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The 27th Legislature
First Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

First Session

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[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 4, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life which has been given to us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and of our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 31 students from St. Elizabeth Catholic school in my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. The group is led by their teachers, Mr. James Nagy and Miss Isabel Flis, and parent helpers Miss Megan Fekete, Miss Ashley Selig, Miss Jamie Valeriano, Mrs. Shawna Mitchell, and Mrs. Anne Paterson. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 44 of the smartest students in the province of Alberta from St. Timothy school in, obviously, Edmonton-Castle Downs. They're accompanied today by teachers Mrs. Leana Perri and Mr. Sheldon Biamonte and by parent helpers accompanying them: Mrs. Danzo, Mrs. Julio, Mr. Huismann, Mrs. Hanna, and Mrs. Castillo. I would ask all these bright young students and their parents to rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's a real privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very good friend, someone that I started school with in Andrew – we rode the school bus for many years – a very successful businessman, also a constituent of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. We had a lot of good times together, some that we can't really talk about in this Legislature, but we also cherish the wonderful memories. A father of three sons that are also doing extremely well, I'd ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly: Mr. George Mandryk.

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

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the community sponsors of the School at the Legislature program. Seated in your gallery are Mr. Tim Downey, president, Priority Printing Ltd.; from Access and CHUM Television Edmonton Mr. Eric Rice, manager, creative/production services, and Ms Lynn Redl-Huntington, producer; Mr. Brian Dunsmore, program director, CKUA; Ms Tammy Fallowfield, vice-chair, board of directors of

CKUA Radio Foundation; and from the downtown Rotary Club Youth Services Committee Mr. Bill Hamilton and Mr. Jack Clements.

This program gives grade 6 students and teachers from all over our province an opportunity to relocate their classroom to the Legislature of Alberta for a week. Supported by 35 teachers and over 400 parent volunteers in 2006, over 700 students from 32 classes attended the School at the Legislature program. We are very grateful for the support received from our community partners. I would like to ask our guests now to rise and receive the welcome from our Assembly.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Ms Maureen Wills of Cochrane and Ms Luanne Whitmarsh of Calgary. Maureen is the president and Luanne is the chief executive officer of the Kerby Centre in Calgary. I would also like to introduce Dwight Ganske, director of the client and information services branch in the seniors' services division, as well as Dorothy Gitzel from the seniors' information services branch of my ministry, who are accompanying Maureen and Luanne.

The Kerby Centre is celebrating its 35th anniversary of serving seniors in the Calgary area. The Kerby Centre supports Calgary and area seniors with a vast array of programs and services. Just a few examples include adult day support programs, grocery delivery, information assistance, and a shelter for abused seniors. These ladies, indeed all who work and volunteer at the Kerby Centre, deserve our praise and gratitude for the assistance they provide to seniors in Calgary. I would ask Maureen, Luanne, Dwight, and Dorothy to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Elmiski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you and to the House a true Canadian hero, Corporal Nick Turner. Corporal Turner is the son of Sheriff's Officer Tim Turner, one of our protectors here at the Legislature and a fellow I'm sure most of you know.

Corporal Turner has just returned from combat operations in southern Afghanistan, where he served with the 3rd Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, attached to the 2nd Battalion Battle Group. He has the distinction of serving as the Canadian Forces' youngest sniper. On Canada Day Corporal Turner and his partner found a large weapons' cache that included rockets, grenades, IED bomb materials, and explosives. During this action the enemy opened fire on his team and platoon, and while under fire Corporal Turner and his partner managed to remain calm, assess the situation, and eliminate the imminent threat. As a result of his actions Corporal Turner and his partner managed to seize these weapons and prevented the locals from being harmed.

Corporal Turner is proud to serve our country, and we are proud to commend his efforts here today. I'd ask Corporal Turner to please rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly six talented Alberta members of the Canadian team competing at

WorldSkills Calgary 2009. The 2009 WorldSkills competition being held September 1 to 7 will feature about 1,000 competitors from 51 countries in 45 Skills competitions. Students from across the world will compete in trades and technology skills areas like website design, welding, cooking, and automobile technology. The Alberta competitors are joined today by their trainers and their employers, who played a key role in helping them reach their goals at the Canadian Skills competition earlier this year and who continue to help train them to develop the right skills, knowledge, and expertise for the WorldSkills competition next year.

As a founding partner of Skills Canada Alberta 16 years ago the Alberta government is very proud to partner with Skills/Compétences Canada, Skills Canada Alberta, WorldSkills Calgary 2009, the government of Canada, and the city of Calgary to host this international competition. Alberta members of Team Canada specialize in trades and technology occupations and will compete in autobody repair, industrial control, car painting, electrical installations, IT PC network support, painting and decorating, and sheet metal technology. Every Alberta member of Team Canada will have the opportunity to demonstrate their personal excellence and showcase the trades and technology talent in Alberta. I'm certain each competitor and trainer will do a fine job of representing their technical training institution, employer, community, Alberta, and Canada.

1:40

I invite each competitor to stand as I call your name, and I ask my colleagues to hold their applause until everyone has been introduced. With us today are Devon DeBoer, Steven Dingwall, Tiffany Vandermeij, and Brad Chyz of Calgary, Craig Spady of Red Deer, and Daniel Green of Drumheller. Unable to join us today is a seventh member, Matthew Chaddar of Millarville. I congratulate all of these exceptional Albertans for their achievements and thank the industry experts and employers who help train our youth every day.

I would also ask their trainers as well as members of WorldSkills Calgary, Skills Canada Alberta, and Skills/Compétences Canada to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Daniel Dibbelt. Tomorrow, Wednesday, November 5, is national Take Our Kids to Work day. Taking our kids to work is a national program of The Learning Partnership that has existed since 1994, and more than 1.5 million young Canadians and tens of thousands of workplaces have participated in the program. As chair of the NADC I am pleased to advise that we always strive to be ahead of the rest, so I am pleased to introduce today in our members' gallery Daniel Dibbelt, who is 13 years old and is a grade 9 student at Hythe regional junior high school. Daniel is joining his father, Dan Dibbelt, executive director of the NADC, at work today. I would ask Daniel and his father to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you. Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all of the members of the Assembly two very special constituents of mine. They are Ms Debbie Adrian and her son Adam. Debbie is actually a former employee of my law firm, but she now is a nurse at St. Mary's hospital in Camrose. She's also the president of the local UNA, chapter 204. With her is her son Adam, who is nine years old and in grade 3. He tells me he has been studying politics, though, since

way back in grade 1. He's very keen on politics, and I think we can look for big things from this young gentleman in the years to come. If they would please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two very special guests: Ms Karen Henderson and her niece Ms Nicole Hodgson. Karen resides in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford and is an employee of the Department of Energy. Nicole was born in Edmonton 25 years ago but has lived her entire life in Australia. She is back now visiting her family for the very first time.

