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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

First Session

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[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, October 27, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, I'll now invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem, and I would invite all to participate in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of students from the Ponoka composite high school. There are 21 students and their teacher, Mr. Brady Teeling. They are seated in the public gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Elmiski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you 17 students from Yellowhead Tribal College. The Yellowhead Tribal College is an aboriginal studies program in Edmonton where college and university preparatory students are involved in IT, nursing, music. Some, of course, are still trying to figure out what they want to do. Accompanying them today are teachers Linda Anderson and Bill Brady. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I have double my pleasure today. I get to introduce two classes from two different schools in Edmonton-Riverview. First, I'd like to introduce the grade 6 class from St. Martin Catholic school, a bilingual English-Ukrainian school, which I think is particularly fitting given some legislation that's coming up later this week. They are seated in the public gallery, I believe. I'd ask them to rise. There are 17 of them altogether, accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Natalie Harasymiw. I can tell you that they are outstanding young citizens. Please give them a warm welcome.

The other class is from Windsor Park elementary school, which is very close to the university and, like St. Martin Catholic school, is one of Alberta's really extraordinary schools. There are 23 students accompanied by their teachers Mrs. Fitzpatrick and Mrs. Spurr and parent helper Mrs. Lu. I'd ask them also to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure today to introduce two groups of guests. First of all, on behalf of the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology I would like to introduce to you and through you representatives from the Alberta Graduate Council. This government knows how important graduate programs are at our postsecondary institutions because they attract and retain the best and brightest students and researchers. As I introduce the members who are here with us today, I'd ask them to stand. They are David Coletto, chair of the Alberta Graduate Council; Rithesh Ram, Candice Powley, Nathan Turley, Sukupreet Guram, Hasan Anwarul, Tamara Larter, Tom Wu, Kelly Goss, Ben Whynot, Shannon Digweed, and Chris Skappak. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

It's also my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of 42 medical students from the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta who are here today meeting with Members of the Legislative Assembly. They're seated in both the members' and public galleries. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mme Jocelyne Bélanger. Mme Bélanger is an employee of the Ministry of Education and has spent more than three decades contributing to the development of resources in French to support Alberta's K to 12 curriculum. Thanks to the tireless efforts of Mme Bélanger and her colleagues there are now more than 3,000 resource materials in French available for Alberta students, teachers, parents, and school administrators. Next spring Mme Bélanger will retire from the Alberta government. Her dedication, commitment, and passion for Alberta's education system and our students will be greatly missed. Mme Bélanger is here today to be recognized for an award that she has received for her leadership in Alberta's francophone community. We'll be hearing a statement on that later today. Jocelyne is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you Fern Reirson, president of the Alberta School Library Council and teacher librarian at Richard Secord school in Edmonton; and the energetic Maureen Pelensky, teacher librarian at Minchau school in my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. They are my guests today in the members' gallery, here to celebrate National School Library Day, which is today.

I had the absolute pleasure today of visiting Minchau school in my constituency of Mill Woods along with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore. Hosted by Mrs. Pelensky, we were able to witness the innovative media conferencing system housed in the

library that the school uses for its morning announcements as well as other creative programming. They call it MTV, or Minchau Television, and it has helped make Minchau school's library a hub for students. I think everyone in this House remembers looking forward to visiting their school library and the pride we took in being able to take a special book home and share it with our family and friends. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Join me in saying happy birthday to the hon. Member for Peace River.

Ministerial Statements

Syringe Reuse at High Prairie Health Complex

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, on October 2, 2008, the medical officer of health in the Peace Country health region was notified of an inappropriate infection prevention and control practice in the High Prairie Health Complex operating room and endoscopy suite. The practice involved the reuse of a single-use device in an IV line to deliver medication to a patient. The medical officer of health took immediate action to stop this practice. He notified Dr. Gerry Predy, Alberta's acting chief medical officer of health, that same day. The College of Physicians and Surgeons and the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta were also advised of the situation.

1:40

A risk assessment was undertaken with the help of an infectious disease specialist. Preliminary results of the risk assessment indicate a low risk that patients could have been exposed to blood-borne pathogens such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C, or HIV. Given that risk, however, Alberta Health Services will be contacting up to 2,700 patients to offer testing. The Department of Health and Wellness is working with the region's public health staff to support that look back.

Though the risk of infection is very low, I know the residents of High Prairie will be concerned, but I can assure residents of High Prairie and all Albertans that your health and the safety of patients is our paramount concern. So here is what we are doing. The medical officer of health in Peace Country and the acting chief medical officer of health will manage the look-back process in which all patients who may be affected are contacted by public health staff for follow-up. We take this matter very seriously, Mr. Speaker, and we'll ensure that the patient look back is very thorough.

I've also asked the Health Quality Council of Alberta to conduct a root cause analysis of this situation so that lessons learned in High Prairie can be shared across the health system. Later I will table a copy of that letter, Mr. Speaker. This will also be important information for the health professional regulatory bodies that are responsible for putting in place for their members effective, professional standards consistent with the provincial standards.

Mr. Speaker, we have a top-notch health system in Alberta. Alberta Health Services and health regions have been working to ensure compliance with the provincial standards for infection prevention and control that we released in January of this year. The discovery of this inappropriate practice in High Prairie is most definitely cause for concern. However, it is important to recognize that health professionals acted immediately to stop the practice in question when the concern was raised. I want to commend the staff at the High Prairie Health Complex, who took steps to stop the practice as soon as it was identified. Notification of public health officials occurred quickly and in compliance with the Alberta standards for accountability and reporting.

As we continue to make patients' safety a key focus in Alberta's health system, we may identify other practices that do not meet the provincial standards. That the improper practices are identified and corrected and that lessons are learned and shared across the system is key to improving patients' safety and health care quality. My department's compliance assurance branch has confirmed that appropriate infection prevention and control policies and systems are in place in the health regions.

The next phase of compliance-assurance activities includes verifying that Alberta Health Services has appropriate education and monitoring components in place to ensure consistent compliance with the standards across all health facilities. We will continue to monitor progress and compliance with the provincial infection prevention and control standards and are working with Alberta Health Services to address compliance issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on behalf of the Official Opposition.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The news the government of Alberta brings to this House today is alarming. We are talking about the health of nearly 3,000 people, Albertans who are again innocent victims of this government's continued mismanagement of our public health care system.

In 2007 this government was made aware of problems with infection prevention in our hospitals; in fact, at St. Joe's hospital in Vegreville, in the Premier's constituency. At the time the then minister's advice was: wash your hands. No doubt this government hopes to wash its hands of this mismanagement as well, but the people of Alberta should not accept their government's lame excuses. This is exactly the same kind of situation that we were told would end. This situation is occurring because of a decade of systematic government cuts to the public health care system.

We are extremely lucky that the diligence of the select health professionals in High Prairie discovered the practice and finally put a stop to it. I join the minister in commending those individuals. We cannot rely on good luck to safeguard the health of Albertans. How is it that this practice was only discovered by accident when nine months ago the government introduced new provincial standards for infection prevention and control? Standards mean nothing if we don't have sufficient resources and the political will to monitor and enforce them. Just a few months ago the minister refused to negotiate to retain world-class doctors who specialize in infection prevention. He just let them go, revealing that prevention clearly isn't a high priority for this government. How many more incidents like this are we going to hear about as a result of this government's mismanagement?

The government must take full responsibility for the declining quality, access, and affordability of Alberta's public health care system. They must protect public health. Nothing else will restore public confidence in this government and the public health care system we all depend upon. In the meantime, my thoughts along with those of my colleagues in the Official Opposition are with the thousands of Albertans now living with the fear that they may have contracted serious or lethal illnesses. It is my sincere hope that every single test result comes back negative.

Thank you.

Ms Notley: I rise to request leave of the House for unanimous consent for the leader of the third party to respond to the ministerial statement.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank all members of the Assembly, as well. Mr. Speaker, this is the second time in two years that Albertans have been warned that safety measures were not being followed in one of our public health facilities. A similar incident a couple of years ago caused 3,000 Albertans to be tested for HIV and hepatitis at St. Joe's hospital in Vegreville. The health minister at the time vowed to monitor and enforce compliance, assuring Albertans that this was a rare occurrence and that they were in safe hands.

In High Prairie syringes that were supposed to be used once were used on more than one person. This happened for more than four years in the endoscopy clinic and possibly since 1990 in the dental clinic, putting 2,700 patients at risk. Now we know that patients here may have been exposed to HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C. Of course, the residents of High Prairie are concerned. These are very serious infections.

Fifteen months ago there was a report that outlined measures that should be taken to prevent this type of thing from happening again. Clearly, these recommendations have not been followed. At a minimum, staff in all health facilities should be supported and receive information about appropriate standards and measures on a regular basis. If front-line staff aren't trained in such a fundamental procedure, all Albertans' health may be at risk. This government needs to make a major effort to deal with this comprehensively so they can give Albertans confidence in their health care system, confidence that should never have been undermined in the first place.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

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

National School Library Day

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. October is Canadian Library Month, and today is National School Library Day. I'd like to recognize the Canadian Association for School Libraries and all library workers for their hard work to promote and support awareness of the importance of libraries in our schools and communities. Alberta's children and youth are continually developing their literacy skills, and the many libraries across our province provide extraordinary support. Libraries in Alberta schools contribute to students' social, cultural, artistic, and academic development, which helps to create a foundation for success in everyday life. Twenty per cent of our public libraries are co-located with school libraries in Alberta.

Along with members from Edmonton-Rutherford and Calgary-Mackay I am part of an MLA committee that is consulting with stakeholders on how the province can support libraries into the future. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of libraries in building strong communities. The scope of services that libraries deliver has expanded dramatically in recent years. Libraries are becoming more and more innovative and are embracing technology in exciting ways. I know that two of my colleagues, the members from Edmonton-Decore and Edmonton-Mill Woods, were at Minchau school in south Edmonton today to celebrate National School Library Day, and they were given a demonstration of the school videoconferencing system, hosted in the school library. The library has become a vibrant hub in the school and has capitalized on technology to capture the imagination of its students.

I'm pleased to draw attention to this day and to the many people

who continue to work hard at increasing awareness about the importance of school libraries and all our libraries and, also, to the teachers, parents, principals, librarians, library boards, and volunteers who work hard to ensure that our libraries are world-class. They all continue to contribute greatly to our students' educational experience as well as welcoming and assisting new Albertans, seniors, and others as we all work towards building even stronger Alberta communities.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Government Spending

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This spendthrift government throws money at problems. It announces \$2 billion for carbon capture before they even have a plan. It announces \$2 billion for public transit before they even have a plan. Failing to plan almost seems to be a badge of honour for this government. My question is to the Premier. As the world economy staggers to a halt, what is this government's plan to protect the wealth and jobs of Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said in this House before, we budgeted very responsibly and pragmatically. Over a period of time we've set aside \$7.7 billion in the sustainability account because we do have the most volatile revenue stream in all of North America. The value of the resources, the price of our commodities rise and fall; in fact, we've seen this year as much as \$10 a barrel a day. We do have the protection of the \$7.7 billion stability fund. We also are a debt-free jurisdiction, and we're an excellent place to invest for not only oil and gas but also all of the knowledge-based industries right here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you. Again to the Premier. We're all concerned about prudent government here. B.C. has better roads, lower crime, higher environmental standards, better provincial parks, higher ranked postsecondary education, and better school completion rates than Alberta, and it spends 28 per cent less per capita than this government here does. My question is to the Premier. Why doesn't this government deliver value for money?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, obviously, the hon. member hasn't paid taxes in the province of British Columbia. What we have, also, that no jurisdiction has in Canada is no sales tax. In fact, it is the law in Alberta that if any opposition out there wants to introduce a sales tax in Alberta, we have to take it to a public plebiscite. That is for the protection of that young generation sitting there.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier's response worries me that he doesn't know the difference between taxing and spending. We have tax-and-spend Tories here. Given that Alberta spends so much more than the Canadian average, how is it, for another example, that Alberta has the lowest rate of police officers on the street of any province in Canada except Prince Edward Island?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is another flip-flop. The other day they're saying spend more; today, spend less. Just tell us where you want to spend less. You want to send – what? – the 600,000 new Albertans that came to this province over the last 10 years back to

their province, back to their country of origin? Or do we provide service for them in terms of more teachers, more doctors? Yes, there will be more police officers, but you just don't hire more police officers without having more Crown prosecutors and also managing the system. The police, after putting in thousands of hours of very good, strategic investigation, see the very same person out on the street a few hours later.

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

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, what we have in Alberta is a bloated government that won't admit to its addiction to spending. They spend 23 per cent higher – 23 per cent higher – than the Canadian average, yet what the Tories deliver for that money is not good enough. We've had successive finance ministers warning that spending increases cannot be sustained. My questions again are to the Premier. Were these finance ministers wrong?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have a jurisdiction that does spend more because of the increased number of people in the province of Alberta and some of the inflationary pressures that we've had, but we're also taxing less than everybody else in Canada.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, spending more and taxing less is a formula for an economic disaster that's looming in the future of this province. We have already seen two government bills pushed through this Assembly that terminate legislative accountability and give a blank cheque to cabinet ministers. Again to the Premier: why is this government systematically dismantling legislative limits on spending?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where he's going. We have definitely Canada's largest capital infrastructure plan in place. People asked for a plan. We delivered the 20-year plan; it's \$22.2 billion. That in itself is going to assist in the future in moving finished product out of this province because we do need good roads to do that. We also have invested significantly in our universities. We have invested very significantly in the health and education systems. Those are really the foundation of a growing economy.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you. Then let's get specific. Again to the Premier: how is it that this province spends more per capita on education than any province in the country and has the worst school completion rate in the entire nation, the worst high school completion rate in Canada? Figure that one out, Mr. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Oh, it's very easy to do that, not challenging as much as it would be for him as an academic. When the economy is hot, Mr. Speaker, what happens is – and this was evidenced a few years ago at the height of the economy in Grande Prairie, where we had high school students leaving high school and going to get a job at \$25, \$30, \$50 an hour in the workplace. That's one of the issues we're dealing with. As the economy cools, I'm sure that we'll see more students coming back to complete their high school education. The other thing – and already we're seeing the trend – is that there are more students enrolling in postsecondary and less in the apprenticeships, so you see now a bit of a shift in how students are making up their mind about what they want to pursue.

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

Monitoring of Single-use Medical Devices

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans were dismayed 18 months ago to learn of serious failures of infection control practices in the Vegreville area, risking thousands of lives. Today the health minister made an announcement that 2,700 patients who received similar care at the High Prairie Health Complex had been exposed to HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C due to the reuse of syringes over the past 18 years. This is a shocking failure of oversight by this government and further erodes the confidence of Albertans. To the health minister: why in October 2008 were all of the methods and procedures regarding single-use medical devices not reviewed province-wide?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue of multiple use of syringes was something that, actually, was an acceptable practice a number of years ago. What we have brought into this province as of January this year is a set of standards. We are working with Alberta Health Services to ensure that those standards are being met. We do not have groups of cops running around the province at health facilities. What we have is a compliance branch working with the health region to ensure that these standards are being met.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans need to have confidence that their health care system will not harm them. Can the minister answer why this problem, ongoing since as early as 1990, only came to light as an accidental discovery and not part of your promised monitoring program?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my statement earlier, we have asked the Health Quality Council to do a complete root cause analysis. I'm sure that as part of that review they will determine some of the answers to the questions posed by the hon. member, and we await their report.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: After 18 years it must be assumed that many health care workers knew about the practice in this health system but did not feel safe in blowing the whistle. When will this government do as other jurisdictions in Canada have done and enact whistle-blower legislation?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, there was an assumption in that preamble that I think the hon. member might want to reconsider. He is suggesting – I think his words were: hundreds of health care workers knew about this situation. I think he might want to reconsider whether he wants to accuse health care workers in this province of not doing their job.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

2:00 Infection Prevention and Control Standards

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. A couple of years ago 3,000 patients at St. Joseph's hospital learned that they may have been exposed to diseases such as HIV and hepatitis due to a failure to follow safe health procedures at that hospital. Despite

government promises to ensure this didn't happen again, it has. My question is to the health minister. Why did this government fail to keep its promise to enforce compliance with appropriate infection control measures, leading directly to this latest scandal?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I would have to go back and check the files to see if anyone ever promised that this would never happen again. Our health care system is comprised of hundreds of thousands of human beings who do diligent work on behalf of Albertans every day, and for us to stand here and say somehow that a mistake is never going to be made in the system forever into the future is absolutely ludicrous.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it's pretty clear that this government undertook to ensure compliance with specific guidelines to ensure that this type of thing didn't happen again. The question to the minister is: why didn't that happen?

