something of real economic importance because the beef and pork and poultry industries are so significant in this province, but I'm not convinced that it addresses those concerns very well.

I look forward to hearing from the minister in due course how section 3 of this particular bill is justified. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

8:50

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure that I have a great deal to add after my leader has so eloquently expressed many concerns with this bill, but there are a couple of things. I think that this bill is very important because our beef industry simply cannot afford any kind of a hit that would come as a result of finding any sort of tainted meat within that beef industry, particularly here in Alberta.

One of the things that concerns me with the change to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development from Alberta Health and Wellness is that I would want to know what the qualifications of the inspectors are going to be. I also would like to know what the expectation of their education would be to give them the authority to go in and inspect and make whatever recommendations they would be doing.

One of the other questions is: would this amendment give the minister the authority to impose the country of origin labelling if required? Well, I personally feel that "if required" doesn't fit anymore. I really want to know where my food is coming from, and I think it's very important. I think we all are starting to read our labels much more closely. I'm very lucky in southern Alberta because I can buy most of what I eat locally. I know the farmers. I know my beef and lamb producers, so I am very lucky. Not everyone is that fortunate to be able to buy locally, which is what we're all trying to do. As far as the labels go, I bought something the other day and found out that although I had seen Ontario on it – it actually was packed in Ontario – the food had come from China. That did give me some concern.

I think it's important that we start doing our food labelling. I realize that it does become expensive because how are you going to label the ingredients in a chocolate bar when there are so many? However, I think we know that Cadbury has learned that lesson by having to recall all their chocolate bars because of the tainted powdered milk from China.

I am not a vegetarian, and I like my meat, but I also like my fish. Again, I'm even starting to be wary of fish. I certainly wouldn't buy farmed fish. I would want it to be wild, and even that, really, is no guarantee that they're not full of mercury as well.

Those are really my two concerns. I think we have to know where our food is coming from, and I want to know the qualifications of the people that are telling me that that food is okay.

Mr. MacDonald: We should have labels of origin.

Ms Pastoor: Labels of origin, yes. Yeah, our food should be labelled. We should be able to understand where the food comes from.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 33
Agriculture Financial Services
Amendment Act, 2008

[Adjourned debate October 20: Mr. Griffiths]

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It's always a thrill to stand up in this Assembly and speak to the attentive crowd here. And I welcome them to speak, too. I'll listen attentively to you.

Mr. Denis: It's going to be in *Hansard*.

Mrs. Forsyth: You have our full attention.

Dr. Taft: Yeah. Good.

Bill 33 is called the Agriculture Financial Services Amendment Act, 2008. It's kind of an interesting piece of legislation. I've got questions about it. I'm not saying that I'm opposed to it, but I sure do have some questions and hope that the minister or the sponsor of the bill or somebody else actually brings forward a little bit further explanation here. The bill is an amendment bill. It's giving the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation the authority to offer livestock insurance programs.

Now, I'm sure everybody here, whether you live on a farm or not, is familiar with crop insurance programs. Crop insurance programs have been around for goodness knows how long, probably since the 1930s, I'm guessing, or maybe since the '40s. And you can understand why. Well, a farmer raising crops can be the victim of all kinds of things beyond his control or her control, from a hailstorm – in fact, Mr. Speaker, now that I mention that, I remember vividly in 1988 visiting a family friend on a small farm outside of Saskatchewan on a beautiful July day. Sorry. It was a large farm near a small town.

An Hon. Member: Which town in Saskatchewan?

Dr. Taft: Just east of Saskatoon, but the town – I have to think for a minute what the name of the little town is.

Mr. MacDonald: Floral?

Dr. Taft: No, it wasn't Floral. Not the birthplace of Gordie Howe. Anyway, I appreciate all the help that I'm getting from a few members here.

Mr. MacDonald: Foam Lake?

Dr. Taft: No, it wasn't Foam Lake.

Anyway, this large farm was run by a family named the Robertsons, and all they had on this large farm near this small town was grain. No cattle. It was a beautiful July day, at least it started off as a beautiful July day. We were in this fine, old farmhouse which went back probably to the 1920s and looked almost like the house on the Ponderosa. We were in there, and we had tea with Alastair, who was the head of the farm at the point. Then he took us for a quick tour around the farm because my father was with me, and my father had spent part of his boyhood visiting this farm from time to time.

As we were going around among the barns and the sheds, the weather had changed. Out of nowhere, it seemed, a hailstorm broke out, and we took shelter in a barn. The hailstorm blew over in five minutes, but we came out, and in that five minutes the crop had been destroyed. Now, that wasn't Alastair's fault. It wasn't anybody's fault, but he had lost the whole year's crop.