Mr. Speaker, the Hodgson family has resided in Edmonton for over 100 years, leaving behind a significant mark on our city's great history. Nicole's great-grandfather, John Hodgson, was a comptroller for the city of Edmonton and financial commissioner for over 40 years. The family has the distinction of having a street named after them, Hodgson Road, just across the border in the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. Karen and Nicole are seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask both of them to rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome and welcome home from the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great privilege to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a very special couple visiting us from Calgary today. They've had a big impact on my life because they raised a beautiful, smart, and, thankfully, charitable daughter, who is my wife. Seated in the visitors' gallery is my mother-in-law, Kathryn Jamieson, and my father-in-law, Dr. Geoffrey Jamieson. Dr. Jamieson is also an accomplished Canadian artist. He is a retired lieutenant colonel, and after 25 years in the military much of his work consists of military portraits and scenes commissioned and owned by regiments and collectors worldwide, including the national War Museum in Ottawa, which owns 30 of his pieces. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Well, hon. member, my experience is that as long the honourable mother-in-law approves, you're okay.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, sir. As a bachelor I'll heed your advice.

All kidding aside, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two friends of mine who are visiting from Ottawa, Lianne Hastman and Ryan Hastman. I'd ask them both to stand. Lianne is formerly of the Prime Minister's war room in the last federal campaign, and Ryan is the executive assistant to the Minister of International Trade and former Member for Red Deer-North in this Assembly, Stockwell Day. More importantly, both of them were married on November 1, and they're here on their honeymoon. I'd ask that you give them the traditional warm welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Canadian Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday, October 18, I had the privilege of attending the 2008 Canadian Pro Rodeo Hall

of Fame induction ceremonies in Calgary. Each year the Canadian Rodeo Historical Association inducts qualifying individuals to the Canadian Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame within the categories of contestant, builder, and animal. To date there are 149 inductees in the hall of fame, and this year another six skilled and talented individuals and one faithful animal were added to this prestigious list. Those inducted into the hall of fame this year include Mr. Wayne Vold, saddle bronc rider and country music singer from Ponoka, Alberta; Verne Franklin from Marwayne, Alberta, an all-around cowboy; bull rider Lawrence Hutchison from Cremona; Jerry Sinclair, saddle bronc rider from Marwayne, Alberta; all-around cowboy Ellie Lewis from Grand Forks, B.C.; and the rank bull rider Dale Johansen from Strathmore, Alberta; and, of course, Blue Bill, the legendary unrideable bucking bronco back in 1947, born in the blue hills of Saskatchewan.

This year the Canadian Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame has another reason to celebrate. After a three-year search the hall of fame has found a new home in Calgary. An agreement is currently being developed which would see a 4,000-square-foot facility built beside the well-known Ranchman's Cookhouse and dining lounge on Macleod Trail. This will provide a truly fitting place in which to house the hall of fame and showcase the artifacts and history which have come to represent so much of Alberta's tradition. Thanks to organizations like the Canadian Rodeo Historical Association we can ensure that this important part of our heritage is preserved for future generations of Canadians and rodeo enthusiasts.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Climate Change

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, there are serious problems with investment in Alberta's oil sands and upgrading sector. Yesterday the Premier, I think correctly, said that uncertainty in climate change policy is a key problem, saying: "without certainty in this policy we won't see a considerable amount of money invested into value-added without having that issue settled." My question is to the Premier. Given that the Premier considers this uncertainty a major obstacle to development, will this government take the lead, provide certainty, and raise its standards to match those of the federal government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we've gone well beyond what the hon. member has mentioned. In fact, we have committed \$2 billion to carbon capture. That is the single largest investment in carbon capture not only in Canada, not only on the North American continent but indeed in the world. It has now attracted attention from a number of investors, a number of countries in the Middle East and is one of the reasons we'll be talking to a number of people in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Germany as well. That's the policy of carbon capture.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not going to address the issue of uncertainty.

Next week the Prime Minister and most Premiers are meeting to discuss the economy. As everyone knows, the oil sands are a key component of Canada's economy. Since the need to co-ordinate federal and provincial climate change policy is key to the economy, why won't the Premier rearrange a couple of days of his European schedule to take advantage of the first ministers' meeting and address these crucial issues?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the mission to the United Kingdom, to the Netherlands, and to Germany is not only an Alberta mission, but it's really a mission on behalf of Canada. When we heard yesterday the fact that for the first time in I forget how many years, 80 years perhaps, Ontario will now be a net receiver of equalization payments, that tells us that we do have a serious economic situation in this country. I can tell you that the best thing we can do is to meet with potential investors in other countries and also to reassure all those that we also are leading in a very critical area, and that's the area of environmental sustainability.

Dr. Taft: Well, it could be a tough sell in Europe, Mr. Speaker, because Europe is planning to spend \$90 billion – billion with a B – a year to achieve absolute reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. They are succeeding, and they are succeeding dramatically. To the Premier: given Alberta's track record, on his trip to Europe how is the Premier going to justify his own government's policy, which allows total greenhouse gas emissions to rise?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you know, this is the thing. Today, November 4, the hon. leader is talking about an increase in greenhouse gas emissions, okay? He also yesterday talked about a slowdown. He called it a cancellation, which is incorrect, of a lot of the oil sands projects, yet just earlier, in the March election, he talked about imposing hard caps within five years, which would have totally not only slowed down but shut down a whole bunch of projects in Alberta. So now a flip. Do you know what the number one issue is for most Canadians and Americans today? Jobs and food on the table.

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

Bitumen Valuation

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The message to this government is: take aggressive action on the environment to protect the economy. If you don't do that, there won't be an economy to protect.

When it comes to the oil sands, the key to the royalties we collect and the key to industry's investment in Alberta is the price of bitumen. That is what Alberta collects royalties on, and that is why we need bitumen pricing to be as clear and accurate as possible. To the Premier: how will this government ensure that the method for placing a price on bitumen meets international expectations for being clear and transparent at the same time as earning a fair share for its owners, the people of Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the opposition will have an opportunity to discuss that very same issue when we are proceeding with our Mines and Minerals (New Royalty Framework) Amendment Act, 2008, which is really introducing the new royalty regulatory framework that will take effect January 1, 2009.