Mr. Liepert: Well, as I said, Mr. Speaker, we have a compliance branch working with the Alberta Health Services Board and, prior to that, the various health regions. We have put in place a set of standards and are monitoring as best one can to ensure that all of the standards are being met. There are going to be occasions, and I am sure that in this particular situation there was no one working in the High Prairie Health Complex that willingly did something that they knew was wrong.

Mr. Mason: No one is accusing them of that, Mr. Speaker, but we are accusing the government of failing to make sure that people are adequately trained on health procedures and making sure that there is compliance and enforcement. The question is: why did the government fail to do so, resulting in the threat to the health of 2,700 Albertans?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are in fact ensuring that adequate training and monitoring are taking place. I think it needs to be put into perspective that the acting chief medical health officer today at the news conference said that there was a four in one million chance of an infection as a result of this. But we want to be thorough and ensure that there is not one of those four in one million chances that actually was infected.

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

Syringe Reuse at High Prairie Health Complex

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today many of my constituents received horrific news that an inappropriate infection prevention and control practice was identified at the High Prairie Health Complex, casting fear into many people. Can the Minister of Health and Wellness explain to all these good people: if someone had not accidentally discovered this, how much longer would this have gone on?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the question itself is quite hypothetical, but I would have to say this to the hon. member. I understand that there are some concerns in the High Prairie region relative to this incident. I repeat again, however, that the acting chief medical officer of health says that it is a four in one million chance that an infection occurred.

It also should be noted, Mr. Speaker, that unlike some other situations around the world that have happened like this, this was not

a direct syringe into the arm of a patient. It was a syringe into an IV line that eventually was into the arm of the patient.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given the fact that Albertans put their trust in us to ensure that the health care system is safe, can the Minister of Health and Wellness explain to my family, my friends, my constituents that they still can trust the health care system even when these kinds of things continuously happen?

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I have to state that the hon. member in her preamble said that these kinds of things continuously happen. They do not continuously happen. We have a very, very safe health care system in this province, one of the most safe in the world. As I said earlier, this is a system made up of hundreds of thousands of human beings, so mistakes occasionally will happen, but they do not consistently happen.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister again: how long will it take to track all these patients down and to be able to test them so that they can be sure that they are not infected?

Mr. Liepert: Well, it's difficult to put a time frame on that. What I can say is that starting immediately, we are going to attempt to contact all of the previous patients. I'm sure one can appreciate that Alberta has a very transient population relative to workers in the oil industry and a number of other industries. We could have former patients who literally live around the world. We will do our best to get hold of all 2,700 patients and report back appropriately.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Police Officer Funding

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday, when I asked the Solicitor General about why he was hiring sheriffs instead of more police officers, he corrected my math, but he didn't assuage my desire for clarification. Again to the Solicitor General: given that Alberta has some of the lowest numbers of any province in terms of police officers on the street, why in the last couple of years has the Solicitor General hired some 200 sheriffs instead of actual police officers?

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

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our province is taking a different approach to fighting crime in this province, going from a reactive role to more of a proactive role. In doing so, we're working more with co-operation, integration, and co-ordination between policing services in the province, and our sheriffs play a vital role in that.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out to the Solicitor General that Alberta citizens would like to see its government spend money on fighting gang and gun crime instead of writing more tickets on our highways. Given this reality will the Solicitor General immediately direct any further budgeted money to hiring more police officers and not additional sheriffs?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, our government has identified \$470 million through the safe communities recommendations, money

that's going to not only add more police officers – we've already announced 300 over the next three years – but also other initiatives which are going to get to the root cause of crime, which in the long run is going to be more effective than just putting more police officers on the street.

Mr. Hehr: To the Premier: although the Solicitor General doesn't seem interested in hiring more police officers, will you commit to hiring more police officers instead of sheriffs with additional budgeted money for this problem?

Mr. Stelmach: Stay tuned.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Wildlife Predation on Livestock

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many ranchers in southwest Alberta are experiencing severe livestock losses of cattle on summer and fall pasture. In several cases grizzly bears and wolves have been seen by ranchers on the dead carcasses, yet fish and game wardens consistently say that the animals were not killed by bears or wolves. My first question to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: what evidence is required to warrant designation of a bear or wolf kill?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner for that important question. The question of wildlife predation on livestock is important to us. That's why I met with ranchers in southwestern Alberta in August, and I have another meeting planned on the same subject in November. We investigate every report of killed livestock, and if it's confirmed as a predator kill, we compensate owners for that. We also compensate livestock owners for vet bills for injured stock.

With respect to what we look for, there's a long list of indicators of what type of predator it was. I'd be happy to provide the hon. member with a list of those indicators.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you. To the same minister: given that bears and wolves have been seen on the carcasses and livestock losses are much greater than normal on the same pastures, how can SRD continue to ignore the logical conclusions being drawn by the ranchers?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, our officers are not ignoring the concerns of our ranchers. They are working with our ranchers to investigate and confirm these kills, but officers must see more evidence of predation than simply the presence of a bear near a carcass. Having said that, we recognize that there's significant cost attached to livestock loss, and that's why we've brought in a series of programs that deal with mitigation and deterrence and compensation to deal with this issue.

Mr. Jacobs: My final supplementary to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: would it not be reasonable just to compensate ranchers for confirmed unexplained losses than to have the ranchers take matters into their own hands?

2:10

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, again, I agree with the hon. member that compensation is the key, timely and fair compensation, but I also

want to state for the record that we believe that there's more than enough room on the Alberta landscape for both wildlife and livestock. Albertans value predators, but livestock is private property, and we respect property rights. That's why we recently commissioned a report, the Lyster report, to look into that. I'm happy to report to the hon. member that the recommendations from that report do recommend important and I think positive changes for stock growers, and I'll be happy to report on those changes at my meeting in November with the stockmen.

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

Infection Prevention and Control Standards

(continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have questions to the Minister of Health and Wellness regarding today's announcement where 2,700 adults and children in and around High Prairie are going to need to be tested because of this government's mismanagement. My first question: why did it take three weeks from the time the medical officer of health was notified for this to come to the public's attention?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the acting chief medical officer of health needed to do a risk assessment, as I said, and I was acting on his advice as to how long it was going to take him. That's really about the answer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister: does this government's slow response and lack of monitoring of public health care issues have anything to do with the dismissal earlier this year of four top public health care doctors?

Mr. Liepert: No.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister: what steps did Alberta Health and Wellness take to monitor compliance with the new infection prevention and control standards in the High Prairie Health Complex?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, I think I answered that question a little earlier when I said that we do not have teams of cops running around the province investigating hospital sites. We have standards. We work with the former health regions, now the Alberta Health Services Board, to ensure that those standards are being met. In this particular case a particular employee determined that the standard was not being met, reported it, and we acted on it.

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

Enhanced Drivers' Licences

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Media reports say that several provinces are developing a driver's licence with embedded citizenship data in it which will allow it to be used like a passport to cross the U.S. border. Now, some reports say that this form of enhanced driver's licence is being considered by Alberta. My questions are for the Minister of Service Alberta. Could she please tell us when her ministry is planning to introduce an enhanced driver's licence for the province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By July of 2009 all forms of travel to the United States will require the visitor to show a document stating identity and proof of citizenship. Some provinces are looking at an enhanced driver's licence that will have this information in it. Currently Alberta is not considering introducing an enhanced driver's licence for our province at this time. Two-thirds of all Albertans who travel to the U.S. do so by air, which requires a passport. There isn't enough land-based traffic across the Alberta-U.S. border to justify the cost and effort that would be required in creating an enhanced driver's licence.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: given that many truck drivers move goods across the border on a regular basis, wouldn't some form of enhanced driver's licence help them do their job so that they don't need to get a passport?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Commercial truck drivers who do cross the border on a regular basis already have access to alternative forms of identification available to them, including a passport. This is, indeed, the NEXUS card or the FAST card, that allows them to cross the border without a passport. Developing an enhanced driver's licence for truck drivers isn't something we've heard about for the commercial trucking industry, but if there is a need out there, we'd like to hear from them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: if we are not developing an enhanced driver's licence, what identification is available through your department that will allow Albertans to conveniently cross the border into the United States?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans planning a trip to the United States can use government-issued photo identification such as our current high-security driver's licence, proof of citizenship, and our new birth certificate, which features a number of security upgrades. As well, anyone over the age of 12 can obtain an identification card from any registry office in the province. However, a Canadian passport is the best way to ensure convenient travel into the United States.

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

Health System Restructuring

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the Alberta Health Services website is posted an organizational chart for the new health ministry, how it is going to work and how it's going to affect not only urban patients but rural patients as well. My first question is to the minister of health again. Given that there is now a listing for urban hospitals, and that includes Red Deer, Lethbridge, and the QEII in Grande Prairie, and a listing for core urban acute care

hospitals, listing the Royal Alex, the Rockyview, and the Peter Lougheed, what is the difference under your new privatization scheme between urban hospitals like Red Deer and Rockyview in Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, unlike the member I haven't had the time to web surf and haven't looked at the Alberta Health Services website. I will have a look at it and see if I can discern what exactly the hon. member is asking. I don't understand his question.

Mr. MacDonald: I'm surprised by that because, certainly, before this goes up on the website, because of your memorandum of understanding, you have complete control over this.

Now, why are hospitals like Camrose and Wetaskiwin and Vegreville not included on this list? What plans do you have for those hospitals?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, each year we do a capital plan. It's part of our budget. Our new capital plan will be coming as part of the budget process that's currently under way for release next spring.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister: regarding the page that reads Health Strategy Research and Design, what plans and strategic planning do you have to provide private health care under insurance plans? What services will be under that health care plan?

Mr. Liepert: None.

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

Child and Youth Advocate

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week this government showed us that it was more concerned with controlling information than protecting children. Since the minister has refused to resign and the Premier has refused to fire her, we need meaningful changes now. Every reputable source on children's services agrees that the children's advocate needs to be an independent office reporting to the Legislature. Every other province in Canada operates this way. To the minister: will she agree to immediately change the legislation so that the children's advocate becomes an officer of the Legislature and not a puppet of the minister or her department?

The Speaker: It's the Assembly that deals with legislation, but go on.

Ms Tarchuk: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll commit to what I did last week. As you all know, the Premier had asked me to gather some information on what other provinces are doing and take a look at their legislation and the reporting mechanism, and I'm in the process of doing that.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, to the minister again. In 2001 the children's advocate recommended, in his own words, that the office be truly independent. In 2000, in a report commissioned already by your ministry eight years ago, the same recommendation was made. Why have you dragged your feet for almost nine years, and why are you continuing to drag your feet in making this important change?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like I said, I am totally open to improve.

Just on this topic I would like to let the House know that last week I had said that I would endeavour to either take a look at samplings of some of the concerns raised in the quarterly reports or take a look at some of the more troublesome ones and get some information so that I can show Albertans that we do investigate these cases and we do address them. Later on today I will be tabling a report that addresses all of the situations that were identified in the report that was tabled in the House last week by the leader of the third party.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Well, your own report said it, the children's advocate has said it, and every other province in Canada does it. Given that the ministry will be making amendments to the children and family enhancement act this session, will you agree to make one of those amendments the provision of the child advocate to be an officer of this Legislative Assembly?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I'll say it again. I'm open to looking at it. I am gathering that information. Obviously, that would require some further discussion. And I'll just leave it at that.

I think it's really important for us to provide for Albertans how the current system operates and what the benefits of it are. We do have, as I explained last week, a very unique model here, but that is not to say that we're not interested in always looking at improvement.

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

2:20 Caritas Hospitals Foundation

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every year charities around the province use major lotteries to fund needed projects within their communities. One of these worthwhile charities is the Caritas Hospitals Foundation. It has run a home lottery for 16 years to pay for needed equipment at Edmonton hospitals. My questions are for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, responsible for the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. For the past two years the Caritas Hospitals Foundation has been struggling to sell tickets. While it suggests that the current economic downturn has fewer people willing to pay a hundred dollars for a ticket, I wonder if there are too many of these large lotteries being approved every year.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission doesn't pick winners and losers when it comes to issuing a charity raffle licence. If a charity meets all the eligible criteria, it will be issued a licence. We know there's competition for people's charity dollars, and the AGLC will advise a charity of other proposed raffles planned for the same period. Ultimately, it's up to the charity to decide when it runs a raffle. Several may run at the same time because each may feel there's a different market for its sales.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you. My first supplemental is to the same minister. If the AGLC isn't policing the number of licences issued every year, what is its role regarding regulating these kinds of lotteries?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission is responsible to ensure the integrity of the raffle process, including making sure the charity meets all of the eligibility requirements and complies with all regulations. In the case of major raffles over a hundred thousand dollars in total ticket value, an AGLC inspector monitors the process throughout the raffle to ensure that the operator continues to meet the regulations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you. To the same minister: what options does a struggling charity have if it can't meet its ticket deadline?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Mr. Speaker, a charity can apply for an extension of the draw date to allow for the sale of additional tickets. The AGLC hasn't received a request from the Caritas Hospitals Foundation for an extension of this year's raffle at this time.

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

Ministerial Vehicle Fleet

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Right now significant taxpayer dollars are going to pay for ministers' gas-guzzling cars. In the spring, when we asked the Minister of Service Alberta about making the ministerial vehicle fleet more fuel efficient, she responded that "the government is moving in that direction." My question is to the Minister of Service Alberta. What is the status report? How far has the government managed to move?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to provide some information on that. Service Alberta and Alberta Environment are currently working together on a number of initiatives for making the Alberta government vehicle fleet more environmentally friendly, including alternative fuels and introducing more fuel-efficient vehicles into the fleet. We have introduced 36 hybrid vehicles into the fleet as of today. There are challenges with introducing hybrids. For a large portion of the vehicles that are used in the rural remote areas, hybrids are impractical, so we are looking at this very carefully, making sure that we are using taxpayers' dollars properly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, out of the ministerial fleet is the minister able to tell me how many of the ministers are driving fuel-efficient cars?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Mr. Speaker, currently in the ministerial fleet there are, I believe, three cars that are environmentally friendly. That is something I am working on currently with the executive and is something that we certainly need to move towards, as I said previously.

An Hon. Member: Who puts the gas in your car?

Ms Blakeman: I walk.

When will these \$43,500 taxpayer-funded benefits come with at least a minimal requirement of environmental responsibility for these ministers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, with the Minister of Environment we are working with respect to the department vehicles first, and then we will be moving on to the executive cars. That's something I intend to push as well. We are looking at the reducing of idling in all government vehicles, and that's something that we are working on right now.

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

Traffic Tickets

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week it was announced that the traffic fines enforcement program will be sending out 30,000 letters across the province to people with overdue traffic safety tickets. These people will have 14 days to pay their outstanding fines before collection action will be taken. My question is for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Why is the province only taking action now on this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is not only taking action now. It has been a policy of this government that if people have overdue tickets that they have not paid, they cannot renew their driver's licence. We started a pilot project in Edmonton two years ago where we raised \$8 million in unpaid tickets. We've now expanded that to the city of Edmonton, and we will be continuing to roll it out over the next two years in the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, my second question is for the same minister. How will this program benefit Albertans?

Ms Redford: Well, I think the first thing to think about is that we currently in the system have 651,000 unpaid tickets across the province. That is, I think, an indictment of the people who have committed these crimes and who should have paid these tickets. These people need to obey the law. They need to pay their parking tickets. And if they don't, we're going to make sure that they pay for it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is for the same minister. People are saying that this is a cash grab for the government. Is that true?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this is money that is owed to the government because people broke the law. They were ticketed for that. They were speeders, and they need to pay the penalty. [interjection] It's not a cash grab.

The Speaker: I keep hearing interjections from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I suspect you wanted to inform everybody that you walk, too, is this correct?

Mr. Mason: I wouldn't go that far, Mr. Speaker.