That's an example of how we ended up developing crop insurance. Farmers came together. They pooled their resources. They socialized the risk in the same way that we socialized the risk for health problems, and they came up with crop insurance. Fair enough. Good idea. You know, every year there are hassles and concerns and debates about how crop insurance is implemented, how it should be administered, about the amount of paperwork, enforcement, and all the rest of it, but nobody disagrees with the concept.

The point of this legislation, Bill 33, is essentially to take the same idea and apply it to livestock. Now, I think that's an interesting notion – I'm not opposed to the idea at all – but I think it's an idea

and a shift that needs to be carefully considered, and it needs to be carefully considered for a number of reasons.

I've often spoken to beef producers around this province. In fact, my in-laws still raise cattle. If this session hadn't opened on that second Tuesday in October, I would have been out helping with dehorning and castrating and branding and otherwise cattle.

9:00

Ms Pastoor: Oh, prairie oysters. Yummy.

Dr. Taft: Now, the Member for Lethbridge-East is licking her chops at the idea of a good feed of prairie oysters. I have to tell you that after seeing bucketfuls of them, I have no appetite at all for that sort of thing. Regardless, I'm losing my track about my point here.

The point is that when I talk to cattle producers, they are by and large fiercely independent people who have historically in Alberta been happy to take their chances on the free market. They've resisted in a way that many other sectors of our economy haven't. Beef producers have resisted the idea of meddling too much in market forces. Now, maybe the BSE outbreak signified or triggered a cultural shift in that attitude. I don't know. I still hear beef producers talk about being hard-core free marketers and, "We'll take our chances with the free market," but maybe the reality of a harsher world or of the penalties of BSE and the consequences of BSE have undermined that spirit.

Although the talk is still there, the feeling is no longer as deeply held because what we have here, as far as I read Bill 33, is essentially a big step towards socializing the risks of producing beef in Alberta and of bringing in protection so that when free-market forces don't go the way of the beef producers, there's somebody there to bail them out and they're not just left on their own resources. Now, what that somebody is can take all kinds of forms, you know, and we'll have to see in the details how that is played out.

Again, I look forward to seeing what comments the minister or other members may have, but it seems to me that this may be kind of one of those turning points in the history and the society of the beef sector in Alberta, a turning point towards a much more collective approach to how that food is produced. I find that interesting. I'm not opposed to it. I'm not supporting it right now. I just would like to learn and hear more about it.

There are some things that also interest me in this piece of legislation. One of them is around I think it's section 6. I just need to check. I have it here. Yes, Bill 33. Allow me a moment, Mr. Speaker. Yes, it is section 6 which does something that has become a habit of this government, and that is to take a clear cap that is in legislation and pull it out of legislation and put it into regulations so that the legislative controls that did things like prevent government spending from getting out of hand are removed.

I think when this occurs on a broad scale we see a government that is beginning to do exactly what this government did in the early 1980s, and that is lose control of spending. Some of these provisions, like what is referred to in section 6 of this act, were probably brought in, I'm going to guess, sometime in the 1990s because of the need to control spending because of a philosophy that prevailed in this government at that time which was genuine or, at least, a little bit more genuine: accountability.

The current legislation provides for a \$2 million cap, in effect, on a loan under the legislation. If we pass Bill 33 – and I think every fiscal conservative in this Assembly should pay careful attention here – we're removing that cap, and we're saying it's no longer the business of this Assembly what the cap is because it would be handled under regulations. With the regulations, at least from the talk I hear, the cap is going to go from \$2 million in legislation to \$5

million in regulation. You can bet that as soon as there's a little pressure brought on the cabinet ministers, it's going to go from \$5 million to \$6 million to \$8 million to \$10 million to whatever. And that repeated many times over is how government loses control of spending.

Mr. Speaker, that's a concern I have with a specific section here. I don't know why that's necessary. I have a hunch that that's not aimed at your ordinary family farm, such as it is anymore. Frankly, your ordinary family farm, like some of the ones that I'm very familiar with, wouldn't know what to do with a \$2 million loan. I have a hunch that this is aimed at the big corporate farms. I do believe that. I know some members here may be doubtful, but my hunch is that, in fact, what we're doing here through this legislation is setting up a way for big, big beef producers to reduce the downside risk and shed it off to the taxpayer. That's my hunch here. I'd like to see if the minister can disprove that.

I would hope that all of the fiscal conservatives in this Assembly take a careful look at this piece of legislation. I have to ask myself: why is it that we have a Crown corporation that will be able to make multimillion dollar loans to big beef producers? I want to see the justification. I'd like to know, for example, if those beef producers have to be Canadian-owned, or could they be owned by anybody from around the world? If they are, then why would it be that we're putting Alberta taxpayer money at risk? I'd like to know what other benefits those meat producers might also be enjoying in the form of subsidies to infrastructure or compensation under BSE bailout regulations or all kinds of other rebates they may be getting. I hope that the minister will address those particular questions.