Dr. Taft: Well, given the obvious importance of the bitumen valuation methodology for Albertans and for multibillion-dollar investment decisions, what is the government's deadline for establishing a valuation method?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, negotiations have been taking place for a number of months with industry. This is a key component of the regulatory regime because this is one way of finding balance: yes,

selling upgraded bitumen but also an opportunity to upgrade in Alberta. Rather than taking the royalty on the bitumen, we actually take bitumen in kind and process it here in Alberta. This is a discussion we are having with industry. It is proceeding well, and maybe in the next question the Minister of Energy may update as to where we are in the negotiations.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks. Whether it's to the Premier or the minister, given that an increasing percentage of our royalties is from the oil sands and no bitumen valuation has been in place, how can the minister or the Premier know that we as Albertans are getting a fair royalty right now?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, if I might. Again, the member is alluding to negotiations that are taking place as we speak between department officials and industry players, particularly with respect to integrated operations, where the bitumen valuation method that he speaks about is in fact very critical to the negotiations with our Crown agreement holders. We will be concluding those agreements shortly, and the bitumen valuation methodology that is a part of that, of course, will be public at that point in time.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Surgery Wait Times

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Average wait times for some medically necessary operations have increased since the government fired the health authorities in May. Not only are patients in the Edmonton region worried by the increased wait times; so are patients in the Peace Country health region. My first question is to the Premier. Why has the average wait time for general surgery in the Peace Country health region for urgent operations increased from six weeks in May, when you fired the board, to over 20 weeks in August?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister has information in terms of the elective surgeries not only in Edmonton but in other regions in the province.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday this member raised an issue around wait times for cardiac surgery, and I'm pleased to tell the House that his record of being one hundred per cent wrong continues in the information he provides. He referred yesterday to a 17-week wait time in the Capital health region, and I'm told that the wait time is nine weeks for cardiac surgery compared to an average across the province of eight weeks.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the Premier: how can patients trust the government with health care delivery when the Alberta wait-list registry from the department of health is wrong? How can you run a province-wide system when you can't even run a website?

Mr. Stelmach: I think the minister just said that he was wrong. I don't know if he was talking about the website. I think you're still misinformed about something, but I'm not quite sure.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I would like to supplement the answer. There is some data which has been reported that doesn't match what Alberta Health Services is reporting. I've asked for a review of this particular data and will present it to the member when we get that review.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: why did Alberta Health Services wait so long to report this inaccurate or incorrect data when Albertans are relying on the website, the registry system, to see whether or not they can get medically necessary operations in a timely manner?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that some of my babas in Vegreville, I can tell you, don't follow the website because they don't have access to a computer, number one, but they do rely on their family doctor and the system to put them through, given the quality of health and also access that they expect. We're improving on all fronts. I know they're still upset over the changes to the one superboard. We're not backing off. We're moving ahead. We have to bring forward reforms to ensure that we sustain this system for the next generation.

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

Congenital Syphilis Outbreak

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The deaths of five newborns from congenital syphilis in Alberta was an avoidable tragedy, yet this Minister of Health and Wellness blames the victims, insisting that they need to take personal responsibility. Medical experts reject this guilt-laden approach, proven to be unsuccessful in preventing syphilis. To the minister. You're asking Albertans to take responsibility for their own health. What was the personal responsibility of the babies who were born with congenital syphilis?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, this member also typically is wrong in his recollection of events. At no time did I blame anybody. What I did say is that we live in a society where people have to take personal responsibility for their actions. In this particular case this is a sexually transmitted disease between two consenting adults. I would suggest that in order to prevent this particular disease, know who you're sleeping with and know who your partner is sleeping with.

Mr. Mason: The question, Mr. Speaker, was about the babies that were born with this disease and what choices they had.

2:00

At the meeting of the Health Committee last evening the Health and Wellness minister said that the public information campaign regarding the syphilis outbreak was cancelled at his direction. This decision has been criticized by public health officials, including Dr. John Van Aerde of the faculty of medicine at the University of Alberta. He says: "In summary, it makes sense to implement educational and prevention programs for syphilis (and other public health issues) on a large scale to reach a broad basis of the population." Given that he has ignored the opinion of experts in the field, could the minister tell the House . . .

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

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member is referring to is the fact that there was a proposal to have a province-wide campaign that was going to cost some several million dollars. We took a look at that campaign to make sure that what we did in the area of sexually transmitted diseases was targeted to those folks who had the highest level of risk, and that's what we've done. There will be a number of initiatives that have taken place, and more are continuing. I think what is important is that the work that our public health officials have done in this particular region in this particular year has reduced the number of cases by half.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It begs a question about how it got out of control in the first place.

Public health doctors, infectious disease specialists, and neonatologists are all saying that this situation was preventable. In fact, the minister said so in his own words: this is a preventable disease; this is not cancer. Now five babies have died. Why didn't you prevent it?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member: it is a preventable disease. And I stick to my position that individuals have to be responsible for their own health. If this member wants to take a different position that individual Albertans should not be responsible for their own health, well, then, say so.

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

Community Development Trust Fund

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency is blessed to have diverse industries such as oil and gas, trapping, fishing, agriculture, and a huge forestry sector. The forestry industry has been and is still struggling, and that struggle is negatively impacting all my communities that depend on this industry. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: what exactly are you doing to address the economic downturn and the needs of First Nations and Métis communities, especially in my constituency?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's true that there has been a significant downturn, particularly in the forestry industry. In fact, about 6,500 jobs have been lost in northern Alberta in the forest industry, and many of those jobs were held by aboriginals. Fortunately, the federal government did find about a billion dollars to put into a community development trust fund. Alberta's share of that will be about \$4.3 million, and we'll be distributing it to some of the communities that have been impacted and alluded to in the member's question.

Ms Calahasen: Well, then, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: if this funding is coming, how soon is it going to be here, and what kind of activities can we rely upon in order for the communities to be able to start planning?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we're going to be rolling out some of these dollars as quickly as possible. I'll be speaking with the communities impacted very soon. I think it's important to realize that the first year of the program will be aimed at helping address the slump in the forestry industry, and that will include some transition plans that will be developed with the communities to foster economic growth and create jobs. Retraining and skills development

are also part of that plan. It will take a little bit of time to get those things in place, but in the end our skilled workforce will be well buoyed by this program.

Ms Calahasen: I hear what we're intending to do, but, Mr. Speaker, I still don't know which communities are going to be getting these funds in order for them to be able to ensure that they can take care of their economic issues relative to the forestry sector.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we'll be providing about \$2.7 million to support aboriginal communities, including communities such as Peerless Lake and Trout Lake and several others across western and northern Alberta. Many of those are in the member's riding. We'll also be providing about \$1.6 million or \$1.7 million, somewhere in there, to the four western Métis settlements in the hon. member's riding, including Peavine, East Prairie, Paddle Prairie, and Gift Lake. In the end I think you'll see that the commitment from the federal government through us as a provincial government will be there to help address the problems aforementioned.

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

Carbon Capture and Storage

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's no secret that Alberta's tar sands are being targeted on multiple fronts based on their environmental footprint. In order to protect our economic interests, we need to improve our environmental performance, and carbon capture and storage is a step in the right direction if we do it right. But the Auditor General has indicated that measures and models for ensuring Albertans know what we're achieving are clearly needed. To the Premier or the Energy minister. Billions of public dollars are being spent to reduce our carbon footprint through carbon capture and storage. The question everyone is asking . . .

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

Mr. Knight: Thank you. Well, I don't exactly know what the question is, Mr. Speaker, but I'll tell you what: I do know what's happening with respect to carbon capture and storage. There's something that both the member opposite and perhaps the Auditor General would like to know, and that is that there are no monies being dispensed at this point in time with respect to that issue. What we have done is gone out and asked for expressions of interest. We have received 54 very qualified expressions of interest with respect to this program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. With billions of public dollars at stake will there be a transparent process of bidding and awarding public dollars?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that question is categorically yes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans expect a detailed plan before distributing the money. What is the timeline for getting the carbon capturing process working? Can the minister tell us exactly: what's the return on public investment here?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can. As a matter of fact, the timeline could be a little bit flexible, but we're thinking that we'll have a second round of condensed applications in front of us in the April 2009 time frame, a selection process being made sometime in the few months following that.