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

Access to Municipal Assessment Records

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province, municipalities, and taxpayers all have a stake in accurate and fair property tax assessments. The current system is not working that well. Assessments end up in a tribunal system, and the municipal government board hears appeals that are sometimes two years old. What this means is a loss of municipal and provincial tax revenue because of this system. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs. A major problem is access to timely and accurate assessment information, which can lead to many unnecessary appeals. Will the minister consider amending section 299 or section 300 of the Municipal Government Act to clarify the information that's to be provided to the municipality?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our department works very closely with municipalities and with the tax assessors. We are continually changing legislation, bringing forward legislation to make sure that we accommodate and try and make sure that we are able to work with the municipalities and have a very fluid focus.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Part of the problem is the lack of timelines on disclosure of the information prior to the hearing, and it really leads to unnecessary delays. Will the minister ensure that there are clear dates on evidence exchange by the parties bound to the date of filing an appeal in order to expedite the resolution of the appeal? Some of them are two years old.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, any time that there is any type of hearing that takes place, there needs to be a fair time allotment for the sharing of information for both sides. There are particular situations where that time allotment takes longer than we would wish as well, but that is presently the process and how things are done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I'm asking you to take a look at it.

The board often makes changes to assessments that are already considered to be a reasonable estimate of fair market value. Will the minister clearly define market value for assessment purposes that includes a range tolerance for market value to eliminate unnecessary adjustments by the board within that range of tolerance, which is part of the holdup in the appeal process?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are two definite ways to look at the assessment of land: it's through assessment and, of course, market value. Market value is assessed by taking properties that have been sold of comparable value and providing that information to the board when they require it. We do that readily, and the municipalities do as well.

2:30

Urban Aboriginal Strategy

Mr. Benito: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has the second-highest urban aboriginal population in Canada. More than 60 per cent of Alberta's aboriginal people live in cities. Edmonton and Calgary are among the top cities for urban aboriginal populations. Many of them live

in my constituency. My questions are for the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. What are you doing to address the needs of urban aboriginal people in Alberta?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct in the preamble. We do have a very large aboriginal population here. In fact, Edmonton has over 52,000, and Calgary is not that far behind. Our city is actually second only to Winnipeg. But to address the question, we're working very closely with the municipal and federal and aboriginal governments and organizations, businesses, the nonprofit sector to help deliver what we call the urban Alberta strategy, particularly in Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge. This is a strategy that's focused on job skills, on training skills, on life skills being delivered to our aboriginal . . .

Mr. Benito: My second question is to the same minister. My constituents want to know what you are doing to specifically address high unemployment, health care, education, and counselling needs.

The Speaker: Thirty-five seconds.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we have an Alberta aboriginal workforce action plan, which I am working on with the Minister of Employment and Immigration at the moment. This will help increase our aboriginal component in the workforce up to about 74,000, one of the higher rates right across Canada. We're also working with Advanced Education and Technology on their placement programs. We're working with Alberta Health with some of their health programs, and we're working with other ministries to help ensure that the aboriginal community knows there are help programs available.

Mr. Benito: My final question is to the same minister. What are you doing to help aboriginals who are transitioning from their rural communities into urban areas?

Mr. Zwozdesky: We actually have over 20 friendship centres located throughout the province of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, which are set up specifically for that purpose, to help community or rural aboriginals who are transitioning into urban centres find their way along the city way of life in a much more effective way. We provide over \$700,000 to these native friendship centres specifically for that purpose, and we're having very good success. I'm quite pleased with the results so far, but there is more work still to be done.

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

Support for Child Care Agencies

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The transparency, accountability, and capability of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to support families in crisis and protect children in custody have repeatedly been called into question. Child worker turnover is incredibly high. The ministry is currently facing over 100 lawsuits. Given the disparity in wages between social workers directly employed by the ministry and those in contracted agencies, will the minister re-establish stability by providing equal pay for equal work; in other words, put all children's services workers on the same pay grid?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that I spoke to this last week and let the House know that we are working with our agencies and I'm working with the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. We know that they have issues finding and keeping staff and paying competitive wages. One of the steps that we took recently was to invest the \$11 million that we did before Christmas. We've made some assurances going into the future of some guaranteed percentage in the next budget. As well, we'll take any other additional requests through the budget process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Unfortunately, it hasn't stemmed the exodus. We're losing more than we're gaining back.

Will the minister commit to meeting directly with front-line workers, addressing the conditions leading to low morale, and reviewing the policies that lead to children being taken into custody with inadequate resources to support them?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, just to follow up, I also wanted to mention that we not only work with our contracted agencies on all of their issues, like I said last week, whether it's monetary or not, but I had referred to a working group that we have which is well represented by our contracted agencies. I have received letters from those that are involved with the working group. They are enthusiastic about this taking a look at a new approach, taking a look at outcomes-based funding. We're going to proceed with that good work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Will the minister review the manner in which information goes one way up the chain of command without returning to front-line workers so that they can implement the feedback received, thereby improving child support?

Ms Tarchuk: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I didn't quite understand that question, but I'll suggest that maybe if you can forward that to me, I'll get the information to you.

Thank you.

Federal Building Renovations

Mr. Johnston: Mr. Speaker, there's been little news about the federal building since the government announced its intention to save this building last June. Can the Minister of Infrastructure update the Assembly on what is being done to move this important project forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to let everyone know that we held our public tender process in order to provide design consultant services for the federal building. There were a number of people that were very interested in this unique project, and the team will be led by Kasian Architecture Interior Design and Planning Ltd. Kasian is a well-established international firm. They have offices in Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, and Dubai. The design development work is under way, and it should be completed in early 2009.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: when can we expect to see some construction work going on at the federal building?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, work is already under way. Hazardous material removal is taking place, and interior demolition is also taking place. We expect to hire a construction manager early in November. For the first construction subcontractors those contracts should be awarded early in the new year, and the renovations and modernizations we expect to be completed by the end of 2011.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the same minister. What assurance can you give that saving this 50-year-old building is the right environmental choice?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Reusing an existing building is quite often a sound environmental choice. We reduce the massive amount of waste that is involved in taking a building down and replacing it. We also are targeting the LEED standard with the federal building, so we're talking about greater energy efficiency, reduction of energy consumption, a healthier work environment, improved air, reduced water use. There are a number of advantages in reducing the carbon footprint by including more green space, and we're going to do that with the plaza, also with a green roof. It's going to be a wonderful building.

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

Students with Health Needs

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been told by parents that their children cannot register for school programs because their child has diabetes. The children have been denied school trips or education programs because of their diabetes. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Education. Can the minister explain why children are being denied these educational experiences?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Children in Alberta cannot be denied access to education in the province, and school boards have an obligation to find the appropriate educational opportunity for each child in their jurisdiction. The determination is made at the local level, but they have an obligation under the School Act to provide those educational opportunities. As for in-school activities, the school boards and schools are required by the act to provide a safe and caring environment, so they have the opportunity to take into account conditions that children have and to make sure that whatever activity they're engaged in, they can do it in a safe and caring way.

Mr. Cao: To the same minister. Often it is lack of awareness of the seriousness of diabetes that has left children without proper care in classrooms. What is being done to ensure that our educators are aware of the needs of children with diabetes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the more generic sense, there is an incredible amount of work that is being done and support available through the student health initiative, for example, the joint endeavour between Alberta Education, Alberta Health and Wellness, and Children and Youth Services working collaboratively. Specifically, Alberta Education has authorized teaching resources regarding health conditions, including a resource by the Canadian Diabetes Association. We're developing a resource called teaching students with chronic health conditions, which will help teachers to understand specific health conditions and how to work with students in those areas.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. I've been told that there is draft legislation in Ontario to protect children while in school care who have diabetes, severe allergies, epilepsy, or asthma. Will the hon. minister commit to looking at similar legislation for Alberta?

2:40

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, before I get to that, I would say that we're collaborating with Alberta Health and Wellness on the implementation of the Alberta diabetes strategy, so there's specific work being done in that area. With respect to legislation, it's not necessary in Alberta to have specific legislation. The School Act covers it. Section 45(8) of the School Act states that

a board shall ensure that each student enrolled in a school operated by the board is provided with a safe and caring environment that fosters and maintains respectful and responsible behaviours.

So what we need to do is to make sure that teachers have the necessary resources so that they can deal with the situation of each child that presents in their classroom, that schools and school boards have the supports and the resources they need to make sure that every child has the opportunity to get an education.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 114 questions and responses today. We'll take a 30-second momentary break before we continue the Routine, and we'll go on to Members' Statements in 30 seconds from now.

I'm sure hon. members would like to know that yesterday was the birthday anniversary for the hon. Member for Battle-River Wainwright.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Now we'll call on the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Taber Terry Fox Run

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the inspiring accomplishments of the citizens in the fine constituency of Cardston-Taber-Warner, that I am proud to represent. Taber hosted their Terry Fox Run on Saturday, September 13, and raised over \$35,000. Together with the head shaving event at the annual Cornfest festival and the August Tour of Hope visit by Rolly Fox, Terry's father, a grand total of \$50,468.45 was raised.

Taber's tremendous success was thanks to the work of many, from the brave volunteers who offered up a full head of hair to six-year-old Selena Sharpe of Stettler, who climbed up on the stage at the head shaving event and challenged other children to match her

donation of a loonie; to the many volunteers, registration clerks, entertainers, and spotters along the route of the run; to the 215 runners and the community supporters who pledged; to members of the Red Hat Society, air cadets, Frito Lay, various LDS youth groups, Horizon school division employees and students; and to the dedicated volunteers of the local Terry Fox committee. The 2008 Terry Fox Run committee, chaired by Yvonne Dreddy, did a superb job and pulled off the most successful Terry Fox Run in Taber history.

To put this into perspective, Mr. Speaker, with a population of 7,821 people the amount raised works out to a per capita of \$6.45. The entire community came together to support this worthy cause, and I invite all members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating the town of Taber for their tremendous efforts.

Thank you.

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

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. In order to raise more awareness and understanding about breast cancer, I rise today to speak of the impact that this disease has had on the lives of Albertans.

Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer among women; however, men are capable of contracting this disease as well. This year alone 2,000 women in Alberta will be diagnosed with breast cancer and another 440 will die of this disease. It is a disease that every individual is affected by, whether diagnosed with the illness or having a close relative or a friend who is. All women and men are linked by this cause. It is the disease that hits close to home for all of us.

We should all take this as an opportunity to help reduce the incidence of breast cancer by informing ourselves and others about it. Knowledge is the key to prevention. Here are a few things you need to know. Mammography screening is critical. Regular screening leads to early detection. Early detection leads to early treatment, and earlier treatment leads to a better chance of survival. Check with your physician to see if you need a mammogram, and take the necessary steps to reduce risks.

Also, it's never too early or too late to make positive lifestyle changes that support good health. Now is the time to stop smoking, limit alcohol consumption, start exercising, and eat a healthier diet.

The Alberta government is supporting increased awareness and screening. Our government was a sponsor of the Tour for the Cure, which travelled the province this summer to increase Albertans' knowledge about breast cancer. Government has also introduced the Alberta breast cancer screening program, a province-wide program designed to increase the number of women who have regular screening and mammograms.

For all these reasons and for many more we need to increase awareness about breast cancer. Together we can prevent this disease from impacting the lives of Albertan families like yours and mine.

Thank you.

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

Public Health

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are paying the price for the Conservative government's long-standing mismanagement of the public health and prevention systems. Year after year cutbacks to public health, including four medical officers this year, have led inexorably to this unfortunate result, thousands of Albertans potentially infected with life-threatening illnesses.

Today's revelations about the problems in High Prairie remind us of similar problems at St. Joseph's hospital in Vegreville 18 months ago, yet apparently there hasn't been enough sobering wake up to shake this inept government into action. All Albertans, including thousands of dedicated health professionals, are shocked that this was allowed to happen again.

Health system restructuring has not and will not address the front-line problems of space and staff shortages and quality control. Staff are told to do more with less and cope with unsafe workloads so that prevention policy and enforcement issues, like infection control, take the back burner, and patients' lives, yours and mine, Mr. Speaker, are being placed at risk. This is the tip of the iceberg of negligence in this government, and many staff are reluctant to come forward and reveal serious problems from the emergency departments to the long-term care settings.

In High Prairie the most basic of medical procedures is not safe and has not been safe for 18 years. Surely, if this government is truly interested in openness, in the interest of public safety it will now bring forward whistle-blower protection to give workers confidence that they can contribute to safer conditions without reprisal. Front-line health care professionals are alarmed by the lack of listening from this minister or influence on issues affecting quality of care and the legal liability that they face daily. The public and professionals have lost confidence that this government has the ability or the will to address fundamental issues of access and quality and cost efficiency, let alone infection control. The minister must provide the necessary resources to public health to deliver the results Albertans deserve and restore Albertans' trust in our cherished public health system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, en français, s'il vous plaît.

Gala de Reconnaissance

Dr. Brown: Merci, M. le Président. Chers collègues, le 17 octobre à Calgary j'ai eu le plaisir d'amener les salutations du Ministre de l'Emploi and de l'Immigration et du ministre responsable du Secrétariat francophone à l'occasion du Gala de reconnaissance de l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta. Cette célébration annuelle vise à souligner les accomplissements et les contributions des leaders francophones de notre province.

Parmi les récipiendaires cette année je tiens à mentionner le nom du docteur Carl Amrhein, vice-président académique et vice-recteur à l'Université de l'Alberta, qui s'est mérité le prix de l'Ami de la Francophonie 2008. Le docteur Amrhein s'ajoute à la liste d'illustres lauréats des années passées, entre autres l'hon. Membre d'Edmonton-Mill Creek et M. le Président, qui se sont tous les deux mérités le même prix en 2004 et 2007 respectivement pour leur appui considérable envers l'épanouissement de la Francophonie.

Une des nôtres s'est aussi distinguée cette année en recevant le prix Maurice Lavallée en éducation. Mme Jocelyne Bélanger, une employée du Ministère de l'Éducation, travaille depuis 33 ans à l'élaboration de ressources en français pour appuyer le curriculum albertain. Grâce à son travail acharné l'Alberta est maintenant reconnue comme un chef de file dans la production de matériel scolaire en français au Canada.

Pour conclure, j'aimerais inviter les membres de l'Assemblée à se joindre à moi pour féliciter de nouveau le docteur Amrhein et Mme Bélanger ainsi que tous les autres lauréats du Gala de reconnaissance 2008.

Merci.

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. members, on October 17 in Calgary I had the pleasure of bringing greetings on behalf of the Minister of Employment and Immigration and the minister responsible for the Francophone Secretariat during the French-Canadian Association of Alberta's annual Gala de reconnaissance awards banquet. This annual celebration aims to highlight the achievements and contributions of the province's francophone leaders.

Among this year's recipients I would like to mention the name of Dr. Carl Amrhein, vice-president academic and provost at the University of Alberta, who was honoured with the Ami de la Francophonie 2008 award. Dr. Amrhein joins the ranks of previous illustrious award recipients that include the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek and Mr. Speaker, who each received the award in 2004 and 2007 respectively for their significant contributions to the development of la Francophonie.

One of our own was also honoured this year with the Maurice Lavallée award in education. Mrs. Jocelyne Bélanger, an official with Alberta Education, has worked for the past 33 years to develop resources in French to support Alberta's curriculum. Thanks to her tireless efforts Alberta is now recognized as a leader in Canada in the production of educational material in French.

In closing, I would like to invite members of this Assembly to please join me in again congratulating Dr. Amrhein and Mrs. Bélanger as well as all the other recipients of the 2008 Gala de reconnaissance awards.

Thank you. [as submitted]

The Speaker: Merci.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

2:50 Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Awareness Month

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to ask Albertans to recognize October as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Awareness Month. Sudden infant death, more commonly referred to as SIDS, is the unexplainable death of an apparently healthy infant under the age of one. In Alberta each year there are about 25 cases of sudden infant death syndrome. From 1998 to 2003 combined in Alberta SIDS was identified as the cause of approximately 12 per cent of infant deaths, after congenital anomalies and perinatal conditions. The number of deaths may fluctuate from year to year, but the loss of even one baby is too much.

The Alberta government supports SIDS awareness by investing in programs and services. Alberta Health Services through education programs and resources provides useful information on topics like positioning infants correctly during sleeping, providing smoke-free environments, and encouraging breastfeeding. Another information service is the Health Link Alberta telephone line, which puts nurses directly in contact with new parents or anyone who cares for infants who may be worried about SIDS.

Although SIDS remains largely a mystery, communities working together and all efforts to research, educate, and support public understanding do make a difference. Please join me in recognizing the month of October as SIDS Awareness Month.

Thank you very much.

Statement by the Speaker

MLAs Elected in Alberta

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we move on, a little bit of history today with respect to the number of MLAs in the province of

Alberta since 1905. When Alberta's first general election was held on November 9, 1905, 25,163 Albertans elected 25 MLAs from a field of 56 nominated candidates. The number of MLAs increased to 41 in the 1909 election. In the 1913 election the number became 56. In 1917 58 MLAs were elected. The number for the 1921 and 1926 elections was 61 MLAs, and the number then increased to 63 for the elections of 1930 and 1935.