Some of the rest of this legislation is largely about changing the wording of the legislation in ways that seem pretty simple and straightforward and just a matter of keeping in spirit with the bill. For example, in a number of places the term "insurable crop" will be changed to read "insurable agricultural product" because an agricultural product is a much more encompassing term than crop. That's in the spirit here of extending crop insurance to livestock.

I think there are some tough questions here. I would like to hear from anybody on the government side how they justify and explain this apparent kind of abandonment of market forces in a core section of our economy because I thought this was a free-market government that actually valued fiscal responsibility. Instead, I sense this is taking us in the opposite direction. I'm not opposed to it. I wondered if maybe the government even ever considered marketing boards for red meat, for example. There used to be that sort of thing for pork. [interjections] I'm getting commentary from backbenchers. We have a turkey marketing board that actually enjoys great success. I wondered if that approach was ever considered instead of this one. I'd just be curious to know.

Those are some of my questions. I look forward to somebody from the government side elucidating all those for us. Thank you.

9:10

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I listened with a great deal of interest to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and his comments regarding Bill 33, the Agriculture Financial Services Amendment Act, 2008. I, too, am reserving support or rejection of this bill. I certainly have a number of questions that hopefully can be answered in the course of debate. These amendments will give the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation the authority to offer livestock insurance programs.

It's quite interesting whenever you have a look at the insurance programs that are offered to date to the agricultural sector in our

province. Certainly, we have production insurance for annual crops. It's a significant program. There are over 13,000 crop insurance contracts. It varies from year to year, but roughly, Mr. Speaker, it's around 13,000. There are considerable premiums paid. Contracts with losses vary from around 4,000 to 5,000. There are hail insurance or hail endorsements, spring price endorsements, revenue insurance coverage, and all of these are based on the number of contracts, the acres, the risk, the premium.

The hon. member's question regarding livestock insurance is essentially: how will the program work? What are the details of this proposed program? When we look at perennial crops, we look at hay insurance. We look at moisture deficiency endorsement for hay insurance. We look at export, timothy hay insurance, satellite yield insurance for the pasture, moisture deficiency insurance for the pasture, hail insurance, wildlife damage compensation insurance again. It's surprising that livestock insurance is just coming along, because it may have merit.

Now, many of the hon. members of this Assembly would have various forms of insurance, and I would encourage all hon. members of the House to look at our own indemnity files to see who collected how much and where. It's surprising some of the amounts that are collected. In fact, I had a discussion with our Ethics Commissioner about this whole program and how it's reported, and it's interesting that there are sets of rules, Mr. Speaker, for some members and different sets of rules for other members regarding this. I find that puzzling, to say the least.

There are a number of programs already in existence. In light of what the livestock industry has gone through and is going through at the moment, this may be a very worthwhile program for our producers. Hopefully, my questions along with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview's will be answered in the normal course of the debate.

Now, there are also amendments in Bill 33, Mr. Speaker, that will allow for the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation's maximum loan or guarantee amounts to be modified through regulation, and this I have a lot of caution towards. I'm doubtful about this. If we look at the lending practices of the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, direct lending totalled \$280 million in 2007-08. That was an increase of 15 per cent over the previous fiscal year. If we look at the loans, some of them are farm loans. Some of them, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview talked about earlier, are loans for Alberta's agribusinesses, rural businesses, and commercial enterprises. There is quite a variety of commercial lending products or risk-management products available through AFSC, and I can't understand why, if we have this expanded loan portfolio, we would go to the secrecy of regulations.

Dr. Taft: It's a culture of secrecy.

Mr. MacDonald: There certainly is a culture of secrecy in this government. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is quite correct because this is Right to Know Week. It's Right To Know Week in every place in the country except Alberta.

Mr. Liepert: Open and transparent.

Mr. MacDonald: Open and transparent like a bank vault door: on occasion but never whenever I need that door to be open.

Ms Blakeman: Well, it's funny: that clanging sound just as we walk up.

Mr. MacDonald: It's funny. Yes.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know who is worse at distracting me, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview or the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

New direct loans, Mr. Speaker, for AFSC for the year ended March 31, 2008, were \$280 million, and that's compared to \$243 million the previous year. I'm looking at the annual report, which was provided to me, and I appreciate that. "The total amount of investment leveraged by our loans is an important indication of AFSC's contributions to growth in Alberta."

It goes on to say in here that "the 2007-08 lending investment contributed significantly to the Alberta economy. By fiscal year end, the \$281.4 million in lending translated to leveraged investment, or total project dollars, of more than \$468.6 million." In 2007-08 the loan portfolio reached a billion dollars, and it was about the same the previous year. "Total arrears on the lending portfolio continue to be well managed."