There's been some preliminary work done with respect to the return to Albertans with respect to enhanced oil recovery around carbon capture and sequestration. Mr. Speaker, elementary discussions around this and initial indications are: could be as much as \$50 billion.

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

Federal Equalization Payments

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta and Albertans worked hard through the 1990s to pay down our debt, and by doing that, we put the province in the strong fiscal position that we enjoy today. Through all that we remained a have province under the federal government's equalization program, meaning that we receive no financial assistance from Ottawa from that program. Yesterday the federal government announced it would be providing \$14.2 billion in equalization payments this coming year to the country's six have-not provinces. That's an increase of \$600 million compared to this year and includes \$347 million for Ontario, which has never received equalization payments before. My question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

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

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The equalization program is a federally funded program. It's true that Albertans pay on a higher per capita basis. If you look at 2005, some \$3,996, Ontario paid \$1,656, and B.C. paid \$576 towards the taxes. That's the kind of contribution that we make, which, in fact, goes to be part of taxes and other revenues that are used for this program. We support the principles of equalization, but we do not directly pay for equalization. In those principles we're supporting comparable tax for comparable services across Canada.

Mr. Johnson: My first supplemental to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that Alberta taxpayers pay more than any other Canadians into equalization, will Alberta taxpayers be expected to pay more to cover these increased payments?

Ms Evans: The short answer is no. Any tax increases to support equalization payments affect all Canadians, not just Albertans. At this stage the federal government hasn't given us any indication that there will be any tax increases. Contrary, Mr. Speaker, my belief after meeting with the federal minister on Monday is that there will be no increases in taxation that are contemplated.

It might sound like a bad thing that we have the highest per capita incomes in this country, but in fact it's a good thing to not receive equalization. It says that we are sustaining our own economy.

Mr. Johnson: To the same minister: given the fact Alberta pays more taxes than any other Canadians and receives no payments through the equalization program, what's the government doing to ensure we get our fair share from the federal government?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, while we paid some \$34.9 billion in taxes

and other revenues in 2007, some \$17.9 billion in federal goods and services come back to Albertans, everything from old age pension plans to security, employment insurance. We have pursued and, with our Premier's assistance, for the first time in 2007 we will be given equal per capita payments on Canada's social services transfer. In the year 2014-15 we'll receive even further monies in the health transfer.

2:10 Role of Provincial Sheriffs

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, recently the discussion in this Assembly has echoed Jerry Maguire. As such, I ask the Solicitor General to "show me the money" to ensure that Albertans are getting value by hiring 700 sheriffs instead of investing in our traditional police forces. To the Solicitor General: what other Canadian jurisdictions currently use sheriffs for the enforcement of traffic safety, specifically for things like conducting tests on suspected impaired drivers?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure how many other jurisdictions use sheriffs on their highways. I know there are a number of them. In regard to impaired drivers our sheriffs have the authority when they come across an impaired driver during a regular traffic stop to call in the RCMP if they believe that criminal charges should be laid. They do also have the authority under provincial legislation to conduct a 24-hour suspension.

Mr. Hehr: To the same minister: are any other provinces using sheriffs to conduct surveillance on suspected drug houses?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I'm not certain what other provinces are doing in regard to how they monitor activities, but I will say that in Alberta we're using a very co-ordinated approach to doing this, co-operation between all policing agencies. The work that our sheriffs are doing is supported, and our policing agencies appreciate the work that our sheriffs are doing in that regard.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what specific information did the ministry identify and utilize to support the decision to use sheriffs for responsibilities that were previously taken care of by traditional policing agencies?

Mr. Mason: Or parking: why are they doing parking?

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

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, just let me say that the work that our sheriffs are doing, again, is well supported. Why they're using sheriffs as opposed to police: they're working in co-operation and co-ordination. We're using the most effective approach possible to ensure that our communities remain safe.

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

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. In spite of economic uncertainties Alberta is still facing labour shortages in many industries and occupations. In my constituency many employers are

trying to recruit temporary foreign workers to fill these gaps; however, they are facing many roadblocks. What can be done to help speed up this process?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The temporary foreign worker program is a federal program designed to address short-term labour needs. Even in the current economic climate we anticipate that Alberta employers will continue to have challenges finding the right workers with the right skills. My department is helping these employers by offering how to hire foreign workers seminars, operating the foreign worker hotlines, and co-ordinating jobs. If an employer has a long-term, permanent job for a skilled worker, then we encourage them to look at the Alberta immigrant nominee program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental question is also to the same minister. If an employer has a permanent job to fill, how does the Alberta immigrant nominee program work as compared to the process for temporary foreign workers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta immigrant nominee program speeds up the permanent residency process for eligible workers. Employers offer a job to a foreign worker and then apply to the provincial government for nomination. After receiving that nomination, the worker can apply to the federal government for permanent residency. Provincial nominations are then reviewed on a priority basis. For the hon. member: there is more information that is available on the immigrant to Alberta website.

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

School Bus Safety

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I commend the government for implementing strategies to make school buses more visible, increasing the safety driver training for school bus operators, and undertaking a public school bus safety awareness initiative. To the Minister of Infrastructure: given that the best safety initiative for urban areas to avoid potential school bus associated injuries and lengthy rides as well as to reduce pollution is to build schools in new communities and maintain those in established areas, will the minister commit to resolving the backlog beyond the 32 P3 schools?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting that there would be that much confusion. In fact, at present there are 132 major school facility projects under way. The 18 that are P3s are a very small part of what we do.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. A number of those 132 are much-needed renovations. They're not new school construction.

To the Minister of Transportation: given the lengthy delays faced by school bus companies in having the required six-month mechani-

cal inspections, how can the minister guarantee that the thousands of Alberta school bus drivers will receive the additional safety training and testing in a timely manner?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, we actually released our report today. We had a bunch of media out in front of the Leg. We had a very good bus driver that brought a bus out to show all the safety features on it, and she actually trains bus drivers and makes sure they have their S endorsement. We believe that we'll move along and have it all done within the two-year time frame that we asked for.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. It is a very important initiative, but carrying it out is the key.

To the Minister of Transportation. Having been a schoolteacher for 34 years, I believe that a significant danger to bus students occurs when the students are either boarding or exiting a lengthy lineup of buses. Has the ministry developed a strategy to improve student safety at this critical time of entering and exiting the school bus?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to say that one of the most important things to this government is the safety of all Albertans and the most precious cargo, our children, that ride those school buses. Yes, in our report, which you'll have to look at, we do have some features that have helped, and they've been there on some of the buses. We're hoping that teachers like him and everybody else watch for those children and make sure that all drivers and other people are careful on the roads and look after our children.