The number of MLAs was reduced to 57 for the elections of 1940, 1944, and 1948. The number then rose to 60 MLAs for the 1952 general election. The number increased to 61 for the 1955 election and then to 65 for the 1959 election. In 1963 63 MLAs were elected. The number of MLAs elected was 65 in the 1967 election. For the 1971 and 1975 elections the number of MLAs was 75. Then the number increased to 79 for the elections of 1979 and 1982. In 1986 83 MLAs were elected, and that number has remained through to the election of 2008.

In the 1909 election each MLA represented 9,129 Albertans. In 1921 the number increased to 9,960 Albertans. In the 1944 election each MLA represented 14,094 constituents. In Canada's centennial year the number rose to 22,430. In the 1986 election each MLA represented 29,105 constituents. In the 2008 election the number of constituents per MLA reached an average of 39,643.

Presenting Petitions

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition to you that was developed by the women of the United Church of Canada, Alberta and Northwest Conference. They are urging the Assembly to "use the present conditions of the lives of Alberta's children as the lens to view and revise their policies" – that is, the government's policies – "to eliminate child poverty and its many manifestations in Alberta." This is signed by people from literally all over Alberta.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am putting forward an additional 36 signatures petitioning the Legislative Assembly to "pass legislation that will prohibit emotional bullying and psychological harassment in the workplace."

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on behalf of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter which he has written, dated today, to Dr. John Cowell of the Health Quality Council of Alberta wherein he requested that a root cause analysis be undertaken by the Health Quality Council of the matters on which he made statements earlier today.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings. I am pleased to table with the Assembly today five copies of the special areas trust account audited financial statements as of December 31, 2007.

I would also like to table the Safety Codes Council's 2007 annual

report and also five copies of the 2007-08 annual report for the Alberta Elevating Devices and Amusement Rides Safety Association.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I committed to further sharing information about the Child and Youth Advocate quarterly reports and how we investigate and address concerns in them. Today I am tabling a response that follows through on my commitment and responds specifically to the excerpts from the quarterly reports tabled by the leader of the third party in the House on October 21.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a statement that, in fact, appeared on the back of the petition that I tabled earlier today from the women of the United Church of Canada, Alberta and Northwest Conference. This is their position statement on the child well-being initiative, a very strong initiative. Essentially, it's premised on the question: what if Alberta government policies were measured by the well-being of Alberta children? I encourage everyone to have a look at the core statement of changes required that they have outlined here.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Chrysalis, an Alberta society for citizens with disabilities, has been supporting and advocating for its Alberta members for over 40 years. The 13th annual achievement award ceremony, which I attended, confirmed the importance of the old adage about not judging a book by its cover.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on the purported question of privilege that we dealt with last Thursday afternoon.

Privilege Misleading the House

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I raised a point of privilege on Thursday of last week following comments from the Deputy Premier, who claimed that our caucus was provided with an oath of confidentiality to sign if we wished to see confidential documents regarding children in care. The Deputy Premier said, referring to our caucus:

They need to deal with a confidentiality agreement to protect the privacy of these people, but if they want the information, it is available to them. They just have to step up." I had not received such a document, so I said: "We asked for these documents, and we were told that they [had] not yet been prepared."

The Deputy Premier then began his response by saying:

You know who has done the honourable thing, Mr. Speaker, is the critic for the Liberals. Yesterday the critic was in the House when this offer was made to both parties. They stood up and said: we are prepared to go forward in that. I believe that the document, the confidentiality agreement, that was referred to yesterday is available. I believe [that] it has been provided to the member opposite, and I believe it has also been provided to those people,

referring to the NDP caucus. I then restated what I had said before: "It was not given to us. It's not true. You are not telling the truth."

The Deputy Premier then said: "It is there. You can look at it, and you can sign it if you're interested in finding out."

Mr. Speaker, in his statements the Deputy Premier told the House that I had the document when I had just told the House that I did not have it, and at the same time he was suggesting that I was acting in a dishonourable fashion. *Beauchesne's* 494 at page 151 says, "It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted." The Deputy Premier did not accept my word when I said that I did not have the document. He later told the House that he was in error but offered no apology. Later still, when the House was discussing the point of privilege, I said, "I think this thing could be resolved if the Deputy Premier was prepared to come into the House and apologize for what he said." We have not yet received any apology from the Deputy Premier.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, by failing to accept my word, the Deputy Premier has broken one of the rules of the House, and that has questioned my honour as a member in this Assembly. He has damaged my reputation and thereby impeded my ability to carry out my duties as a member of this House. In *Marleau and Montpetit* on page 86 it reads:

Speaker Fraser stated: "The privileges of a Member are violated by any action which might impede him or her in the fulfillment of his or her duties and functions. It is obvious that the unjust damaging of a reputation could constitute such an impediment."

Mr. Speaker, I've held elected office for just over 19 years now. In that time I've won eight elections at two levels of government, and I believe that I've built a reputation for honesty. Like any MLA I rely on my reputation to carry out my duties. The Deputy Premier unjustly asserted that my statements on Thursday were false and that my actions were not honourable. On that basis I believe that the Deputy Premier has breached my privileges as a member of this House. In the absence of an apology from the Deputy Premier I would suggest that the proper course of action would be for the House to refer the matter to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing. Mr. Speaker, I believe very firmly that this is, in fact, a matter of privilege.

If, however, you should rule that it is not, then it is my contention that at the very least it constitutes a point of order under standing orders 23(h), (i), and (j); in other words, making allegations against another member, imputing false or unavowed motives to another member, and using abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

Mr. Speaker, that is my submission with respect to this matter. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Others? The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Stevens: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Well, four days have passed since I made my comments and an acknowledgement that I was in error. I was premature, if you will, in the utterances in response to the hon. member's questions. The documents that I had referred to in the response were faxed over within minutes but were not there and were not with the hon. member and his caucus at the time of comment. Four days have passed, so the substance of what I said four days ago is absolutely true from this time and place. Since the hon. member wishes to raise the matter in the House, I'll take the opportunity to say that the subject of my comment would be correct and that the document does allow this caucus to receive specific information with respect to the subject matter that was the nature of the question.

I would say that this is not a point of privilege, but obviously this hon. member cares deeply about it. In that regard, Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to say to you and to the hon. member through you that I am sincerely sorry, that I was premature in my comments. I will ensure as we go forward that the documents that I refer to, if in fact they are to be transmitted, are going to make it into the hands of the other side so that when I do make my comments, I don't have to wait four days in order to say that I am now correct in making those statements. But the hon. member wishes me to say I am sorry. I am quite pleased to do that.

The Speaker: Thank you. That ends this matter.

Just for the comfort of the House, if this matter would have gone on and the chair would have had to rule on this particular matter, the chair would have ruled that this was not a prima facie case of privilege for one very important reason – one very important reason. Let me just quote this one paragraph.

There are two ingredients to be established when it is alleged that a member is in contempt on this ground: the statement must, in fact, have been misleading; and it must be established that the member making the statement knew at the time the statement was made that it was incorrect and that, in making it, the member intended to mislead the House.

I believe that what we heard on Thursday last and today was that the member believed – he used the word “believed” – but he had no intention of misleading anyone. That matter is ended.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

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

Farm Fuel Benefit Program

Q21. Mr. Chase asked on behalf of Dr. Taft that the following question be accepted.

What are the costs for the department of agriculture's farm fuel benefit program from April 1, 1997, to May 8, 2008, including the grant costs as well as estimates of the tax exemption costs?

Mr. Chase: Thank you. This is a very specific, defined period of time, approximately 11 years, dating from 1997 to 2008. It's a very specific request, including grant costs as well as estimates of the tax exemption costs, so it's clearly laid out.

The reason for this question is that the whole farm fuel benefit program has come into some disrepute as to who actually qualifies for the farm fuel benefit. Individuals who are operating in a rural circumstance, not necessarily sowing crops or raising animals but living in a rural setting, have received farm fuel benefits from this program under, as I say, questionable circumstance. Therefore, in the interest of transparency and accountability we're calling upon the government to provide us with those specific statistics: April 1, 1997, to May 8, 2008, including the grant costs as well as the estimates of the tax exemption costs. We believe this to be a reasonable request, a very specific request, and we are counting on the ministry in the name of transparency and accountability as professed to demonstrate that transparency by providing us with this very specific information over the 11-year period.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise has asked that I accept the question on her behalf provided that the House be prepared to entertain an amendment – and I understand that the amendment is available – that Written Question 21 be amended (a) by striking out “the costs” and substituting “the grant and estimated tax exemption costs” and (b) by striking out “, including the grant costs as well as estimates of the tax exemption costs”. The amended written question would read:

What are the grant and estimated tax exemption costs for the department of agriculture's farm fuel benefit program from April 1, 1997, to May 8, 2008?

Now, I'm in a bit of a quandary, Mr. Speaker, because as I understand it there was also an intention to amend the date – and that doesn't appear to have been done in this motion – so that the end date would be March 31, 2008, the year-end period, which is a question of a difference of a month. I'm in a position now of moving an amendment so that the written question can be accepted, but then the written question as amended would not still be acceptable because, according to the notes that I have, it needs to be amended to March 31. I don't believe that at this point there's an opportunity to adjourn debate on it and put it over, and I understand it has been discussed with the opposition and that they were in agreement with the proposed changes, so at this point I would ask whether with unanimous consent it's appropriate to change that last date as well from May 8, 2008, to March 31, 2008. If so, that would allow us to accept the question.

3:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, from the perspective of the chair we can do nearly anything we want to do if we have a unanimous request. This seems to be an innocuous point, but let's, first of all, hear on this proposed amendment before the chair rules on it. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I very much appreciate the hon. House leader's willingness to provide that information and also his willingness to recognize that the information to be of full value should extend to March 31. Given that willingness and the date correction, I am very pleased to accept the amendments.

The Speaker: Hon. members, what we have here, then, is that in the documents you have in front of you, in essence the statement says: the hon. Ms Evans to move that Written Question 21 be amended. You have point (a), you have point (b), and then you have on the same document that the amended written question will read as follows: what are the grant and estimated tax exemption costs for the department of agriculture's farm fuel benefit program from April 1, 1997, to March 31, 2008?

Is that my correct reading, Government House Leader? That's correct. Okay.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Can I now call the question as amended?

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I am extremely grateful to the hon. House leader for acquiescing to the request and actually sharpening it up somewhat and clarifying the dates and for his willingness to provide the information. It's very much appreciated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Written Question 21 as amended carried]

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

Drug Treatment and Community Restoration Court

Q22. Mr. Hehr asked that the following question be accepted. What is the percentage, broken down by year, of litigants dealt with by the Edmonton Drug Treatment and Community Restoration Court since its commencement on December 7, 2005, to May 14, 2008, who have reoffended for a possession-related offence?

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We consider this to be a very important question regarding Edmonton's Drug Treatment and Community Restoration Court as we believe the direction of drug courts is one that we feel the literature supports and that has been highly successful in other jurisdictions. We are just hoping that the type of information we receive through this question will lead us to see that the same things are being done here in Alberta, that this program is working for individuals at the Edmonton Drug Treatment and Community Restoration Court.

I think, also, another point to sort of be touched on is that this type of program has been up and operating in Calgary now for approximately one year. It's run by, I believe, Calgary Legal Guidance and to date doesn't receive provincial government support. I know I had the opportunity this summer of going down to the Calgary Drug Treatment Court. It was a very impressive outfit. I was in Judge Ogle's courtroom. It was well run.

Interestingly, Mr. Theoren Fleury, a former Calgary Flame, was there that day, supporting various individuals who were in the program. Mr. Fleury and his new company, Fleury concrete, provide some of these people at the Calgary drug court a job so that they can be involved in the drug court as well as keep working. It was a very impressive operation, and it was neat to see a guy like Mr. Fleury giving back.

Needless to say, that is the reason we are asking for the information. We believe it, you know, will help us bring forward the administration of this good House.

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move an amendment on Written Question 22. I believe all members have copies on their desks already, and the amendment has been provided to the opposition. The amendment will seek to clarify some wording and dates by striking out "litigants dealt with by" and substituting "clients who graduated from." This is because program participants are referred to as clients, not as litigants. Additionally, the meaning of the phrase "dealt with" is unclear. Information can only be provided as to the number of clients who have graduated from the program. Furthermore, information about convictions of program participants who have left the program without graduating is not available.

Next, Mr. Speaker, my amendment seeks to strike out "May 14" and substitute "May 16." This is because the information has been collected to cover the period up until May 16, not May 14, of 2008.

Finally, the amendment intends to strike out "reoffended" and substitute "been convicted." The word "reoffended" is unclear. Convicted confirms that there has been a finding of guilt by the court.

Thus the motion will read:

What is the percentage, broken down by year, of clients who graduated from the Edmonton Drug Treatment and Community Restoration Court since its commencement on December 7, 2005, to May 16, 2008, who have been convicted for a possession-related offence?

I think that with the acceptance of these amendments we'll be able to provide clearer information to the opposition.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, I thank the hon. Minister of Justice for making those changes and actually tightening up what I was trying to ask for. It is this mutual co-operation that is befitting this House. I am one hundred per cent in agreement with those changes, and I would recommend it going forward as it is as well.

The Speaker: Others to participate? The hon. Member for St. Albert on the amendment.

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, on a point of clarification, I don't think the written amended question is quite the same as what was read out by the hon. Attorney General and Minister of Justice.

The Speaker: The chair listened attentively, and it didn't come to his concern.

Mr. Allred: Well, I will read it out as I think she read it.

The Speaker: Well, no. Why don't we read it out the way she did read it rather than what one hon. member thinks?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I think the discrepancy is that in the written motion it refers to graduates, but in my reading of it, it refers to clients. I think that would be the wording that we would choose to have since that was the intent of the amendment.

The Speaker: Run that one by the House again, please.

Ms Redford: In the written amended question that was circulated, the word "graduates" appears.

The Speaker: Yes.

Ms Redford: The word that we would like to have in there is "clients."

The Speaker: Okay. Now, this is the second time today that this has occurred.

Ms Redford: Yes.

The Speaker: Look, we're talking about wordsmithing here, and this should not be the job of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, all clear to go with that one?

Do we have another comment? Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, do you want to wordsmith, too? We're on the amendment here.

Mr. Chase: No, I don't, Mr. Speaker. I don't wish to wordsmith. I do appreciate the hon. Minister of Justice rewriting the submission. As the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo pointed out, what we're looking at is the percentage of recidivism, and we're hoping that the Edmonton Drug Treatment and Community Restoration Court has been successful in its intent. As the Member for Calgary-Buffalo noted, there has been success demonstrated in Calgary. We're hoping that this will change the lives of individuals, especially those on their first offence, so they don't repeat. Therefore, although I understand the Speaker's concerns about wordsmithing, if we can get it right, then it's a worthwhile amendment.

3:20

The Speaker: That is not the issue, hon. member. The issue is the importance and the intensity of the debate because there would be occasions in here when people do this late at night and all hell will break loose over exactly the same thing. This is not precedent setting.

If I understand this, then, the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General – if we take a look at the document, we’re going to move this through – has moved that Written Question 22 be amended by striking out “litigants dealt with by” and substituting “clients who graduated from.” That’s clear. No issue there, hon. Member from Calgary-*Buffalo*? Okay. (b) striking out “May 14” and substituting “May 16.” No issue there? (c) striking out “reoffended” and substituting “been convicted.” No issues there? Then, hon. Member for St. Albert, right to the bit, this phrase should now read:

What is the percentage, broken down by year, of clients . . . from the Edmonton Drug Treatment and Community Restoration Court since its commencement on December 7, 2005, to May 16, 2008, who have been convicted for a possession-related offence?

That is the correct wording? It’s not the correct wording, hon. Member for St. Albert?

Mr. Allred: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hate to nitpick, but the amendment says, “striking out ‘litigants dealt with by’ and substituting ‘clients who graduated from’.” I think we need to be clear. I don’t think it makes a hill of beans really, but which are we voting on?

The Speaker: Well, you’re absolutely correct. The hon. Member for St. Albert is absolutely correct. Okay. This is going to be the last cut at this, and then we’re moving on. So this should then read:

What is the percentage, broken down by year, of [graduates] who graduated from the Edmonton Drug Treatment and Community Restoration Court since its commencement on December 7, 2005, to May 16, 2008, who have been convicted for a possession-related offence.