Well, we were told that everything was fine at the Alberta Treasury Branches. I listened keenly today in question period again when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre was asking the minister of finance about some of the activities at the Alberta Treasury Branches and the fact that the board – and it's minuted, and the minutes from the board are referenced in the Auditor General's report – overruled a policy and provided \$26 million in bonuses to staff. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre had questions about this, and the Auditor General had questions about this, yet here in this bill, Mr. Speaker, we are putting in regulation the guarantee amounts that are to go forward with Agriculture Financial Services Corporation. We're talking about a lot of money here. We're talking about a billion dollars. Of course, we know who is guaranteeing all this: the taxpayers.

9:20

Right now customers give the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation a very high rating, and that's really comforting to see. This survey of services was conducted, as I understand, by an independent firm, and Agriculture Financial Services Corporation to date seems to be doing what they are supposed to.

I'm looking through this. If we look in the annual report at risk management, we look at strategic risks, and we look at the credit risk. We're going to have a breakdown of the loan portfolio by business before I conclude by remarks, Mr. Speaker. We look at the liquidity risk and: "AFSC mitigates liquidity risks by retaining adequate bank balances in operating accounts. These accounts yield a reasonable rate of return through the Government of Alberta Consolidated Cash Investment Trust Fund."

Again, you know who is supporting this.

An Hon. Member: Who?

Mr. MacDonald: The citizens of the province of Alberta, just like they do with the Alberta Treasury Branches, hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: You mean backstopping them.

Mr. MacDonald: They certainly backstop it, so why we would move this to regulation, hon. member, is just beyond me. I don't think it is necessary.

We're talking about this liquidity risk. "Additionally, the portfolio allows access to advances from the GOA and a revolving borrowing limit of \$1.4 billion through Alberta Finance." If hon. members across the way could explain to me why we need to move this into regulation, I would be grateful. Why do we need to do this? It's taxpayers' money, and they have every right to know where it's going and why and to whom.

Now, when we look at some of the loans – and I'm looking at the financial statements and some of the notes – we see where this money is loaned. These are very important sectors not only to the agricultural economy but to the economy of the province as a whole. We look at grains and oilseeds in excess of \$460 million. Cattle is \$366 million. Other livestock is \$60 million. Manufacturing has loans of \$45 million, and that's gone up from 2007, Mr. Speaker, by \$20 million, up from \$25 million. Accommodations and other services, whatever that is, have gone down by \$23 million. Trade has gone up, and other, whatever that category would be, is around \$80 million. That totals 1-plus billion dollars.

There's a lot of money in this loan portfolio. It's very important in light of the fact that the government of Alberta and the citizens are backstopping this, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre states, that these practices remain in the act and not be amended or modified to be in the regulations. Regulations can change, as we all know, the week before Christmas or the week before Easter.

Dr. Taft: Usually it's Friday afternoon before Christmas.

Mr. MacDonald: It could be a Friday afternoon before Christmas, when the citizens aren't paying attention.

People may not know that considerable amounts of money may be at an increased risk.

Dr. Taft: Do you suppose that's why they do it?

Mr. MacDonald: They may do that, hon. member, but I certainly hope not.

I do know, however, that with the Alberta Treasury Branches I was astonished to learn that \$1.4 billion was invested in a very risky form of investment, and the return would have been \$1.5 million if it had worked out.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate, please, on Bill 33 at this time. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 35 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2008

[Adjourned debate October 16: Ms Evans]

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been following with interest the Government Organization Act since the Member for Red Deer-North – I believe it was Stockwell Day – introduced this bill. He introduced this bill, and I think the province has been paying a price ever since. All hon. members know that when cabinet is selected and they see the portfolios and the statutes that are to be administered by each respective department, that is essentially the Government Organization Act. Now we're looking at an amendment to this act that is going to change a number of things which I have quite an interest in, and so do the taxpayers of this province.

This bill will enable the government to change the way they sell land through cabinet decision, overriding legislative provisions. This is quite interesting. There are some that would say: "What land do they have left to sell? They sold it all at fire-sale prices already." In some cases they gave it away. In other cases they got as much as \$45,000, \$50,000 an acre. The most recent examples I have of some of the government's land sales that come to mind are the Saline Creek and the Parsons Creek properties in Fort McMurray, where there was a unique method used to develop, or hopefully develop,

these two properties so that the individuals who eventually buy the houses will get them at an affordable price. I don't know if this is going to work out or not.

Maybe with amendments this bill would be acceptable, but I'm not satisfied with how we have been selling land in the past, Mr. Speaker. When we look at the sale of the surplus land from the ring roads around Edmonton and Calgary – and I know the hon. Minister of Infrastructure was very active in municipal politics and that this was before his time in the Assembly – the government went ahead and quietly, discreetly sold property that was deemed to be surplus from the ring road lands in Edmonton and Calgary and sold it to various individuals and corporations, in some cases for as little as a dollar per parcel.