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

Long-term Care

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Health and Wellness annual report says that over 1,100 Alberta seniors are on the urgent wait-list for long-term care, and the minister of health is cutting beds. The wait-list for long-term care has more than doubled in the last two years, and the minister's answer appears to be lower standards and fewer beds. This will only make the situation worse and leave more seniors without the help they need. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why won't you do the right thing, create more long-term care beds and protect the spaces that we currently have?

Mr. Liepert: Well, this member is also falling into the trap of wrong information, Mr. Speaker. We aren't cutting any beds in long-term care. In fact, our budget that we introduced in this House this spring committed to 600 additional beds for long-term care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we know that there are beds that are closing, and this minister thinks that that's the way to deal with the problem. It's the minister's job to ensure that seniors get the care they need and not that private corporations get the profits they want. Lethbridge has two nursing homes, and you're letting Extendicare shut down one so they can make more money. To the same minister. It's time to put seniors before corporate profits. How can you possibly justify taking away nurses and medications from the seniors who need them?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is just a bunch of nonsense. What is happening in Lethbridge is that there is a variety of facilities that will be available for our seniors to meet their needs in their community and how they are best suited. There is a model in the Chinook health region with designated assisted living that is a model that the entire country will soon be following in the way we handle the folks who are in their senior years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Residents that are currently in long-term care are actually getting sicker, not better, and they need greater care. Converting nursing homes to assisted living means less staff, less nursing, less medical attention, and less public oversight. Your own report says that right now 1,100 Albertans are in need of more, and your answer is less. Why won't you protect our seniors and protect their health and safety?

2:20

Mr. Liepert: We're doing exactly that. We're building more, not less, and if the member can prove where there are fewer beds in operation, then she should bring it to the floor of this Assembly. She doesn't have any proof, Mr. Speaker, because those two lonely folks in that corner are just a couple of naysayers who have nothing positive to contribute to this province.

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

WorldSkills Calgary 2009

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta students have two months out of the entire year to spend quality time with family and friends and, for some, to make money. Recently I've heard that some parents and students are concerned about time being cut short due to this government's request for local school boards to start the 2009-2010 school year early to accommodate the WorldSkills Calgary 2009 competition. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Is the government forcing Alberta students to head back to classes early?

Mr. Hancock: I think he probably meant Education, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, we're not forcing school boards to start the school year early, but I did write to all the school boards in the province. The WorldSkills competition 2009 is a major event. It's a major event for Calgary and a major event for Alberta but, most importantly, a major event for Alberta students. If the schools start just a little bit earlier in 2009, more students can have the opportunity to go and participate in the WorldSkills competition. So we're asking school boards to consider making that decision, but it is in the end their decision to make.

Mr. Webber: All right. I apologize. It was the Minister of Education I was asking the question of, not the Minister of Energy. I apologize, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Speaker, can the same minister, the Minister of Education, tell us what other initiatives and programs the government has in mind to publicize and support WorldSkills and ensure that it reaches as many Alberta students as possible?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, today we

had the Alberta team for the WorldSkills competition here and highlighted the skills road show that will be travelling around the province. We have an online digital resource with audiovisual footage of previous skills competitions so that schools and students can take a look at what the skills competition is about. The competition itself will allow for a great deal of interactive displays and opportunities for students to participate.

We announced about a month ago, Mr. Speaker, that we would fund up to \$4 million to help school authorities pay for the cost of transporting grades 9 and 10 students to Calgary so that they can watch and participate in the WorldSkills competition. It's a great way to allow students to find their passion in the trades and technologies, find what they might be excited about. We're very excited about encouraging our students, grades 9 and 10 particularly but right across the spectrum, to go to Calgary, to participate, and to find out how exciting WorldSkills Olympics can be.

Mr. Webber: Finally, Mr. Speaker, Alberta Education is putting a lot of time, energy, and resources into this event: funding, transporting thousands of students, and encouraging boards to change their calendars. The minister may have answered a few of these questions already. What benefits will WorldSkills have for our students and our province more generally?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Advanced Education and Technology has actually taken the lead working with the WorldSkills committee and the Canada skills committee and the Alberta skills committee to put on this event and to make it a highlight for students in the province. What's the benefit? It'll leave a lasting legacy for the province in terms of, first of all, the equipment, which will be able to go into postsecondary and secondary schools across the province. It'll leave a legacy in terms of the mobile labs. There is a mobile lab being prepared for display at the WorldSkills, which will then go to a school board in the province to bring technology opportunities out to students across their division. Most importantly, it's going to leave a legacy of exciting students and helping them to find their passion in the trades and technologies and encourage them to complete their education and go on to bigger and better things.

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

Building Canada Infrastructure Funding

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It appears that the building Canada fund contract for Alberta has been signed. You wouldn't know that here in Alberta, but that's the way it is on the federal site. Today we hear that the Art Gallery of Alberta is waiting for its promised share of this federal funding, but the local Conservative MP says that his provincial cousins are holding it up. So to his provincial cousin the President of the Treasury Board: where is Alberta's money? Why is the minister holding it up?

Mr. Snelgrove: Nothing like cousins that kiss and tell, eh?

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has been involved in a very long and, I might say, complicated process of working through the federal government's many different requirements around this infrastructure. Now, we signed the base funding agreement way back in May, the framework agreement. Since then we have been working on all of the other subclauses in the agreement. The Art Gallery money

that was forwarded by us to allow them to keep moving while we worked on this agreement, which will work its way through, was a sign of good faith on behalf of this government.

The position of the federal government we'll get to in the second question, I'm betting.

Ms Blakeman: Well, what steps does the President of the Treasury Board plan to take to improve the communication and understanding with his federal cousins so that Alberta can get the money we've been waiting for?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the holdup on the base funding agreement right now is an indemnification clause, where the federal government wants us to indemnify them for projects they pick. We are simply saying in this process: if we're to indemnify you, you should indemnify us. We're both putting money; this is a joint decision. This might seem like common sense, that you could just do it. Well, sometimes the federal bureaucracy doesn't work like that.

The other aspect. It is an environmental assessment that the federal government requires. In many cases it would cost more than the project. We're simply saying that we have a good process in place in Alberta to do these projects and bring them through a process. That is unacceptable at this time to the federal government, but it's not acceptable for us to turn that requirement over to the federal government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the President of the Treasury Board. Every other province has managed to get their money. Why can't the President of the Treasury Board negotiate to get our money so it can go towards those public transit projects that it was destined for in Alberta?

Mr. Snelgrove: Yeah. It's interesting. Even some other provinces, Mr. Speaker, managed to get planning money for their provinces, like Quebec, for example, that were given an opportunity within this agreement that we weren't. The rights and the responsibilities of Treasury Board, of Infrastructure, and of Transportation on behalf of Albertans is to ensure that we are planning and bringing forward projects in an orderly manner and serve the priorities from an Alberta point of view. In many ways the federal government was faced with an election, that we weren't, and I think they felt an opportunity, that maybe announcing some projects that weren't within the guidelines was necessary. From our point the rights of Albertans and responsibilities of Albertans is paramount.