Mr. Allred: That’s still not right.

The Speaker: That’s still not right?

Mr. Hancock: You were right. The amendment is the clause which ends up with (c), and the rest that’s on there just shows what the rephrase is. If it’s amended in accordance with what’s set out, it would read, “what is the percentage, broken down by year, of clients who graduated from the Edmonton Drug Treatment [centre].” Now, the question really is: does it need to be “clients who graduated from” or whether it’s just a reference to “clients”? If it can be “clients who graduated from,” then the amendment is entirely in order. If you need to drop the “who graduated from” out of it, then we would need unanimous consent of the House.

The Speaker: So as long as it says “clients who graduated from the Edmonton Drug Treatment.” Okay. That’s what the chair thought he had read. The chair was advised that he didn’t read that, but that’s what he thought it said. So what it should say, then, we’ll try one more time, okay? “What is the percentage, broken down by year, of clients who graduated from,” and then the rest of the phrase. Well, that’s what the chair thought he said.

Okay. So we’ve got an amendment before the House. Any further debate on the amendment?

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Any further debate, then, on the question as amended? We’re good to go on that one?

[Written Question 22 as amended carried]

Legal Aid Society Funding

Q23. Mr. Hehr asked that the following question be accepted.
What is the total amount of funding, broken down by year, provided to every Legal Aid Society in the province from May 1, 2005, to May 14, 2008?

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We again have a question that we believe can be answered by the government. Now, we believe this is an important question as many people in my constituency, and I would go so far as throughout Alberta, readily agree that the price of going to court and actually affording legal advice is becoming severe. The Legal Aid Society does a tremendous job in supporting many members of our society in being able to get legal assistance and take issues to court and to protect their rights. We are just doing due diligence as an opposition in checking how much is in fact getting to our Legal Aid Society and hoping that more people can receive – or make sure that when they’re actually involved in legal imbroglios, they have some basic legal guidance as to what is happening and how their rights can best be protected.

That’s all I’ll put forward on that, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would be prepared to accept this question with two amendments, one being with respect to the timing. The original question referred to an end date of May 14, 2008. Since the government of Alberta provides grant funding on an annual basis, I would propose an amendment to “April 1, 2005, to March 31, 2009” and would also suggest that we amend from “every Legal Aid Society” to “Legal Aid Alberta” since that is the only legal aid agency in the province. So the amended written question would read:

What is the total amount of funding, broken down by fiscal year, that has been or will be provided to Legal Aid Alberta from April 1, 2005, to March 31, 2009?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Before I recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-*Varsity*, are we okay, hon. Member for St. Albert?

Mr. Allred: I think so.

Mr. Chase: It’s just a clarification of the process so that I fully understand the intent of the amendment. I understand from the Minister of Justice that legal aid is doled out on a yearly basis, and therefore there is a limited amount that can be offered that will have to carry through to March 31, 2009. My question is: is it not subject to application or caseload? Does that not enter into the amendment? I’m just wondering: is there no way of adding further funding to support legal aid if an unusual caseload came up in that time period? Regardless of caseload is this a specific amount, and no more will be added? I just wanted to clarify that understanding of the amendment, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Redford: Well, I see your point. It’s our intention to provide that grant until April of 2009. What I would suggest is that if there

was an exceptional circumstance, you could ask me the question again, and we could provide more information. At this point, in terms of it being a grant process, we are able to provide you that information as of today to the end of the fiscal year.

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

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Should I now call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to close debate on the motion as amended, or should I just call the question?

Mr. Hehr: Call the question.

[Written Question 23 as amended carried]

Drug Treatment and Community Restoration Court

Q24. Mr. Hehr asked that the following question be accepted. What is the total number of litigants, broken down by year, dealt with by the Edmonton Drug Treatment and Community Restoration Court since its commencement on December 7, 2005, to May 14, 2008, and what is the total amount of annual funding provided by the province to the Edmonton Drug Treatment and Community Restoration Court for that same period?

The Speaker: Okay. Pay attention to this one.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If I could speak to this question, the initial reading I've done on these types of courts and their success in other communities leads me to believe that these have been very good expenditures by this government. I just want to verify this, if we can break down how much funding has actually gone to this program and look at the success rates it's had and possibly then look at expanding this.

3:30

If we look at the costs and look at whether the results are there, whether we should be doing this in other jurisdictions such as Calgary, like I described earlier, the work of Justice Ogle in Calgary, legal guidance with the Calgary program that is not receiving funding yet, and look at whether these drug courts are actually doing a good job of reducing recidivism and actually getting to the people who are both causing crimes as well as suffering addictions, if we can work and find ways to reduce both – I think that's where the nature of this question is, whether this information can help both us and the government move forward on protecting citizens as well as providing support for individuals who are clearly being afflicted by drugs.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again with this question I would request that amendments be made similar to the amendments to question 22 by (a) striking out "litigants" and substituting "clients" since that is the way that we refer to people in the program; (b) striking out "dealt with by" and substituting "participated in or graduated from" since that more appropriately addresses the way that people are treated in the program; (c) striking out "May 14" and substituting "May 16" since that is the period for which we collect

data; and (d) striking out "the province" and substituting "Alberta Justice" since that is the department that I'm responsible for and what I can speak to. So the amended written question will read:

What is the total number of clients, broken down by year, who participated in or graduated from the Edmonton Drug Treatment and Community Restoration Court since its commencement on December 7, 2005, to May 16, 2008, and what is the total amount of annual funding provided by Alberta Justice to the Edmonton Drug Treatment and Community Restoration Court for that same period?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert advises that that's okay. Unfortunately, I must advise the House that it is not okay. There is an error in there. If all hon. members would look very carefully at (b), it says: striking out "dealt with by." Then it says: and substituting "participated in or graduated from." Okay? Then you go down to the first line, and it says, "What is the total number of clients, broken down by year, who . . ." There's the word "who" in this one that is not in the amendment. So you're batting five hundred, hon. Member for St. Albert.

Let's assume that the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General meant to say in the first line of the amended question: "What is the total number of clients, broken down by year, who participated." She had that right, but in (b) above it should also say "who participated in." Okay?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is not intended to persecute you or any other member of the House, but we need two figures, the number of people who entered the program so that we can compare with the number who graduated. That is why I believe we would need something to the effect of "who participated in as well as graduated." We need both numbers, the total participants and those who graduated, in order to get the percentage we're looking for. We're looking for success, and apparently this program has been very successful, but without that addition we have either the number who entered or the number who graduated, and those are two distinct numbers.

The Speaker: Okay. Any others want to participate?

Because of all the violations we've already made this afternoon with respect to this and I want to move this thing through, hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, I'm going to waive the fact that you're not supposed to be saying anything else. Is there any clarification in this that has to be added?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the wording "dealt with by" is left in the question, we're not going to be able to provide the information that is actually asked for in this question either. I'm wondering if another amendment might deal with that.

The Speaker: No. We're going to move on.

Ms Redford: Okay.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, would you like to close the debate on the motion as amended, or can we move on with the question?

Mr. Hehr: I'm going to speak on it nonetheless. We'll see whether we're all on the same page or not. Thank you very much. I'd just

like to reiterate that whether we've got it here or not – I believe we have, but if we haven't, at some point in time I will be asking the hon. Minister of Justice for both those numbers, who participated in the program and who have graduated from the Edmonton Drug Treatment and Community Restoration Court, because both those numbers will be necessary for us to evaluate the success of the program, which we've heard as well. If we didn't quite get there – democracy is sometimes painful and more awkward than we expect. Nonetheless, through my relationship with the hon. Minister of Justice I'm sure that we can work it out at some point in time in the future.

Thank you very much.

[Written Question 24 as amended carried]

The Speaker: Again, just to reiterate that in this little segment we've had here for the last few minutes with respect to these amended written questions and the process we use, there's absolutely nothing that sets the precedent for next Monday or any other day. Okay? This was in the spirit of co-operation and harmony and making good vibes happen.

Motions for Returns

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

Ministry of Justice Costs

M18. Mr. Hehr moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of any and all documents that provide an economic forecast regarding the costs relative to increasing the ministry's capacity to deal with complex legal issues such as public-private partnerships and the British Columbia-Alberta trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, TIILMA, as outlined in strategy 5.3 on page 209 of the 2008-11 business plan for the Ministry of Justice.

Alberta Rules of Court

M19. Mr. Hehr moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of any and all documents that illustrate how Alberta's court system will be made more accessible by rewriting the *Alberta Rules of Court* as outlined in strategy 2.9 on page 206 of the 2008-11 business plan for the Ministry of Justice.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We believe this information is necessary, and it will give us an ability to look at the ramifications of actually going forward with our new relationship. It will also give us some eye, actually, as to whether the cost involved in all this stuff is warranted vis-à-vis the new law as it's being put forward.

Those are my comments.

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to advise the House that we will be rejecting this motion for a return. The *Rules of Court* project is a partnership between the Alberta Law Reform Institute, Alberta Justice, the Law Society, and the Alberta Law Foundation. Much work has gone into this over the past two years. The Alberta Law Reform Institute is taking the lead on formulating the recom-

mendations, and I can report that their final report from the Rules of Court Committee has not yet been received by Alberta Justice, but we are expecting it before the end of the year.

The Speaker: Others to participate?

Mr. Chase: I'm just wondering if the hon. Minister of Justice would like to set a date for fulfilling this request. You mentioned that the work has not been done yet. Would it be possible to set a date further into this year or early next year at which point you could comply with providing that information or upon request? You know where I'm going. I'm just hoping that we can have that information at the minister's convenience.

3:40

The Speaker: Others to participate?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to close the debate. Should we call the question?

Mr. Hehr: Call the question.

[Motion for a Return 19 lost]

Alberta Rules of Court

M20. Mr. Hehr moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of any and all recommendations proposed that illustrate how Alberta's court system will be made more accessible by rewriting the *Alberta Rules of Court* as outlined in strategy 2.9 on page 206 of the 2008-11 business plan for the Ministry of Justice.

Mr. Hehr: Just to speak in favour of the motion, I believe this information will allow us to sort of have a learning process as to what is actually working in the court system and what rules the litigants and service providers of lawyers involved in the process will actually be doing and what the reasoning and rationale are behind certain changes of our justice system being proposed and why they're being proposed.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to advise that we will be rejecting Motion for a Return 20. As noted, the *Rules of Court* project is a partnership between the four institutions: the Alberta Law Reform Institute, Alberta Justice, the Law Society, and the Alberta Law Foundation. It is the Alberta Law Reform Institute that is taking a lead on formulating recommendations for the new rules.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate the fact that there are a number of organizations involved in redrafting these rules. The key part of the request is: "will be made more accessible," and that's what we're looking for. Obviously, these various groups aren't interested in putting up blocks or further impeding not only the quality but the speed of the justice system, and therefore I would urge complying with the request so that we and Albertans as a result have an understanding of the improvements that are being proposed to the *Alberta Rules of Court*.

There has been a great deal of discussion lately about the court allowing individuals out on bail under questionable circumstances. There have been barbs traded as to whether it's the legislators who

make the laws or the judges who carry them out who are at fault. Therefore, being provided with the information about how these rules will improve accessibility is basically the foundation of our justice system, which on a yearly basis we're trying to improve. Again, I had my opportunity with Motion 511, calling for a unified family court process, because that was the intent: to improve accessibility and to improve the outcomes and also the costs associated.

I would urge members of this House to support the intent of Motion for a Return 20, which is to not only improve the justice system but provide the information behind how those improvements will take place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Others to participate?

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, just to add a few more comments supporting my colleague from Calgary-Varsity as he made some really good points. Having this information and making the justice system more accessible should be one of the primary jobs that we put ourselves to. People having the ability to get legal counsel to go to court, I guess, to have their rights and responsibilities understood by them is very important. That's why I think we should have supported this thing in the first place. Nevertheless, that's fine.

[Motion for a Return 20 lost]

Resolution of Civil Disputes

M21. Mr. Hehr moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of any and all recommendations proposed that illustrate how early, effective, and affordable resolutions of civil disputes such as an apology will streamline the ministry's operations as outlined in strategy 2.3 on page 205 of the 2008-11 business plan for the Ministry of Justice.

Mr. Hehr: In speaking for this motion, I believe it is good legislation that showed that an apology is very effective in reducing the amount of time people are actually spending in court and may actually save some time, heartache, and hassle for the citizens of Alberta by having this put forward. An apology mechanism is great for individuals who, say, have been involved in things such as a minor fender bender or, in fact, a situation where there has been a catastrophic injury that has occurred. That is why I'll be speaking for this motion and will leave it at that.

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We would be prepared to accept this motion for a return with one amendment: by striking out "and all recommendations proposed" and substituting the word "materials." This has been an extensive project. It is fundamental to the work of the Department of Justice, and what we can say is that with the word "materials" we will be able to provide extensive research materials that will deal with this issue and will provide a very detailed response. So I suggest that the motion would read as follows: a copy of any materials that illustrate how Alberta's succession statutes can be reformed or modernized to ensure they are consistent with current social values and will facilitate efficient . . .

The Speaker: Sorry. I think you'd better look at Motion for a Return 21, please.

Ms Redford: Sorry. I apologize. It would read as follows:

that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of any materials that illustrate how early, effective, and affordable resolutions of civil disputes, such as an apology, will streamline the ministry's operations as outlined in strategy 2.3 on page 205 of the 2008-2011 business plan for the Ministry of Justice.

Thank you.

The Speaker: On the amendment?

Mr. Chase: Very definitely on the amendment. I want to thank the hon. Minister of Justice for proposing this amendment. We're looking at good-news stories here and all recommendations. In this case "any materials" is more inclusive and therefore will provide the information showing how early, effective, and affordable resolutions of civil disputes will work. This is a very positive recommendation. I'm sure the Speaker is thrilled with the amendment that the hon. Minister of Justice has provided, and I'm sure that's why he was sharing his support with her for this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister of Justice.

The Speaker: Overwhelming would be an understatement at this time.

Okay. So we're going to have a vote now on the amendment.

[Motion for a Return 21 as amended carried]

3:50

Succession Statutes

M22. Mr. Hehr moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of any and all recommendations proposed that illustrate how Alberta's succession statutes can be reformed or modernized to ensure they are consistent with current social values and will facilitate efficient handling of Albertans' estates as outlined in strategy 2.2 on page 205 of the 2008-11 business plan for the Ministry of Justice.

Mr. Hehr: Speaking for this motion, clearly succession statutes are very important to individuals who are faced with these types of issues that arise in everyone's life. If they can be modernized with current social values, clearly that is something we are in favour of. That is what I'll say on that topic.

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today for the last time to say that we would be prepared to accept this motion with one amendment: by striking out "and all recommendations proposed" and substituting "materials." I'd like to clarify to the House that there were no recommendations proposed per se; however, there are a variety of materials that supported this strategy that I will submit. The amended motion for a return will read as follows:

that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of any materials that illustrate how Alberta's succession statutes can be reformed or modernized to ensure they are consistent with current social values and will facilitate efficient handling of Albertans' estates as outlined in strategy 2.2 on page 205 of the 2008-11 business plan for the Ministry of Justice.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: It's obvious and appreciated, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hehr: I feel the same way.

The Speaker: Then shall I call the question?

Mr. Hehr: Yes.

[Motion for a Return 22 as amended carried]

**Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

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

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

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me great pleasure to rise in Committee of the Whole and speak to Bill 205, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2008. Bill 205 was designed with one important goal in mind: to increase the standard of safety as it applies to used vehicles in the province of Alberta. Time and time again we have talked in this House as well as in our homes, businesses, and on the streets about the fact that the safety of Albertans is of paramount importance and therefore this must be a priority for this Assembly.

The amendments proposed by Bill 205 help to raise the level of safety for all Albertans by addressing a technical inconsistency within the mechanical inspection process. Bill 205 would not alter the scope or nature of the inspection process – it would simply ensure a uniform level of qualification and standardization within it; requiring the signatory to be a licensed technician in all cases surely will help to achieve this – nor would the bill interfere with or alter the business decision-making purview of used car dealerships themselves. Indeed, the proposed amendments to the Traffic Safety Act do not touch upon existing rules of conduct and standard procedures regarding sales between dealers, auctions, and the like, nor do they impact private vehicle sales. These other things lie outside the scope of the bill's intent and involve different laws and rules of conduct.