9:30

An Hon. Member: Did you get any?

Mr. MacDonald: No, hon. member. It's funny that you would ask. It wasn't advertised that I could find anywhere that this land was even up for sale.

Of course, it had a certain attraction because once you get the free-flowing freeways going by, the developers want to put single-family housing in there, and people thought the commute was going to be fairly quick. I'm not going to say that the government forgot to put approaches and overpasses in. They built part of the ramps for them and installed lights, so we have these freeways where you can really jet along, and all of a sudden you and your neighbours come to a halt. That's going to be fixed. I don't know what the final cost is going to be, but that's going to be fixed, and the citizens appreciate that.

We look at the past history, and we look at some of the deals that were provided to individuals. In fact, Mr. Speaker, one party sold the land to the government for the ring road. I don't have my notes with me, but I think it was a \$10 million sale. The government used part of it. This is around that new Cameron Heights development just west of the twin bridges going over the North Saskatchewan River. They bought back the surplus land, three parcels that were in excess of 100 acres, for a dollar each. A dollar.

Now, there's land up in the northeast corner of the city. When the Premier was minister of infrastructure and transportation, it was sold for \$2,000 an acre. I didn't see any public offering when that land was sold. I didn't see any public offering for the land that was sold over to the Royal Development Corporation, I think the company is called, on the other side of the east leg of the Henday Drive on highway 216, south of Sherwood Park. There was a nice parcel of considerable size sold over there.

The only way, Mr. Speaker, the taxpayers have of looking at this land is to see it in the *Gazette* after it's sold. After it's sold, of course, the citizens can go to the *Alberta Gazette* and check out the prices, check out how much was sold. They've got to do their due diligence on that. I don't think that this bill is going to improve the situation for the taxpayers.

I don't know why with this bill we would be interested in bypassing legislative authority. We and others have repeatedly raised concerns about this government giving themselves again extra powers to make regulations or decisions that can overturn legislation or legislative authority. Clause 3(c) of this bill does exactly that. Unless this bill is amended by removing this clause, I don't think hon. members on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, can support this bill.

The government manages public land on behalf of the people of the province, the taxpayers, the citizens. Now, 80 per cent of the land mass, 80 per cent of the province, is really public land. Some of that land, as we know, is leased to oil and gas companies for them

to explore and develop. Other lands are sold or exchanged between individuals and businesses. Some of this land will be sold by the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development and some, of course, by the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Ministry of Transportation jointly.

The ring road lands used to be under the guidance of the Ministry of Environment. At one time, yes, the Environment ministry was involved in this, and this goes back to the Lougheed era, when this land was assembled and purchased by the government in the first place, in many cases, interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, for significantly larger amounts of money, taxpayers' money, on a per-acre basis than what the land was sold back for in these sweet deals as recently as three or four years ago. So was it a good deal for the taxpayers? No, it certainly wasn't.

Now, whenever we look at land sales and we look at the Minister of Infrastructure's website – yes, I do look at his website. He may be surprised, but I keep my eye on it as often as I can. You see where there are parcels that come up for sale. I was looking at one in Edson the other day, and I think it was a two, two and a half acre parcel for \$52,000, Mr. Speaker. There were a couple of colour photographs of it: a north view, a south view. There are a couple of other interesting parcels also on his website, but we would never see an announcement in the past of any surplus ring road land coming up for sale or offered to tender.

In fairness to the minister, I did see in the fine city of Calgary a small parcel, as they would say, a jog of land, on the TUC, the transportation utility corridor, up for sale. It was a significant price if I remember correctly. I think it was in the million-dollar range or more. During the course of the debate we're going to have a comparison, I can guarantee you, of what that land is being sold for at this moment – and I give the minister full credit – to some of the prices that we gave away land for in the last four and five years. I think, again, taxpayers will be disappointed and dismayed. They may be very impressed with this minister, and they may scratch their heads at his past colleagues and the fact that so much of this land was given away for so very little money.

Mr. Speaker, the rules and restrictions governing land sales should apply to everyone. Currently, land sales under the Government Organization Act must meet the following conditions. Now, we talked two years ago in this house about the land sales for the Anthony Henday ring road surrounding Edmonton and the one in Calgary, and I'm not going to repeat what I said earlier, but whenever we look at these sales, the kind of deals that have been conducted in the past are why government land transactions need to be clearly controlled and formalized and done in public.