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

Liquor Supply

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Christmas shopping season is just around the corner, and that means that many people will head into their favourite liquor store to stock up as they start to put their party plans in place. Some retailers may wonder if there will be any delays in the delivery of alcohol. My questions are for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, responsible for the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. Do liquor retailers have any reason to worry this festive season?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The good news for all those who partake in the consumption of spirits is that we're not anticipating any shortage over the Christmas season. In fact, the distribution network is working well, and all product is currently being delivered on time. One thing, however, that retailers can do is build up their stocks before the Christmas season so they will not have any problems.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. I have heard from some retailers concerned about delivery issues. What happens if there are problems?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, to ensure that there is no confusion by anybody in this House, I can report that all deliveries are being made on schedule, and if there are delivery issues, they will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question. A recent diesel fuel shortage is creating many challenges for the trucking transportation industry. What impact does this have on the liquor delivery system?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, the recent diesel shortage is not having any impact on the distribution system. Again, the deliveries are being made on time.

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

2:30

Farm Worker Safety

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Agriculture workers in this province have no rights or protection when it comes to workplace safety and compensation after injuries. This is an absolute failure, discrimination by this government, to provide basic protections equally to all workers. There are, in fact, agriculture producers who feel that the lack of farm safety creates a big liability for them. To the minister of agriculture: why has the minister ignored the calls from industry who are saying that farm safety standards are needed?

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

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess the hon. member here is hearing something that I'm not. I'm not hearing that from the industry at this particular time. However, we dwell very heavily on farm safety. Since 2002 we've provided more than \$70,000 in funding for Alberta farm safety, which delivers presentations to more than 30,000 elementary schoolchildren each year. Education on farm safety is paramount.

Dr. Swann: Well, it's clearly not working, Mr. Speaker. A government spokesman reported at a fatality inquiry this week that there's been little change in farm deaths and injuries since 1985 despite safety awareness campaigns. How many more deaths before this government is prepared to implement measures that protect every other worker in Canada?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, one death is too many, but legislation is not the answer. I'm convinced of that. I

wish it were. If it were that simple, I'd be there. It just doesn't work. You can't legislate common sense. It's an absolute fact.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, let's go to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Since the minister of agriculture is unwilling to protect the rights of farm workers through legislation, will the Minister of Employment and Immigration take action to include farm workers under the Occupational Health and Safety Act and extend to them the same rights and protections as other workers in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our employment standards legislation is very sensitive to the traditional and special needs of the family farms, where work is very seasonal and seldom follows a 9 to 5 routine. Farm and ranch employees are covered by the Employment Standards Code as it pertains to termination pay and maternity and parental leave and payment of agreed-upon wages, but it does not cover the other side.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Bingo Revenue

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bingo revenue in Alberta has been in a constant decline for years. Net revenue for bingo events in 2007-08 that charities earned was \$26 million, a \$4 million decline from the previous year. Also, nine bingo halls have closed across the province this last year. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. What is the Alberta government doing to help the bingo industry and, in turn, the charities they support?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission is working closely with Bingo Alberta – that's the organization that represents bingo halls in the province – to mitigate the decline of bingo revenues that support charities. But declining revenues are not just happening in Alberta. It's a phenomenon across North America. However, there are, in fact, other charitable events to support the activities of these groups. In 2007 and 2008 charities shared \$325 million in proceeds from gaming events, an increase of \$55 million over the previous year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you. My final question to the same minister. I've heard it mentioned that putting slot machines into bingo halls would help these charities. Can you tell us: how likely is that to happen?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're certainly not there yet. Again, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission is waiting for a proposal outlining an electronic bingo strategy from Bingo Alberta. Once the strategy is received, it will be reviewed, and a decision will be made at that time.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you're fine?

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Long-term Care (continued)

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've read section 1 of the Health and Wellness annual report '07-08. It says: "Number of Persons Waiting for Long-Term Care Facility Placement." As I read down further in the paragraph, it says: "The reportable numbers of persons waiting for continuing care placements." It has occurred to me that we may not be speaking about the same thing on the same page. Could I ask the Minister of Health and Wellness to please define for me long-term care, designated assisted living, and assisted living? What are the differences?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, they're fairly clear in what the difference is. There's a level of service between each of these levels of care, and I think the hon. member knows exactly what the difference in level of care is.

Ms Pastoor: I do know. [interjections] Never ask a question unless you know the answer.

My next one. I also would like to know if when we are speaking, we are speaking about the same things, so I would like a definition for enhanced lodges, lodges, and independent living and how that occurs with care.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, my answer is the same as to the previous question. I believe the member knows the answer to the question, and I would ask her to enlighten the House.

Ms Pastoor: I will in due time. Absolutely.

There is something else. How many acute-care hospital beds will be turned into long-term care beds in rural areas? I'm talking long-term care, not designated assisted living.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I've made it very clear in this House that we are currently involved in a service optimization review of all of our facilities across the province, and we will in due course be making the results of that particular review public and will answer those questions at that time.

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

Country of Origin Labelling

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As of October 1 all beef sold at retail outlets in the United States must be labelled with the country of origin according to where the animal was born. Since that legislation went into effect, some meat plants in the United States are refusing to accept Canadian cattle and hogs for processing. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. What is the government of Alberta doing to help beef and pork producers in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've known for three years now that country of origin labelling was coming, so that was part of the reason we came up with the Alberta livestock and meat strategy, to offset and regain some of our competitive advantage. We've actually injected \$150 million into the livestock industry this year, and we are going to inject another \$150 million in the new year, hoping that we'll offset some of this.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is this government doing to ensure markets remain open to Alberta livestock products?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we need to keep the markets open that we have, but we also have to find new markets. As I just came from a mission to Asia, there's huge potential out there for market access. We have to pursue these markets, but we have to brand our beef, and I think we can turn the country of origin labelling to our advantage.

Mr. Marz: Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: how effective and enforceable would a trade challenge be against the United States?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, a trade challenge against the United States would be the responsibility of the federal government, but history has shown that these types of initiatives certainly can be long, and they certainly can be costly. As I said before, we've known for three years that this was happening. I chastize the industry and Alberta Agriculture for not being proactive. We should have been there. But all opportunity is not lost. I think we can turn this around to a positive yet.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 104 questions and responses today.

In 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of an additional five members to participate in Members' Statements.

Hon. members, before we continue, in a few minutes from now His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor will attend upon the Assembly. Please remember that one of our decorum rules is that when the Lieutenant Governor is in the Assembly, we will not use our computers at that time, and the use of BlackBerrys, of course, is not supposed to be done during question period either.

2:40 **Members' Statements** (continued)

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

Agri-Trade Farm Equipment Expo

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, agriculture is an essential component of Alberta's economy, culture, and heritage. Over the years this industry has faced and continues to encounter many hurdles that require innovative solutions.

Red Deer's central location both within the province and within the agriculture heartland has resulted in Red Deer becoming a trade and transportation hub for agriculture. As early as 1892 progressive citizens recognized the need to gather together in one location, Red Deer, to share their ideas and solutions to agriculture challenges.