Trying to achieve too broad a mandate within one bill would have been too ambitious and likely not as effective. The amendments will simply ensure uniformity of expertise for vehicle inspections and raise this standard to similar levels of safety found in other types of vehicle inspections such as those for out of province. Quite simply, Mr. Chairman, Albertans have come to enjoy a certain quality of life and safety on our roads. It's an expectation that many of us share. That is why I'm so pleased to see that the Department of Transportation is moving in this direction. After consulting with various people from the Department of Transportation, I believe that the intent of Bill 205 is consistent with the direction that the Department of Transportation is taking.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I can appreciate the intent of this Bill 205, the Traffic Safety (Used Vehicle Inspection) Amendment Act, 2008, and I think it is important that our cars are certified as being safe. Certainly there are some out there. However, in some of the conversations that I've had with people, particularly car dealerships and used car dealers, their problem with this, in my understanding, is that it would prohibit the exchange of cars that would not have gone through this inspection that would go to other dealer brokers or that would in fact go through the auction sales. That would restrict their ability to move these cars, when in fact after all of this took place, then they could be certified as opposed to just being declared roadworthy. That would be probably my main concern with this.

Perhaps someone on the other side of the table could explain how this could be rectified so that that part of the exchanging of cars that would be wholesale to brokers or to other dealers and certainly those that would go through an auction sale – it eliminates the ability to simply provide in writing the details of the car's condition. It has to be an official inspection certificate confirming that it meets the federal standards. That is the part that would be onerous to people that are moving a particularly large number of cars, that are moving them in to a broker, who then passes them on either through auctions or through sales, that perhaps second-hand car lot dealership sort of thing.

I think it is a concern for the ability to move these because ultimately they're still going to have to have the – what's it called? – official inspection certificate that they met the federal standards when those cars are being licensed.

Perhaps someone could explain how this would prevent that problem from happening. Otherwise, of course the bill is good because safe cars are safe for all of us.

4:00

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

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Relative to Bill 205 and in the interest of simplifying this matter between a private member, his initiative, and the direction of government, a decision has been made to drop Bill 205 and to include significant aspects of this bill inside government regulation. I know that the member and the government share the same goal of continuing to ensure safety on Alberta's roads, and I applaud the member for this. In addition to the strategies proposed by the Transportation minister's department, the ministry will engage in a co-ordinated effort to determine the best ways to achieve these goals advanced by the member and government.

For this reason, pursuant to Standing Order 67(1) I move the motion that the chairman do now leave the chair. Thank you.

[Motion carried]

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

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

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

**Bill 207
Young Albertans' Advisory Council Act**

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very grateful today to have the opportunity to rise and lead off the discussion of Bill 207,

the Young Albertans' Advisory Council Act. Structurally the council will provide both a mechanism and a forum for Albertans 25 to 35 years of age to bring their ideas and viewpoints forward. It would accomplish more than dialogue. As we know, dialogue and discussions are not enough. Actions are what define us. The advisory council will provide young Albertans a direct line to government, allowing them to contribute in specific and meaningful ways to the actual creation of policy and programs, particularly those that directly affect them, in this way affording them the opportunity to help steer the actual direction of their government. If I may be bold, I believe that this is an idea whose time has come.

The Canadian Policy Research Networks released a report in June 2007 called *Indifferent or Just Different: The Political and Civic Engagement of Young People in Canada, Charting the Course for Youth Civic and Political Participation*. In that report one of the recommendations is this.

Governments ought to focus the lens inward to consider how institutions and processes may no longer "speak" to the youngest citizens and how they may even discourage . . . participation. For the cognitively mobilized, the formal processes and hierarchal organizations of representative politics provide little in the way of satisfying and results-oriented practices. Wherever possible, participatory decision-making structures ought to be adopted, fully supported and implemented. This necessarily involves the ceding of a measure of political power but brings with it a host of benefits in the form of an engaged, informed and involved citizenry.

In Alberta we have in place bodies to address the concerns of Albertans under the age of 25 just as we have things in place to address the needs of seniors. We do have a Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta Act. This is a legislated act, Mr. Speaker. We do have the Youth Advisory Panel. Again, this is a panel that I have the fortunate opportunity to chair that represents people in this province from the ages of 15 to 22. I will also note that the hon. Minister of Education has brought forward the idea of having an advisory panel of students in this province, but we are absent something that invites those from the young adult generation to take an active role in the same way.

Mr. Speaker, the youth advisory council is not simply an attempt to convince Albertans under 40 that politics and public policy is relevant; it is more than just the age. The uniqueness of those between the ages of 25 and 35 we are seeing not only in Alberta but across North America and all across the world. It is a unique partnership between two generations commonly referred to as Generation X and Generation Y. The result is a generation which shares traits of both, an ambitious mix of high performance and high maintenance that is at times restrained by cautious skepticism. I myself fall into this overlap. We sometimes find ourselves struggling with how our allegiances fit into the traditional processes of government and policy decision-making. We are more similar than different.

More than ever, as a country and as a planet, the differences that are used to divide us—gender, race, religion, sexual orientation—are almost nonexistent. More often than not differences are now celebrated, questions are encouraged, and new and bold ideas are embraced. We have grown up with technology and, therefore, consider it a valuable part of our lives. Texting and googling are verbs that did not exist 10 years ago. From Internet to cellphones and now BlackBerries the world for us has always been one click away. It has raised our expectations of what our lives can be.

Postsecondary education, for example, once considered something for the privileged, is now regarded by many as the natural step in transition from teenager to adulthood. Yet we do not see our lives as so much a linear sequence as an evolution, one that may contain multiple careers, changing roles, and more than one place to call

home. The order in which we accomplish our goals has become less important than the process as each new experience teaches us more about ourselves. We have been taught since childhood to always explore our options. Now more than ever we have a world that allows us to do so. Despite what one might say, this is more than mere self-indulgence. Our economic reality is not the same as previous generations'. In many ways it has become more challenging, but there have also been more opportunities.

Labour mobility is just one area that truly affects a new generation of workers. The days of company loyalty and the idea of a job for life are gone. As well, the concept of a static, reliable labour market is not really a safe concept anymore. For us, survival requires that we explore our options, be open to opportunities, and accept that the only constant is, in fact, change. We as a province and as a government must recognize this reality for young people and the consequences that it will have on our future economy.

Alberta has an important role for those of us who live in this reality, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has always embraced the spirit of change, excellence, and entrepreneurial spirit. In Alberta you have the ability to become whatever you wish to become. Alberta has become the new land of opportunity for those 35 and under. Whether they possess university degrees, diplomas, or trade certificates, the highly skilled and motivated youth that choose to make Alberta home continue to play a significant role in maintaining our place as a leader nationally and internationally. In fact, according to Statistics Canada Calgary has become the youngest population in any city in Canada, with a median age of 35. For these young people who believe in the values of entrepreneurialism and self-determination, the best thing that we can do for them to continue to create opportunities is to support the Alberta that has become young, urban, and powerful on the national and international stage.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, I'm here to tell you that there is a disconnect between the reality of a new generation of Albertans and the traditional institutions and processes that we have. I've got a quote here that came out of a report done by the Canada West Foundation in 2006. The report was titled *Under 35: An Analysis of the Looking West 2006 Survey*. It was a report specifically looking at the under 35 population in western Canada. It says:

Under 35s represent the future of western Canada. They are the future political, business and community leaders. They are the current and future employees, workforce, taxpayers and service consumers. They are the current and future parents of the next generation of western Canadians. The Looking West 2006 Survey presents evidence of a significant disconnect between under 35s and conventional political life . . . It is in the interest of all western Canadians—regardless of age—to identify ways to address and reduce this disconnect so to best ensure that the region can fully benefit from everything the West's young adults have to offer.

These are not my words; these are the words of the report from the Canada West Foundation. It is this advisory council that is trying to bridge that disconnect.

Our government has led the way before in technological innovation, environmental sustainability, trade liberalization, and open and transparent decision-making long before anybody else and long before it became a standard procedure across this country. We must continue this leadership by tapping into our greatest resource, the younger generations who are paving the way for the future economic and social leadership of this province.

Savvy workplaces . . . [Mr. Fawcett's speaking time expired] Mr. Speaker, I will get to that at a later time.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. With a couple of notable exceptions who joined this parliament back in 2004 – I refer to a young and intelligent member who is currently with us from Battle River-Wainwright and a former young, enthusiastic member from Edmonton-McClung who are very close to that 35 age range that the hon. member is suggesting is, sort of, the upper limit of engagement. I would suggest that the group that we most importantly need to engage are the traditional 18- to 24-year-olds, who for whatever reason – the fact that they're in college, the fact that they've just recently graduated from high school, are starting to develop either their education or earn sufficient money to be able to afford to have postsecondary education – is the group that I believe should be targeted as opposed to the 25 to 35. If we grab their attention at the 18 to 24 age, then they're likely to continue to be engaged.

Members of this House who were around in the previous Legislature prior to March 3 know that two years ago I brought forward a motion calling for the lowering of the voting age to 16 based on the experience I've had of 34 years as a teacher both in elementary and in junior high school. I recognized the capabilities and the desire for young people, if given the opportunity, to engage to do so. This was one of the reasons for creating a leadership option program that I ran for my grade 8s and grade 9s at F.E. Osborne junior high school in the constituency of Calgary-Varsity.

I saw that young people were capable of choosing their community involvement. The option was structured so that young individuals, as part of their evaluatory process, were required to evaluate their day-to-day contributions and their 10 hours per term, totalling 30 hours for three terms, of community service. I saw that students as young as 12 had this ability to evaluate and make conscious decisions as to how they would contribute.

My concern is that by the time individuals hit that 25 to 35 age range, it's possibly too late, that they're already involved. In some cases they're married. Certainly, by age 35 they probably have family and other considerations that require a fair amount of their time commitments. I'm not sure how many young individuals at this point would simply want to be a member of an advisory council. As I pointed out, the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright and the former Member for Edmonton-McClung had the wherewithal, the gumption, the intelligence, and the energy to actually seek out political office rather than just simply advising those in office.

If we want to engage people, then we have to change the way in which the democratic process operates. The Member for St. Albert tried unsuccessfully this past spring session to bring forward a bill calling for fixed elections. That would have been one sort of an opportunity to anchor and recognize the importance of the democratic process. If you want individuals to engage, whether they're ages 16 to 24 or 25 to 35, give them a degree of predictability. The fixed election would have done that.

The Member for Edmonton-Riverview, the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, has written two books in terms of promoting democracy. His first novel, *Shredding the Public Interest*, was a bestseller. Recently he followed up that bestseller with *Democracy Derailed*. The books not only pointed out the shortcomings of our current democratic process in Alberta but offered solutions and alternatives for engaging people beyond what this bill is recommending.

What we need in Alberta if we want to engage people is to give them an opportunity to be involved on a daily basis and, at least as elections draw near, to have their voices recognized. As the Liberal caucus we've asked the government to recognize what B.C. has already undertaken in the form of proportional representation. They got as far as the citizens' assembly portion. With the citizens' assembly they set a bar of 60 per cent in a referendum associated

with the election. Unfortunately, 58 per cent was achieved. Considering that 58 per cent is very similar to the actual turnout of voters in this past federal election, having achieved 58 per cent indicates the importance that B.C. individuals put towards a citizens' assembly and the natural follow-up from the citizens' assembly, the recommended form of proportional representation.

It's extremely important, if we want to engage youth, that we give them opportunities. As opposed to a Premier's council or the intent of this particular bill, let's get them involved in a citizens' assembly, where they have a real opportunity to put forward recommendations that would lead to a tremendous and most important dramatic reform in the democratic process. As we are currently, we're stuck – and I say "stuck" in terms of a series of less polite words I could use – with our current first past the post system. I would argue that it has not served Albertans well from a democratic standpoint. Year after year after year we have seen a decline in voter participation. It was an embarrassment on March 3, 2008, to learn that barely 40 per cent of Albertans chose to participate, and of those who chose to participate, 21 per cent allowed 72 members of this government to be elected.

4:20

Now, I don't believe an advisory council of young individuals from 25 to 35, having seen this historical backdrop, are going to suggest that status quo is acceptable, yet when efforts have been made within the government's own backbenchers to try to change the status quo minimally with the idea of a fixed election, it was overwhelmingly rejected. So I'm wondering which direction the advice goes. Are we rounding up a group of potential 25- to 35-year-olds, and is the idea, then, that the government will advise them as to how they should conduct their business? Or is there a real desire for change through engagement? If there is a real desire for change, then I think we need to take it all the way down to the school level, and that was why I suggested in the first place age 16.

We have some dreadful statistics in this province. We have 40 per cent of Albertans considered functionally illiterate. If we're going to overcome that, then we have to have dramatic changes in the way we provide education, not only in the delivery of education but in the opportunity for students beyond the high school level to have something to look forward to, as should be the case in terms of seats available in postsecondary institutions. Whether they be of the technical variety, whether they be of college, or whether they be of university, we have to provide those seats.

We also have to look at what's happening in high school. If you take StatsCan, it suggests that almost a third of Alberta students are failing to complete their . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired] Thank you. I'll look forward to continuing if this bill gets to that point.

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

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 207, the Young Albertans' Advisory Council Act, proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill. I believe that through his proposed bill and the words he has shared with us here today, the member has managed to capture the emerging sensibilities of what many of us often refer to as the younger generation. The notion of a body that directs the thoughts of young Albertans in the 25 to 35 age range towards specific aspects of policy is in so many ways the kind of democracy that we strive for.

As we can all remember, it was the making a difference aspect that energized us and continues to do so today. There seems to be

a narrative emerging that for whatever reason young Albertans are generally less engaged and less energized. We spend a great deal of time trying to determine to just what extent this is true and if we're doing enough to resolve this if, indeed, it is true. There are even surveys, as was mentioned, and reports by everyone from the Canada West Foundation to Elections Alberta that crunch the numbers and outline the challenges.

I think that we have perhaps moved beyond this analysis. What I support about Bill 207 is that it takes action. It provides an insight into the sensibilities of the next generation, allowing us to consider emerging issues, and it allows us to truly consider and perhaps embrace innovation. Alberta has always been at the forefront of innovation in many ways, so why would innovation in thought be any different?

While it is generally true that the younger generation have new and different ways of looking at problems, if I may pick up on something alluded to by the Member for Calgary-North Hill, I think there is something particular that we can gain from this generation's insight. They are unique. More than ever this generation has been characterized by change. For them, change is their constant. There is no such thing as too many options. Rather, there is: have we considered all the possibilities? Sometimes it is dismissed as indecisive, but it needn't be thought of that way. More than ever the 25 to 35 group is able to draw on some of the more grounded thinking of the Gen X crowd and the more consultative, questioning, and open nature of Gen Y. For them, this comfort with change and acceptance of the new and the different permeates all aspects of their lives, both the professional and the personal. Balance has been replaced by lifestyle.

Our generation may have come up with the idea of balance, but this generation demands it. In short, they want more input into the bodies and organizations that make the decisions affecting their lives, be it workplaces or governments. Maybe this is a more accurate way to look at this. Maybe it isn't so much that they are less involved, but they want in in more nontraditional ways. Here we see how their unique perspective plays a part, in how they see their involvement. I think understanding that may be key to bridging the proverbial generation gap or gaps that exist.

This age group is just finishing postsecondary and starting to raise families. They need ways to funnel their ideas without having to attend formal organizations or run for office. They need to have a specific area to discuss with others in their age group the problems that they face and the solutions they can bring forward. This is one arena where they could accomplish their goal and give back to their province and their communities.

When we consider the success of the Seniors Advisory Council and the Youth Advisory Panel and the way in which they draw attention to and address issues that particularly impact these two age groups, the rationale for the young Albertans' advisory council proposed in Bill 207 is evident. The Seniors Advisory Council describes itself as a communication link to government and has done much to help address issues such as long-term care and quality of life. The Youth Advisory Panel has utilized the input of Alberta's youth in the 15 to 22 age range in addressing issues of health, education, and combatting drug use, to name a few. The work of these bodies helps to not only raise awareness but to bring people together to achieve solutions for both the young and the old.

When we consider the trends of a growing economy and an aging population, nowhere else is a meeting of the minds more important than in our workplaces. Perhaps now more than ever we are seeing a generational mix in the workplace at all levels, but the truly innovative and forward-thinking work environments are asking themselves how they can use this to their advantage, how to use the

benefits of diversity and channel it into results. Project teams are increasingly comprised of multigenerational members, and leaders are having to manage across generations.