Now, the current government has a habit of inserting clauses into legislation that will allow the ministers to enact orders in council or regulations that could trump the legislation itself. This is not acceptable. It's not in the taxpayers' interests. What passes in the Legislative Assembly is the law of the province and should be supreme over regulations that may stem from it. This bill is one more example of that shift of power away from the elected representatives of Alberta, and it should not be passed in its current form. If the government wishes to soften the requirements on land sales, then it should set out in the legislation the specific cases where those alternatives should apply. Land belonging to Albertans, paid for by Albertans, sometimes at a very high cost, should be disposed of as determined by the representatives of the citizens, we who have the privilege of serving in this Assembly.

I'm looking forward to the debate on this bill. Certainly, it will be quite interesting. I look forward to having some explanations as to why this is necessary, what will happen with the *Alberta Gazette*, what will happen to all of the notifications, who will receive them when land is to be sold or disposed of. Mr. Speaker, it should be a

very interesting debate. I look forward to further discussion on this bill, and at this time I would please request that we could adjourn debate on Bill 35.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

9:40

Bill 34

Employment Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2008

[Adjourned debate October 20: Dr. Brown]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to continue the discussion on Bill 34, the Employment Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2008. As I had mentioned at the outset on moving second reading, this is the particular piece of legislation which governs and sets the standards for private-sector pensions in the province of Alberta. We have a current reciprocal agreement with federal pension regulators and other provincial regulators which was drafted in 1967, a time which predates, I might note, the birthdate of many of the members present in the House. So there is a need to reform that reciprocal agreement.

As I had mentioned previously, the Canadian Association of Pension Supervisory Authorities, known as CAPSA, of which Alberta is a member, was responsible for the development of the new agreement to replace the existing one. I want to speak a little bit about some of the provisions and some of the changes that are being made under the agreement.

Under the old agreement a pension plan was registered in the province in which the majority of its members were employed. It was the jurisdiction of registration that was then charged with the responsibility of administering and enforcing all of the provisions of the legislation of the other jurisdictions with respect to members employed in other jurisdictions.

Under the new agreement the registration in the majority jurisdiction continues to apply. However, the change is that the laws of that province of registration will apply to all the members, regardless of which province they happen to reside in or where they're employed, but only with respect to the technical, administrative items. So that will simplify the administration of the plans for the plan sponsors and the regulator.

The purpose of CAPSA is to work towards harmonization and uniformity of standards for pension plans throughout Alberta. Our superintendent of pensions here in the province of Alberta has had direct input into the proposals set out in this bill and in the drafting of the interprovincial agreement and is in accord with the provisions of the bill.

The most significant change is that Alberta will be permitting the laws of another province to apply to Albertans instead of Alberta laws for planned administration issues. The new agreement continues to apply the laws of the province of employment with respect to benefit entitlements. So it's only with respect to administrative functions, things like investment funding and disclosure, that the laws of another province would apply. One of the examples, a very good example, of the administrative provisions is the provisions in different provinces that provide for remission of the pension contributions of the employer on a weekly basis in some provinces, on a biweekly basis in other provinces, on a monthly basis in other jurisdictions.

What should be noted is that this new agreement would not affect the substantive member benefit entitlements that they would be entitled to under the province of their residency and employment. All pension jurisdictions have as their primary goal the protection of members' benefits. The variances are in the technical methods of

how they do this. For example, Alberta permits the funding of solvency deficits through a letter of credit while Ontario does not. Nonetheless, should a pension plan terminate with a deficit, there are rules in the agreement that would apply the Alberta requirement for the employer to fully fund benefits for Alberta members.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I would urge all hon. members to join me in supporting Bill 34 on second reading.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It was a bit of a surprise to me, but it turned out that I am the Official Opposition critic for Bill 34, Employment Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2008. I've spent some time with it, and I'll do my best to bring a critical eye to this.

Not to repeat too much the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, where this started, interestingly enough, was that we ended up with pension plans that were crossing over provincial lines. The famous case that sort of in modern times started the kerfuffle, if I may put it that way, was what's call the Leco case. It was a large trade union that existed in both Ontario and in Quebec, and it wanted to make some changes. Essentially, it was looking to fold, I think. They had an agreement where they decided to roll it up, and that was okay for the Ontario folks. Then the Quebec folks disagreed absolutely.

It was a surplus from an Ontario registered pension plan, but it also had a significant number – it was a Leco, L-e-c-o, plan. It also had members in Quebec and some other provinces. The fund had been wound up. There was a decision, a member consent-based surplus withdrawal provision. The Ontario pension commission approved this surplus refund in 1997, but then the refund was challenged by the Quebec members. And then we have dueling pension wars in Ontario and Quebec. They each ended up with rulings and appeals and da-da-da-da.

In the end, essentially Quebec won on that one, and it was ordered that the Quebec portion of the surplus was subject to the surplus arbitration of the Quebec pension legislation. It ended up being a huge mess, and what it really clarified for everybody is that we needed to have a better way of dealing with pension funds that end up crossing over jurisdictional boundaries.