In 1983 the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce and the Westerner Exposition formalized this practice and developed the Agri-Trade Farm Equipment Expo, led by show manager Pat Kennedy. Since its inception this event has been a success and is now the largest indoor farm exposition in western Canada. From November 5 to 8 the Agri-Trade Farm Equipment Exposition will celebrate their 25th anniversary at Westerner Park in Red Deer. On Wednesday, November 5, the ag innovations award will be presented to recognize and promote those in the industry who have developed an

improvement to a product or service that will benefit agriculture producers in North America and in the world. The event will showcase over 400 exhibitors and occupy over 450,000 square feet of space at Westerner Park, bringing millions of dollars in consumer and business spending to Red Deer.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to invite all the members of this Assembly to attend the 25th anniversary Agri-Trade and join me in recognizing the founders and organizers for their leadership and dedication.

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

WorldSkills Trades Competition

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week is national Skilled Trades Week, and there's no better time to raise awareness in our province about trades and technology occupations. As you heard during Introduction of Guests, the WorldSkills Calgary 2009 competition is taking place from September 1 to 7, and it will display some of the most talented youth in 45 trades- and technology-related skill areas.

You may have noticed the WorldSkills Calgary 2009 truck and trailer parked just outside the Legislature today. This is a new skills road show, and it will travel throughout the province educating, raising awareness, and generating interest in the WorldSkills event. This road show will stop at community events and schools and use a combination of presentations, displays, and hands-on activities to demonstrate the importance of trade and technology careers in our province. Following the international event in 2009, the skills road show will be transferred to Skills Canada Alberta, our local skills organization, to continue the promotion of trades and technology occupations.

Skills Canada Alberta, a provincial arm of the national association, Skills Compétences Canada, is a not-for-profit organization which works with employers, educators, labour groups, and the government to position trade and technical careers as first-choice career options for Alberta's youth. Skills Compétences Canada established WorldSkills Calgary 2009 to host the world's highest level of trade and technology talent. As a member of WorldSkills International, Skills Compétences Canada selects and prepares competitors for regional, provincial, national, and international competition.

I'm pleased to rise today to recognize all of the ongoing hard work of the local, national, and international skills organizations for generating awareness in these in-demand careers and for encouraging Alberta's youth to find their passions, develop their skills, and reach for their goals.

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

Tribute to the Canadian Forces

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Forces have a rich and proud history, a history filled with stories of countless men and women who boldly served their country in times of war, conflict, and peace. With unwavering commitment, tremendous bravery, and profound selflessness these men and women have carried out what they would call their duty. For members of our Canadian Forces duty always means honour, integrity, and sacrifice. This has been their duty.

Our duty, Mr. Speaker, is much easier. It is our duty to show our men and women in uniform the respect that they so richly deserve, to remember them, and to thank them for their immeasurable contributions. Perhaps more importantly, it is our duty to teach our

current and future generations all we can about the history and role of our Canadian Forces and the sacrifices they continue to make.

Mr. Speaker, November 5 to 11 is Veterans' Week. Throughout the province schools will be honouring Veterans' Week and Remembrance Day with assemblies, poetry competitions, plays, art displays, and guest speakers. Students will learn about how Canadians sacrificed and served their country so that we are able to enjoy the freedoms and rights we have today. They will hear the stories of lives lived and lost and will be reminded that duty often comes with the highest of costs.

While Remembrance Day comes once a year, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta social studies curriculum teaches our students throughout the year to understand and respect the role that the Canadian Forces played in shaping the history of our great nation. This is one of the greatest ways that we can honour those who dedicated their lives to our country, and it is one of the greatest ways that we can live up to the freedoms that they have fought so tirelessly to protect.

To all members of our Canadian Forces and their families past, present, and future we thank you for all you have given in the name of our country, in the name of duty.

Thank you.

Canadian Paraplegic Association Hope Kits

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, Alberta has many not-for-profit groups that support people in a variety of difficult situations. One of these organizations is the Canadian Paraplegic Association, Alberta. This organization has been a very important part of my life since I had my spinal cord injury some 18 years ago. Accordingly, I can attest that the Canadian Paraplegic Association is a fine organization that provides assistance to Albertans who have sustained spinal cord injuries or other physical disabilities.

Last week I had the privilege of attending the association's board meetings in Red Deer. At the meeting the executive director, Teren Clark, unveiled what is called the hope kit. The hope kit, Mr. Speaker, is a terrific tool for Albertans who have recently suffered a spinal cord injury. Each kit includes a portable DVD player with six DVDs, each packed with information on what life is like after a spinal cord injury. The CPA is in the process of delivering hope kits to every regional hospital and rehab centre in the province.

I would like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that many Albertans generously donated to the CPA in order for these hope kits to become reality. Two of the donors who helped make these hope kits a reality were Premier Ed Stelmach and Edmonton's Mayor Mandel. On behalf of the CPA I thank them and all other donors for their contributions.

Mr. Speaker, when you suffer a spinal cord injury, information and inspiration are crucial to the process of moving to the next stage of your life. The hope kit will provide both. Hope can only take you so far, though. Albertans with disabilities still face a number of obstacles to achieving their full potential. For one, affordable, accessible housing is still in very short supply. For another, as was so eloquently pointed out by the folks at the Families Who Care rally last week, Albertans with disabilities have a very, very difficult time finding and retaining caregivers. Nevertheless, the CPA is continuing to soldier on and provide these hope kits.

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

St. Albert Protestant School Board

Mr. Allred: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The St. Albert Protestant school board recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. St. Albert Protestant is somewhat unique in Alberta in that it is the only separate school jurisdiction that is not a Catholic board.

St. Albert Protestant was formed in 1958 when the population of St. Albert was less than 2,000. It has grown from a school held in the United church to a district with 15 schools, including two high schools, with 6,700 students. Hopefully, there is another school on the horizon. The population of St. Albert is currently just under 60,000.

St. Albert Protestant is a district of great successes. Students and teachers are continually exceeding provincial averages for measures like provincial achievement tests, high school completion rates, and transition to postsecondary rates. Please join me in extending congratulations to the St. Albert Protestant school board on their golden anniversary as a school district.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I move on, just a little update. Three hon. members went beyond the two-minute time allocation. One hon. member erroneously used the name of a current member in a statement. So please.

2:50

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling another 34 signatures on a petition calling upon 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. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a letter that I wrote to the Leader of the Opposition correcting a number of erroneous comments that were made in this House recently regarding the Mazankowski Heart Institute.

I would also like to table five copies of a letter that I wrote to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar relative to some questions that were asked yesterday that would have been more properly put on the Order Paper.

The Speaker: Others?