The generation gap can be bridged from both sides. The 25 to 35 group understands bottom lines and profit margins, but they also see a need for values-based organizations that help the world in addition to profiting from it. Jobs in new technology, industries, for example, that help the environment seem to marry these two ideas quite well. Meanwhile, mentoring opportunities are one of the most important ways of passing on knowledge and experience, and the younger group is embracing the idea that there is much to be said about the value of experience and the lessons of history.

For all these reasons and the innovation it may provide, we should embrace the opportunity for young Albertans to provide feedback to our government. In fact, we know they already are in so many ways, especially the young Albertans who are elected to this Assembly. This bill would certainly solidify our support as well.

I support Bill 207 and encourage my colleagues to do the same. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 207, Young Albertans' Advisory Council Act, clearly a much-needed approach, and I applaud the member for raising the issue of how to get more connection between elected representatives and young people.

4:30

There are a couple of concerns, as one might expect. I'm a bit surprised that the age group has been established at 25 to 35. Maybe that's quite possible to modify. I'd certainly like to see young people after high school to be more engaged in some of the issues that we are involved with and that they certainly care about. It's clear that what's going on south of the border indicates that young people do care when they are brought into the process, when they are given information that they care about and that's relevant to their lives and on which they feel like they have some influence.

I think it's an important initiative and would just like to raise some issues related to that. The council makeup is a bit unclear, and it's not entirely clear whether there will be mentors, older people, involved in this or whether it's purely young people with an elected member.

Another area of concern, of course, is that it be all parties contributing to the organization and that it clearly not be seen as any particular party's baby. I'm sure there will be ways to address that. All-party and nonpartisan access, then, would be good to have more open discussion about.

Some of the issues that relate to this, in my own personal experience in politics, have to do with the great number of young people who have said to me that it's difficult to be heard on the key issues that they care about. They are intimidated by the political process. They don't feel that they know how to easily get access to what's going on in the Legislature with their own elected representative, how to access their own elected representative. Some of these things, obviously, there are remedies for, and this might be an assistance if it was fairly widely represented in the province and each of these young people took responsibility for reaching out to another dozen young people to help them to demystify or make more friendly the whole political process.

Other young people have talked to me about the intransigence, I guess, of the political process in Alberta, where everything seems to

be stacked against change. The whole notion of proportional representation and the funding of campaigns and the unfairness of the present democratic process: they'd like to see proportional representation as a reflection of the commitment to democracy. Those are problematic for young people. But that should be one of the issues that comes out at their council meetings, and they should be educated, informed, and able to influence some of the issues related to democratic renewal and revitalization that are systemic, are not strictly related to education or party politics or even related to the issues that we associate with youth, such as education funding and housing.

Those are some of the concerns. Clearly, some of the other demographics that have to do with the need for greater democratic involvement would be women and more ethnic diversity, and I would hope that those two would be well reflected in this kind of an organization because they, too, have significant barriers to participation in the political process. I think that's been documented at least in a number of news media reports and needs to be addressed in addition to the youth element.

It would be interesting to know what kinds of evaluation are being considered for this investment of public dollars and time and energy. How will we know in a year or two or three whether this particular initiative is making a difference to the young people, making a difference to the political process? How are they participating in local and regional and national political activity? It would be good to know more than just the number of times they met or the number of topics they discussed. Does it translate into behaviour change? Does it translate into a willingness to participate in a campaign, a willingness to run for office themselves, a willingness to educate others in the school system, for example, or to engage others. So I guess the outcome, or the deliverables, from this committee are a little bit vague, and I think it needs to be fleshed out.

Part of the Liberal platform in the last five years has included a perspective that we do need a youth caucus advisory. Part of the concern with any advisory committee, obviously, is that this carry some weight. If young people feel that this is just a nominal experience and doesn't actually translate into meeting with relevant policy-makers or relevant cabinet committees, it may or may not last. Young people need to know that they make a difference and that some of their advice is not only being heard but actually resulting in some of the characteristics of democratic government that they're hoping for: more transparency, more accountability.

Will it result in, again, a change in the electoral process and in the funding of campaigns? Many young people say: money is still way too big an issue in politics; how can we change that? Well, I would hope that these kinds of issues could be discussed at that kind of a committee or advisory council level and that these would be taken to heart and that the boredom that's associated with politicians and politics could be banished from that kind of meeting and they would see the real, critical issues that we deal with and that have to do with rules and war and taxation and distribution. We somehow need to make young people more, I guess, aware and feeling that they might have an influence on the way this government makes decisions and those decisions themselves.

As Professor David Taras at the University of Calgary has said, many young people have dropped out not only of some of the activities in their community, but they've dropped out of politics, and that needs to change. Clearly, the new media have to be a part of this, and I'm sure there will be opportunities in this advisory council to learn the new media if they haven't and to participate actively through the new media with people from all over the world as they learn about the similarities and differences in Alberta's system to those elsewhere.

It would be particularly important that politicians at all levels, who rarely talk to students on campus and engage them in decision-making, be a part of this. Again, I would emphasize that young people over the age of 16 should be a part of this if we're really serious about engaging them. One analysis suggested that if you don't include and engage young people after high school, you have less chance of engaging them later. So the earlier they establish patterns of negotiation and sharing of information and wrestling with these issues, the earlier they do that, the better for the democratic process.

One study indicated that the problem is compounded during a provincial election. Here in Alberta it was compounded because there were no polling stations on the U of C campus. I don't know how that happened, but I know those kinds of issues certainly need to be talked about. They need to be confronted, and young people need to be able to vent their spleens on it.

The other big area, of course, that this advisory council would contribute is more discussion between elections. I think many people are cynical about politics and discussions that only happen a few weeks before an election. They want to see ongoing dialogue wrestling with issues and a sense, again, that they have some influence on the direction that the discussions and the policy take.

Elections Canada is apparently trying to adopt an online voter registration system in which anyone, including young people, could be getting information throughout the months and years ahead of an election. That tool should be available in Alberta. I think that would be a tremendous addition to some of what we want to do in this province. Certainly a 25 per cent voting rate in this age group, at least in the age group 18 to 24 – I don't know what the voting is at the older stage – is not acceptable.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

4:40

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to join in this debate. First of all, I'd like to congratulate the Member for Calgary-North Hill for sponsoring such a bill and taking the thought of bringing it before the Legislature because I think that the general topic of the bill addresses a matter that needs to be looked at and thought about not only by us here, elected politicians in the Legislature, but overall, I think, on a national scope. I think it involves more than just politicians and any and all advisory boards that could be put in place, but it's a wider issue that I think we're experiencing in this country, and it pertains to media, and it pertains to the education system and just our social values.

Mr. Speaker, there was a time not that long ago when I was the youngest member in the Legislature. Then the Member for Battle River-Wainwright was elected, and he became the youngest member, and now I know our Member for Calgary-North Hill is now our second-youngest member, representing a rather youthful group in this building. So to say that this Legislature is not accessible to young people wouldn't be fair because those who actually have the desire to be politically active and seek elected office obviously are not precluded and are able to hold a seat in this Legislature.

But the fact of the matter is that as I try to reach out as much as I can to youth, I find that politics is not something that they find very interesting. It's not very engaging, and it's not competitive when you compare it to other sources of entertainment or hobbies or distractions that are out there available to young people. Now, that's not the case world-wide.

I don't believe it's politics in itself that's not interesting to young

people because I think it would be fair to say, Mr. Speaker, that an average young person right now is more aware of the occurrences relevant to the American presidential election than they were just a month ago relevant to our Canadian general election. Now, why? We have to ask. The answer is that politics in other countries is omnipresent. In all sources of media, in all entertainment magazines politics is something that is topical. It's very difficult to avoid it. Whether you are a political buff or not, you can't escape politics. You have to, even in a passive way, become aware of what's going on. That is not the case in Canada, and who is to judge whether it's a good thing or a bad thing? Simply we are not very political creatures, and that reflects in the young population.

Now, there are means by which young people can be involved. I certainly hope that every member of this Assembly does whatever she or he can to reach out to young people. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, this morning I know that many members of this Legislature met with young medical students from the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta, spent at least half an hour with them to discuss issues relevant to education in the faculties of medicine. That is available upon a request, and many Albertans would be surprised how accessible their members of the Legislature are to them if they simply picked up a phone or, even better, as the Member for Calgary-North Hill indicated, e-mailed or even text messaged one of the members here in the Legislature. All that is available, but there simply isn't a desire. I know that young people can find members of the Legislature when they choose to because we are accessible via Internet, but there has to be a desire to do so.

Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, it would be fair to say that on average most Albertans live a very satisfied life, a very fulfilled life, so engaging on a daily basis in politics and what occurs politically in Alberta is not something that they have to do. There are jurisdictions in the world where, you know, an average citizen will read two or three newspapers daily because the political situation is so volatile and affects people's lives so much that it is important to be not only well informed but also active. In Canada, frankly, that is not the case, and we are fortunate for that and perhaps somewhat victims of our own success and stability.

Mr. Speaker, I know that we do have under the ministry of children's services a Youth Secretariat which on a voluntary basis engages young people and seeks their opinions relevant to development of policy not only for the ministry of children's services but for all of government. So there is that venue out there. I am not convinced there is a need for yet another secretariat. I would even venture to argue that very structured forms of engaging young people, in themselves, would deter young people. Young people, as I find, don't care to sit on committees and boards and advisory secretariats. As the Member for Calgary-North Hill indicated, their means of communicating differs significantly from the prior generation; hence, picking up a laptop and e-mailing an MLA is probably a much-preferred way of communicating with policy-makers than actually belonging to some form of secretariat.

Also, Mr. Speaker, one thing that we have to think about on a long-term basis is our education system. As a social studies teacher and now entering classes on an ad hoc basis teaching children about social studies, I am always of the opinion that our curriculum could be well served if a higher level of content on Canadian, provincial, and municipal politics was to be introduced. It is unfortunate that many of our constituents simply are not familiar enough with the process to know whom to communicate with. You know, I think that it's not only my experience, but it's often that I go into my constituency and my constituents will stop me and ask me when the next time I'm going to Ottawa is, perhaps sometimes not knowing whether I'm in provincial or federal government.

Those are issues that need to be looked at, and there are many stakeholders that should be addressing this together. Again, as I indicated earlier, I am not certain whether putting in yet another piece of legislation and passing another bill would be something that will encourage young people to participate. As a matter of fact, odds are that the members of this new board, committee, whatever you wish to call it, Mr. Speaker, would be the very same people who are already communicating with us, and that in itself would not engage new people.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to the House that we don't require such legislation. On the other hand, I would encourage all members in all political parties to reach out to young people and make ourselves as relevant and as approachable to young people as humanly possible and to definitely listen to them and take into consideration what they have to say. I find that a great deal of advice that I have received has come from younger people and that there are many young people who would like to offer that advice.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, I don't think I will be supporting this legislation simply because I don't find that in itself it is a vehicle for engaging people. Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that I concur with the speaker just ahead of me about this Bill 207, Young Albertans' Advisory Council Act. I can understand where the idea came from. I have a couple of questions about why the 25 to 35 age bracket. I think that we have to do something a great deal more fundamental than just setting up an advisory council. I think we have to all look back into our own histories and find out how we all got involved in politics. The only ones that may have looked at it long term are probably any of us that were on high school student councils. At least you're exposed to it at that point.

Myself, I remember as a kid my grandfather and my uncle and my dad listening to the Queen's speech and then dissecting it, not knowing what they were really talking about or understanding. All I knew was that it created a great deal of controversy, and it created a great deal of debate. Then my aunts would throw in their two bits' worth, and it really became a very animated conversation. I did understand that it was all about how we're supposed to live.

I was very fortunate in Manitoba. In the Catholic school system they had what they called junior parliament, and each grade 8 class elected a person. Then we went to the parliament building and actually had a mock session, not unlike the TUXIS that will be in this chamber not too long from now.

4:50

It was sort of an osmosis kind of process, I guess, in my case. Of course, I have a daughter that's very interested as well, and my older daughter is out now, but she also was very interested in politics and worked in MLAs' and MPs' offices. Again, it was an osmosis sort of situation that they learned the importance of politics or how they're being governed from within the house.

To quote an expression I probably don't really like – but I'm going to quote it anyway – the ones that are on student council and the ones that get into TUXIS and the ones like myself that were in a grade 8 junior parliament, which is what we called it: I'm not sure those are the ones we need to go after. We don't need to go after the ones that probably would end up on this young Albertans' advisory council. Many of them would go on with the idea, certainly, of giving back to their community, and they would understand it. But I think we really have to go after – here I'm going to use the expression. I've obviously been watching CNN too long. We have

to go after Joe Sixpack and Josephine Sixpack. Those are the ones that aren't voting. How do we get them to get out and vote?

An Hon. Member: Try proportional representation.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Proportional representation may well bring out Joe and Josephine Sixpack.

Those are often the people that aren't voting. Certainly, when I was campaigning and I was going to doors and talking to people – actually, I even went into bars – they said: what are you talking about? They were proud of themselves that they actually had never voted in their lives. I, of course, proceeded to give each one of them a lecture that I would hope they would take to heart.

The other problem that I might have with this bill, too, is that it's not really clear how these people would be selected. Of course, what I would like to see is that perhaps we really should have a quota system at least to get the thing started where we had a certain number of women, a certain number of ethnic groups, certainly a certain number of natives so that we can get a true cross-section of the young people in our province.

One of the other things I would like to see is probably an independent group that would choose the people who would apply for this position and sit on this board and that when they applied, none of their names were allowed to be seen. I'd like this to be exceedingly nonpartisan. I think we all know probably that in this province it would be a little bit difficult because the government is so intertwined in everything. It would be fair if they were chosen by not knowing who they are, just what they had to bring to the table.

As I've said, the group that we really have to go after are those that have never voted. Often when we look at the high schools and even some of the junior schools, you can almost sometimes see the groups that the kids aren't going to be engaged, necessarily, in citizenship. There's always sort of the in crowd, and then there's kind of like the out crowd and then the side crowd. Often the students that are having problems academically, having problems socially, are not likely to get out and vote. We need to be able to say: "You know, your life can get better. By being engaged, you can help make your own life better because you're getting an education and you're being able to be exposed to people. Understand that politicians actually do govern your life."

Unfortunately, as time has gone on, politicians are probably the lowest held in esteem by citizens. I think I read once that they were even lower than used car salesmen. Now, however, I know some very successful used car salesmen, so I'm not even sure that that's a good comparison.

Maybe we have to look at the way we do business. Maybe we have to look at the way we as politicians act. Where is the open and transparent government that people need to be able to relate to? I think the biggest thing that is happening is: how do we rebuild the trust of society? I'm not sure that a lot of citizens out there actually really trust a lot of their politicians, not necessarily out of their offices. Certainly, all the MLA offices are very efficient in helping constituents. That's not what this is about. This is about: do they really trust, and do they take enough interest after they've trusted to find out exactly what's going on in the House?

There are a number of things that are happening already that are good. What about the School at the Legislature? That's a wonderful program. The other program that is very good and, I believe, is actually being reviewed in terms of how we work it is the MLA for a Day program. I know that I've been fortunate to bring young people up from Lethbridge, and they've totally had a whole different view of how politicians work. My caucus is always very generous in allowing me to bring them into our caucus, and they can under-

stand how we figure out a question board or we figure out who talks about what and how the bills go through, so they have a whole different view of it when they leave.

Some of the groups that already exist now are the high school councils and the university councils. Certainly, within the university they have national university councils and provincial university councils. Those students that are involved in that, I would venture to say, probably do vote, and they don't just vote at one level. They'll vote at all three levels. They'll vote federally, provincially, and municipally and understand the power of the vote. I don't know how we can get back that concept, that your vote really does count.

Again, to have people look at me askance, I think we have to talk about how we elect people. Clearly, first past the post is not working. It works great with two parties. I think we'll be able to see that in the States, that they have two parties. But when you have five parties, it isn't that successful.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate today on Bill 207, which proposes to create a young Albertans' advisory council.

Mr. Speaker, I'd sincerely like to commend the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, himself a very bright young Albertan, for bringing this bill forward, which seeks the input of Albertans who are 25 to 35 – and I believe he fits in this group – to get input on government initiatives.

It is tremendously important, I believe, to have forums by which we can communicate with all Albertans, be they young or old. Engaging younger Albertans in the political process is extremely important to the future of our province, Mr. Speaker. Young people offer a fresh perspective and may be more in touch with some of the contemporary issues of our day. In many ways they are the driving force behind our province's success and the builders for our future. This is particularly true for the parts that I represent, rural communities and Alberta's rural economy, where young Albertans play a very important role. They are involved in their communities and have a vested interest in its well-being.