So it was referred to the group that my hon. friend talked about, the Canadian Association of Pension Supervisory Authorities, with a sort of plea: would they please deal with this and come up with a suggestion on how this could have been done better? The effect of that whole back and forth, which took place over – now, it was originally wound up in '87, and it went back and forth. The surplus refund was '97. I think this went back and forth for about four years, which is a long time.

9:50

What it really did was that it caused all of the pension regulators to be much more cautious in their approach to administration of reciprocal agreements. Therefore, it made it more difficult for employers to administer these multijurisdictional plans because they now had to be more careful. There was increased pressure from industry to provide a solution, so they turned to the Canadian Association of Pension Supervisory Authorities. Now, that group is a national, interjurisdictional association of pension supervisory authorities whose mission or mandate is to facilitate an efficient and effective pension regulatory system in Canada, and it also looks at pension regulatory issues of common interest and develops policies to further simplification and harmonization of pension law across Canada.

They put their little heads together and came up with a multilateral agreement. What we had before was basically a reciprocal agreement that existed and, when it got tested in court, clearly didn't work. Now what we're moving to on the basis of what the Canadian Association of Pension Supervisory Authorities came up with is a multilateral agreement which is dealing with the issues that are being identified by the regulators and the stakeholders. Our superintendent of pensions in Alberta was involved with the Canadian Association of Pension Supervisory Authorities during the development of this particular agreement.

The second sort of piece of this puzzle is the Employment Pension Plans Act. Now, you know, sometimes there's serendipity, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon for one of the other bills I spoke on today at one point I said: well, perhaps this other bill doesn't exist anymore or is not in force or is a shell bill or something like, and if that's the case, someone will correct me. Then I look, and, no, indeed the bill I was talking about was the Employment Pension Plans Act. Having read everything I can now, I can say that that particular act puts in place protections, safeguards, for employees by setting up minimum standards over things like qualifying for benefits, determining what the benefits would be, funding pensions, investing pension assets, and the disclosures that are required back to the membership.

So we have the setup to this. What was the problem? I've outlined that. The solution was to come up with a multijurisdictional solution to this, and that's, in fact, what we're getting here. The old way was the reciprocal agreements; the new way is the multi-jurisdictional, multilateral application. Currently what we have is that pension members in more than one jurisdiction can register in the jurisdiction in which the majority of the members are employed, and that jurisdiction then administers the laws, but that's the piece that didn't work. So the piece we're trying to get into place now is to facilitate registration and regulation of multijurisdictional pension plans in the jurisdiction where the majority of members are employed. Same end product; different way of getting there. Okay.

Now, one of the things that I was interested in – and the sponsoring member I'm sure will leap to his feet first thing in Committee of the Whole or in his closing comments in second and tell me which trade unions he consulted with.

Mr. MacDonald: They have millions of dollars in pension funds.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, yeah. The trade unions are our biggest pension holders outside of the big public service pension holders. So which trade unions did the member consult with around this particular proposal? If he would be so kind as to list those for me, I'd be very happy.

When I actually look at the act, there are a couple of sort of what I would call housekeeping amendments, where they're correcting the name of the ministry because it's been referred to here as the minister of finance, and of course it's now the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. So they duly go through and change that everywhere it appears in the act. Then they start getting into the definitions of the designated jurisdictions and defining that down as to how that's going to work, which takes up most of the bill. It ends up with coming into force on the proclamation of it, which is a little fuzzy, to be honest with you.

What we're aiming for here is that if a pension plan is to be registered in another jurisdiction, only the administrative and the day-to-day funding and investment laws of that jurisdiction will be applied, and the laws of Alberta would apply in all other areas. In essence, we're creating a hierarchy or a prioritization of what's going to apply to who. It's a way for us to get around the problems that came up in the Leco example, where there ended up being a fight

over who actually had jurisdiction. In this case it tries to lay that out and say: this is where all the rules are going to apply, and this is where only some of them are going to apply. I will admit that pensions are not my area of expertise, but I'm getting there.

At this point I don't know what to say about whether or not I support this bill. I want to go away and do some more research and spend some more time on this. I'd appreciate getting the information from the sponsoring member on who was consulted of the stakeholders because pension plans are so critical to people that I'm really aware of the onus on me to not make mistakes here and to make sure that this is a reasonable plan that it is supported by the stakeholders, and we haven't had time to do a stakeholder feedback loop to find out what people are actually saying back to us in the community.

You know, I came out of the not-for-profit artistic sector, so I don't really have a pension plan. You don't care about that when you're young and involved in all that fun stuff, but as you start to get older, you realize that you're either going to have to work a very long time or win a lottery or have some miracle happen, or you're going to be very poor. That, I think, is the state of affairs for many of my colleagues that I came up through the artistic ranks with. None of us ever earned enough money to have enough to put it aside for pensions. Happily, my acting union equity took that money right off my paycheck. I never even saw it. God bless those unions.

An Hon. Member: Wow.

Ms Blakeman: Well, it's true. That was the only pension or retirement savings that I had. You don't make a lot of money as an actor, so there wasn't a heck of a lot of money in that pot. This is really the sign of how much they're protecting me: they wouldn't even give it to me when I went on withdrawal as an actor and I asked to take it and combine it with an RRSP that I was starting. They wouldn't give it to me. They keep it, and they will continue to administer those funds on my behalf until I hit 65. That's a good thing, and I appreciate the effort they've done there. So there's a union that's trying to look after their member even when the membership may be really in need of looking after because they've been foolish about what they might have done with it.

10:00

Pensions. So many people in Canada today and in Alberta don't have a pension. Those that do are really counting on it. I am particularly cautious about giving my blessing to something until I am really sure that this is the best deal, because I just don't want to go on record as saying that this is a great idea and then find out a couple of days later that it wasn't. I am particularly concerned that, for example, the trade union that protected me has had an opportunity to comment.

At this point I'm going to adjourn debate, and I look forward to getting more information and continuing this particular debate on another day because I think it deserves a lot more careful thought.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

(continued)

Bill 19

First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Amendment Act, 2008

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure on behalf of the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit to move third reading of Bill 19, First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Amendment Act, 2008.

I think everyone here understands the importance of this act, particularly to the Blackfoot Nation, and we would look for support at third reading for a quick passage.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this was one of the bills that was under one of my portfolios, so I have been able to speak in second and in committee and now in third. Thank you for the opportunity. Actually, a number of my colleagues have also spoken on this. We were all in favour of this and were willing to be very supportive.

It is incredibly important to the First Nations people in Alberta, particularly the Blackfoot. It's important to any community that has a strong faith in which they have particular tokens or items or objects that are representative of that faith. That's perfectly understandable to any of us that have ever participated in any of those rituals. I know that the government worked hard to be sensitive and follow a really definitive protocol in implementing the act when it was first brought in in 2000, and I'm sure that it will continue to do that in this particular case.

So I'll express my approval for the third reading, and I'm aware that some of my colleagues want to speak as well. Thank you very much.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll keep my comments brief, but I'd like to take this opportunity, having spoken at length last week to this bill, to remind or encourage members here to visit a place that I was at on Saturday, just this last Saturday, called Blackfoot Crossing. Some members here may have been there. There's an absolutely fantastic interpretive centre at Blackfoot Crossing, about an hour or so east of Calgary, out by Cluny. It's a facility that will not only house some sacred artifacts that might be covered under this piece of legislation but also will help bring them to life both for the Blackfoot people who are in that area and for visitors of all cultures who go there.

The interpretive centre outlines the history of the Blackfoot people from precontact days through the time when the Blackfoot ruled the southern plains on horseback, were essentially a buffalo-based culture, through the treaty process and the residential schools and through to modern times. Through the course of telling that story, of course, there are many photographs. There's a lot of great text, including a full recreation in large scale of the original Indian Act. There are vocal presentations, audio presentations, some of which are recordings of elders. There are also many sacred objects in that facility.

I would urge anybody here who is at all close to that area to take the time, take a couple of hours. The building itself is nothing short of spectacular. It's on a site overlooking the Bow River, a particularly broad stretch of the Bow River. It's known as Blackfoot Crossing because the nature of the river there is that it's broad and shallow, and it was an easy place for people to cross the river before there were bridges.

The facility was not at all busy when I was there, but I really hope that the people of this province get behind it. I would also hope that

the government of this province gets behind it and helps them in some of their promotion, maybe encourages classroom and school visits to this site. That site along with this legislation are parts of a process of strengthening and building not only the culture of the Blackfoot people but the culture of Alberta and of Canada.

I just wanted to drive home to all the members here to, please, as Albertans, as Canadians, as human beings do whatever you can to support places like Blackfoot Crossing. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member who wishes to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister of aboriginal affairs.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been a very interesting evening of wonderful progress, and everyone is grateful for that. On that note, I would move that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 10:08 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Tuesday evening, October 21, 2008

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 7	Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2008	1451
Bill 8	Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2008	1451
Bill 21	Heating Oil and Propane Rebate Act	1453
Bill 14	Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2008	1454
Bill 15	Family Law Amendment Act, 2008	1455
Bill 16	Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2008	1456
Bill 25	Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2008	1457
Bill 19	First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Amendment Act, 2008	1465

Second Reading

Bill 32	Meat Inspection Amendment Act, 2008	1457
Bill 33	Agriculture Financial Services Amendment Act, 2008	1459
Bill 35	Government Organization Amendment Act, 2008	1462
Bill 34	Employment Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2008	1463

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