5:00

Alberta has the largest farm population in Canada after Ontario, as defined by Statistics Canada, and despite some very challenging times, we've always had, and I hope we will for many, many decades to come, a very strong and prominent agricultural sector. Agriculture contributes to the diverse economy we are so fortunate to have and supports a number of vibrant communities across our province. The rural life that our economy sustains is part of our heritage, and many families in Alberta take great pride in their own farming legacy. Our very own Premier is himself a farmer and comes from a long tradition of farmers, from his grandparents homesteading north of where we are today.

Mr. Speaker, our rural communities rely on young Albertans to continue to grow and prosper. However, as in many other parts of the world, Alberta's rural population overall is aging, mirroring the generational shift that we have generally seen within society at large. Historically farms have been traditionally tied to the family unit. Farms were often passed from generation to generation – and they still are today – along with the many skills and knowledge that are necessary to run them successfully. Tight knit communities were formed around this tradition, something that continues to this very day and is certainly a point of pride in our province.

New ideas are needed to enhance this way of life in rural communities, and young Albertans are key to this moving forward. Thus, retaining young people is crucial to ensuring the continuation of a strong economy in these areas. In addressing these concerns, the young Albertans' advisory council could serve as a valuable line of communication for them and to the government. This communication is crucial to any initiatives that would seek to retain young Albertans as leaders in the agricultural sector and in their greater communities. Their input is very valued alongside that of the young Albertans in our urban centres.

Alberta's rural communities are facing many pressures above and beyond an aging population. Alberta's significant growth and prosperity have led to increasing opportunities for many young Albertans, many of whom have the ability to enter the workforce in multiple industries and earn a significant amount of money to provide for themselves and their families. More of them are going on to postsecondary education, which opens up even more doors, including pursuing forms of education specific to advanced farming operations.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, it is safe to say that Albertans enjoy a wealth of opportunities in both urban and rural areas. Young rural Albertans should have a voice in policy development that affects agriculture, housing, education, and many other aspects important to living and working in rural Alberta and in all of Alberta today. In this way rural representation would be of tremendous value to a young Albertans' advisory council.

Mr. Speaker, a body like this is important for Albertans now and in the future, as it seeks the valuable input from this age group. This demographic will be our leaders and builders in the future. A young Albertans' advisory council would offer a unique opportunity to help sustain young Albertans' leadership roles in rural communities and in continuing to grow our long-standing rural economy. In this way this body and its operation would seem to have the potential to connect with rural communities in an important way.

Now, whether it be through legislation or perhaps some other means, I think that there is substantial and real opportunity and that we definitely should find ways to develop and enhance a meaningful dialogue with younger Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to hearing more from other members of the House on the ideas surrounding how an advisory council of this nature may best be created.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 207. Including Albertans in policy development is one of the top priorities of this government as differences of opinions can bring fresh perspective to matters of importance. This is necessary in creating smart public policy. Inclusion breeds familiarity and builds relationships, helping to open up communication between people of different sensibilities. Bill 207 is designed to continue to do just that by furthering discussion between government and Albertans between the ages of 25 and 30 years old. This would be accomplished through the creation of a panel that would allow these young Albertans to not only express their opinions but also to make recommendations.

One of the key areas where young Albertans may be able to provide particularly valuable insight is in the area of technology. Mr. Speaker, the advancement of technology has brought with it many different ways to communicate like never before. From radio and television to Internet and cellular phones we have an increased

ability to communicate our ideas more quickly and to an even larger audience. The impact on our culture has changed the way we communicate and has created more opportunities to include diversity of opinion in policy. To remain innovative and continue to lead the way forward, the government of Alberta needs to remain at the forefront of this challenge. In this way Bill 207 has an important role to play. It provides for the creation of a panel of young Albertans who are familiar with advancing communications, giving them an insight into ways the government may best utilize technology in policy development and program creation.

Over the past hundred years politicians have continued to embrace innovative communication delivery to reach their constituents. One of the earliest demonstrations of using new communication technology to reach citizens is found with the inauguration speech of American President Calvin Coolidge of February 22, 1924. Both the inauguration and the opening speech were broadcast to over 22 million people over 25 radio stations.

As technology advanced, the importance of these mediums grew exponentially. In 1955, only three years after television stations began broadcasting, over half of all Canadians owned a television set. On September 26, 1960, Massachusetts Senator John Kennedy and Vice-President Richard Nixon addressed over 70 million viewers in the first of four televised debates. Many historians point to those live television debates as an influential factor in the outcome of the presidential election of 1960.

More recently the popularity of the Internet has inspired many public officials to adopt a strategy for communication. Mr. Speaker, the influence that communication technology has is considerable, to say the least. A significant number of Albertans between the ages of 25 to 35 rely on such devices every day.

Keeping up with the rapid pace of communication is a considerable risk. In order to address a new generation of Albertans, the government has needed to become Internet savvy. Increased social networking such as Facebook has become increasingly relevant in elections. The latest estimates place Facebook membership at some 70 million people world-wide, including over 8 million Canadian youths. These Internet tools have permeated our culture to a degree unimagined during the years of Calvin Coolidge, but the effect is the same.

5:10

We need to ask ourselves: is there more that we as a government can do to address the wants and needs of young Albertans? Mr. Speaker, keeping Albertans involved and up to date on programs and initiatives that will affect their lives is very important to this government. The growth of this province is due in part to the advancement of technology, providing a net benefit to our province. In order to adapt and embrace the way communications are changing, the government needs not only to keep up but to stay ahead of what might be coming.

Alberta's policy development should include these considerations, and involving young Albertans can be an important means to accomplishing this. Mr. Speaker, using technology to communicate is not a new concept for any government, but the capacity and means to do so has always required vision and a willingness to embrace new ideas. As a progressive government it is imperative to keep pace, allowing the Alberta government to be more aware of the challenges and opportunities of this age group.

While the government of Alberta is making every effort to address its younger generation, there may always remain a gap between technological advancement and policy development. Mr. Speaker, the young Albertans' advisory council can help close this gap. It can help ensure that the process of creating policy reflects technology

and cultural developments towards technological change. Most importantly, it provides another avenue of engaging young Albertans. I therefore stand in support of the creation of a council or similar body to engage young Albertans. Perhaps legislation may not be the only or most effective way of doing so, but the benefits of engagement are undeniable. Considering the innovative avenues open to us to help facilitate the process of dialogue, I think that the opportunities and the possibilities are numerous.

I enjoy hearing more of the views of my colleagues on these ideas. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's an interesting discussion we have. I guess I'll give my discussion, and you can decide whether I support it or not. I think sometimes we come up with solutions that are looking for a problem. I don't see any barriers to youth being involved in the service clubs and politics in their communities and families. As a matter of fact, I doubt there's anywhere in the world that provides the opportunity to youth that we do here.

You know, Teddy Roosevelt said: much has been given; therefore, we can expect much from you. At that age in life we don't and we shouldn't give young people much in government. As a matter of fact, if they didn't even know there was government, then we will have succeeded in what they should be doing. Most of them are raising families. They've got their education, or they're getting their education. They're enjoying life. They're at a time in their life when they can actually have fun and, in many cases, not look out for the consequences that some of us old farts are now paying for some of the days that we spent as youth. The thing they have that we don't have, Mr. Speaker, is their entire future.

I mean, it was very, very refreshing at our party convention in Jasper when we had 150 young people attend. Now, I don't want to make too glaring of a response here, but from what I read in the paper, that was about the same as one other party in Alberta had at their convention totally.

It has to get back to: what are you giving them, and what do they want from you? I think, one, that you have to give them respect. I've raised four children, and all of it, all of our life and with my parents has been one of respect. You respect your elders. You respect each other. You open doors for each other. You do good things for your neighbours. It's developing a culture of respect.

Out of respect for their right to choose and their right to take or leave government, I would stand firmly on the side of saying that when they have something they need, as many seniors do, or something to give to government, as lots of people who have spent a career in business do, then take that. But don't ever think that legislation is the answer to a problem that I don't think clearly exists.

You know, let's just go back to a little bit of the volunteerism and getting youth involved. One of the most successful organizations I know of at attracting youth is the Vermilion Ag Society. A lot of people will think: "Oh, agriculture societies. Things have changed." This group is over a hundred years old, and they have a tremendous core group of young people whom they've encouraged to come into the organization because they've let them drive an agenda.

There was a group that fit right into this 25 to 30 that decided they want to have – believe it or not – a chicken contest. It might have started as a bit of a lark, but we sure got some tremendous buy-in from poultry Alberta, and the Hutterites and everybody with chickens brought in these darn chickens. They had a lot of fun, and they raised quite a bit of money, and this last year they built the finest looking chicken pen you've ever seen. With the changes to

the recycling dollars, they may well have paid for that chicken pen at 20 cents a can now, but they got the opportunity to do something they wanted to do, not to think like us or do what we're doing or to do as we say, not as we do. They got a chance to come on board, be accepted, contribute what they did, and actually, in fact, they probably have a lot of these people as members of that ag society for life or until they move to another community.

I can just about assure you, Mr. Speaker, that if they do move to another community, they will get involved in that community because once you get involved in the community, whether it's social service organizations, government, municipal council, or sports, it's a huge difference as you go through life and your kids are involved in sports. If you keep them involved and it's fun, they'll stay involved. My two oldest kids now are coaching or playing with other teams, and the youngest ones are still involved in sports. That's a kind of life that should be encouraged responsibly – I mean, live a little – but don't destroy some of their hopes by watching them watch us in here for a few days.

The group that I belong to in Vermilion and have for many years is the Rotary Club. One of our biggest problems, of course, is attracting young people. Well, the biggest mistake you can make is to think you've accomplished a goal by getting anyone in the club and then not listening to them. About us Rotarians the saying in Vermilion used to be: one foot in the grave and one in the gravy. That was just about what ran the club. We've now, you know, turned that around. We have an active organization, and we know the future is attracting young people, teaching them some of the values of Rotary. The Rotary clubs in general have a tremendous involvement in youth, in youth exchange, foreign exchange, and supporting youth programs. That's how you'll attract youth and young people to your organization: make it relevant to them. If you invest in them, you'll get something back.

I find it a little troubling that the conversation around this gets back to the democratic deficit. You know, they say – and it's true – that losers need excuses. Mr. Speaker, in any constituency if you win by one vote or three, if you win by that, you represent that whole constituency. That goes over here. It doesn't matter if five people show up for one group and four for the other; the one with five wins. Everybody has the chance to get voters out. You have exactly the same chance to be represented in that constituency, and they get the check mark. Whether you win by over 80 per cent, as we do out where the clear-thinking people of eastern Alberta live, or some tighter ones, maybe there – I don't know – the fact is that that's what builds the base of our democracy. Everyone has the chance to win that riding, whether it represents 50,000 or 35,000.

There's proportional representation, and clear-thinking provinces have taken a look at that and said: that is a real excuse for losers. You're going to have people voting for somebody they've never ever met, that they don't know. You're going to take representation from here or there or across this country. So the Marxist-Leninist party with three could have a representative? It's just absolute nonsense, but it happens all the time. When you have a loser or a losing party, sometimes if they've lost for a really long time, they start to grasp for excuses that are not relevant, and that contributes as much to the turnoff of young people as anything else. When they're looking for respect to politicians – and that occasionally could be problematic.

We stand up in here day after day and ask questions or infer issues. Today one hon. member actually said: do you suppose this problem up north could be because of the continued health care cutbacks? As a young person what could you expect? You might believe there had been cutbacks in health care, but you go on the website or go into the budget and realize that it has been given increases in double digits for years. When statements like that get

made, what do they expect young people to do? We can't believe a word they say. They want to distort the truth to the point where it's irrelevant.

5:20

Well, if you make politics irrelevant, then young people will certainly stay away, which brings me back to my point of saying that we had over 150 youth go all the way to Jasper. Could you imagine, Mr. Speaker, if we held it in Edmonton, where the bulk of the people or the majority of the people are? What a bright, intelligent bunch of young people who are truly interested in their future, with good questions and engaging discussion.

Truly, I have absolutely no qualms about saying that the future of this province is in great hands. We've probably got the most intelligent, the most hard-working, creating the most wealth of any area in the world in our under 35-year-old people. When we have the opportunity to attend young Presidents' Clubs or with other youth, there is an abundance of talent and commitment, and I believe they do have the family values that we are trying to pass on.

Mr. Speaker, I respect the Member for Calgary-North Hill and what he's trying to accomplish with this bill, but I'm also a firm believer that less government is better government and that you will pull people as opposed to pushing them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much. It's an honour to join in this debate. I want to start by saying that I think that for about the first two or three sentences of the previous member's comments I was in agreement, and then from there I diverged greatly. I do agree that this particular strategy appears to be one for a problem that, I would say, doesn't exist in terms of people participating in the system and making their views known.

Now, I will say that for that group of people between 25 and 35, that is apparently being addressed by this bill – and of course I think people have already spoken to the fact that that age group in and of itself is somewhat questionable. Nonetheless, I've not ever met with, let's say, a 25-year-old who has built a chicken coop, but I will say this. [interjections] They've not come to me to talk about their chicken coop issues at all, so maybe there's a huge chicken coop issue need out there that I'm not hearing about in Edmonton-Strathcona. It's certainly possible.

What I have done is I've met with 25-year-olds who have student debt of over \$90,000 and private debt of \$70,000 or \$80,000 on top of that in order to get through school. What I have done is I've met with 25-year-olds who've had their rent double in the last eight or nine months. What I have done is I've met with 18-year-olds who've had to live on the street because they've been unable to find a home or a place to live. What I have done is met with numerous young people under the age of 25 but also above the age of 25 who are very concerned about the future of their environment in this province and what is or isn't being done on their behalf.

What I have done is met with 24- or 25-year-olds who are parents, who have young children, who can't find a place for their children to receive child care in order for them to go back to work or stay in school or start their lives or contribute in a more major way to the growth of the province. What I have done is I've met with 24- and 25-year-olds who struggle, you know, finding a family doctor, who

can't make a living wage. It's amazing the number of young people as defined by this act who actually work in social services, who work in child care, who work in disability services, who work in nonprofits across the province, typically a place where they go. They graduate from university with their \$60,000 to \$100,000 debt, and then they end up working in a nonprofit for \$18, \$19 an hour. I've met with them. I've met with them having to leave those jobs and go to other jobs and leave those nonprofits without adequate staff because those young people ultimately need to earn more money.

I think, actually, that there are a lot of issues that are very, very important to young people in Alberta, and I think those issues are not separate from the issues that should be considered as important to all Albertans. I think that there is a mechanism for those people to make their views known, and they make those views known as Albertans. They try as best they can to make their views known to this government and to their individual MLAs. I just believe that that group, that 25- to 35-year-old group, is not some separate group of foreign people that we don't know how to talk to, unless it is the case that this government believes that they've lost the ability to speak to the needs of the majority of Albertans, who have real issues that face real working people every day, day in, day out.

Now, this particular proposal, frankly, looks to me to be something that would be an opportunity for a little bit of patronage appointment to young Tories. I find it interesting that the minister to whom this council would report is not yet identified. It occurs to me that it should obviously be wherever the Public Affairs Bureau is housed because, of course, it's all about presenting a picture and a few photo ops at opportune pre-election times, I think. I also would suggest that this notion of having an MLA sit on the council in itself runs contrary to recommendations that have been made in the past about how it's actually kind of a conflict of interest to have MLAs sit on these advisory councils.

In the long run what I really think the issue here is is that these are not issues that address young people. I appreciate that other speakers have said: "Well, people should just live their lives and raise their families and do their thing, and they can get involved in politics, you know, when they're 50, and then it's time. Really, we shouldn't have them look too closely at us before then because then it will be just too depressing for them." I believe it's true that it will be very depressing, but I also think that the critical issues . . . [interjection] Fair enough. It's sometimes depressing for me, too.

The critical issues facing these key groups, 25 to 35, are ones that we should all care about and that should be talked about in this House all the time. We don't need to have a little group of bright, shiny young Tories paid out of public coffers to meet periodically and then do photo ops, as I say, a few months or a few weeks before the next election is called.

I will end my comments there. No, I won't quite. The other thing, of course, is that as we know from the debates and the discussion we've had over the last two weeks, people under 25 clearly need a voice in this province. The bill obviously doesn't address that issue, but I won't get into that any more than we, of course, have discussed repeatedly for some time in this House.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the members, but it's now 5:30. The Assembly stands adjourned until 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

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