Hon. members, it's my pleasure to table five copies of the sixth School at the Legislature report card, 2006-2007.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Health and Wellness, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the College of Hearing Aid Practitioners of Alberta annual report 2006-2007, the College of Dental Technologists of Alberta 2006-2007 annual report, 2007 annual report of the Alberta College of Medical Laboratory Technologists, the Alberta College of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists 2007 annual report, the College of Alberta Denturists annual report for 2007, the Alberta College of Optometrists annual report to government 2007, the Alberta College of Occupational Therapists annual report 2007-2008, the College of Alberta Psychologists annual report 2007-2008, the College of Dietitians of Alberta annual report 2007-2008; pursuant to the Mental Health Act the Alberta Mental Health Patient Advocate office 2007-2008 annual report; pursuant to the Opticians Act the Alberta Opticians Association annual report 2007; pursuant to the Regional Health Authorities Act the Health Quality Council of Alberta 2007-2008 annual report.

Orders of the Day

Royal Assent

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor will now attend upon the Assembly.

[The Premier and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: All rise, please. Mr. Speaker, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

The Speaker: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, and the Premier entered the Chamber. His Honour took his place upon the throne]

His Honour: Hon. members, please be seated.

The Speaker: May it please His Honour, the Legislative Assembly has at its present sitting passed certain bills to which and in the name of the Legislative Assembly I respectfully request Your Honour's assent.

The Clerk: Your Honour, following are the titles of the bills to which Your Honour's assent is prayed.

- 7 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2008
- 8 Climate Change and Emissions Management Amendment Act, 2008
- 9 Land Agents Licensing Amendment Act, 2008
- 11 Insurance Amendment Act, 2008
- 14 Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2008
- 15 Family Law Amendment Act, 2008
- 16 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2008
- 19 First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Amendment Act, 2008
- 20 Agriculture Statutes Repeal Act, 2008
- 21 Heating Oil and Propane Rebate Act
- 25 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2008
- 28 Jury Amendment Act, 2008
- 30 Alberta Evidence Amendment Act, 2008
- 31 Financial Administration Amendment Act, 2008
- 34 Employment Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2008
- 35 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2008
- 36 Land Titles Amendment Act, 2008
- 37 Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (Holodomor) Memorial Day Act
- 38 Securities Amendment Act, 2008

[The Lieutenant Governor indicated his assent]

The Clerk: In Her Majesty's name His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor doth assent to these bills.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: All rise, please.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Lieutenant Governor and the Premier left the Chamber]

[The Mace was uncovered]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

As we await the return of the Premier, there will be an event this afternoon on the steps of the Legislature dealing with a light show that will show the names of all Canadian veterans who lost their lives in World War I. The lights will give their names over the next week to 10 days on the face of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Hon. members, tomorrow morning at 11 o'clock we will have our annual Remembrance Day ceremony in the rotunda as well.

3:00

Government Motions

Ombudsman Appointment

20. Mr. Zwozdesky moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the October 2008 report of the Select Standing Committee on Legislative Offices and recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that Mr. G.B. (Gord) Button be reappointed as Ombudsman for the province of Alberta for a five-year term.

The Speaker: Any members choosing to participate in the debate? There being none, shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 20 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 42

Health Governance Transition Act

[Adjourned debate October 29: Mr. Liepert]

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with interest that I rise this afternoon to participate in the debate on Bill 42, the Health Governance Transition Act. Certainly, whenever we look at this legislation, we are anticipating the repeal of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Act and the Cancer Programs Act, and we are amending, I think, at last count 20 other pieces of legislation. This is the first bill in what I can only guess is a number of bills to facilitate the government's measures to change our health delivery system from nine regional health authorities to this one superboard.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, when we look at this bill, Mr. Speaker, we have to look first off at the memorandum of understanding that was signed on May 29, 2008. You know, there are still many, many questions about that memorandum, where it fits into this piece of legislation. It's quite interesting. It is a deal – and I will use that word “deal” –

between the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, the Alberta Health Services Board as represented by the chair, and Charlotte Robb, the interim CEO.

This memorandum of understanding outlines what's going to happen. There's a series of definitions in here. We talked about this earlier, the legislative authority. The whole legal basis of this is still up in the air. The minister of health looks quite nervous over there. [interjections] He is. He's awaiting a court challenge on this. I'm certain of it. It's coming, hon. minister. It's coming because the legality of this memorandum of understanding is under significant question in the legal community.

When we look at the roles and responsibilities of the minister and we look at the board and we look at what has been moved here in this memorandum of understanding – and this is the reason, Mr. Speaker, for Bill 42 – under section 8.2 and the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Act it's specific as to what is to occur.

- to conduct studies and research into and investigate alcohol and drug abuse . . .
- to provide financial and other assistance to persons conducting studies and research into and investigating alcohol and drug abuse or matters relating to alcohol and drug abuse

It goes on to say in here that these roles are to be transitioned to Alberta Health and Wellness.

Now, when we look at this and we continue on and we see what the minister and this government have in mind for the Alberta Mental Health Board regulation and how that regulation and its policies and programs are to be transitioned into Alberta Health and Wellness, the department, that's quite interesting. That's the way it was in a former regime of the Conservative government, and we're going back there. Many people, including the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, were asking: why would this be necessary? Why would they be moving something that had been integrated back into the department of health?

Well, when we look at some of the comments that have been made by members of the medical community regarding the patient-focused funding or the activity-based funding or the fee for service that the minister and this government are proposing, where the money will follow the patient in our health care system from one hospital, I suppose, to the other, this government is very careful just to say that the money is following the patient. They're not saying that it's going to follow the patient from a public to a private hospital. They don't say that yet. In reality patient-focused funding could be private-facility funding. It very easily could be private-facility funding.

Now, there was considerable information available on patient-focused funding on the Internet when I checked and I was preparing for the debate on this bill. Some people seem to think that it's a good idea. Others have expressed caution about it. But to answer the question from the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, this is a document that has been prepared on this patient-focused funding scheme, or activity-based funding, by Canadian Doctors for Medicare, their Position on Activity-based Funding in Canadian Hospitals and Other Surgical Facilities, which is a code word for private hospitals. Now, I'm going to quote this on page 6 of that document, so we can all get the perspective of where we're going with this bill, Bill 42.

The risk is that hospitals with costs that exceed the tariffs for certain procedures may stop doing those procedures rather than improve efficiency. Establishing accurate DRGs/HRGs is difficult for some services, such as mental health care and critical care.

This is one of the reasons why mental health is going back into the department. In my view this is why this government wants to move it. It's obvious when you look at the memorandum of understanding that they're moving it back into the department because of the observations here.

Mr. Liepert: Why don't they say so?

3:10

Mr. MacDonald: I don't know why they don't say so. Maybe they know that it's not a money-maker, and they're only interested in this whole idea of there being a profit involved in one's illness.

Now, whenever we go on about health care, we look at what this government is proposing – and the first step is in the bill – and we look at where they want to move AADAC and where they want to move the mental health programs and the delivery of such programs. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont referenced earlier the twilight zone, but I would certainly ask that hon. member to drop that publication and pick up the Auditor General's report. The hon. member can pick up either the report from April of 2008 or the report from October of 2008. I think we have to read very carefully, and hopefully we will heed the advice and the concern that is being articulated here by the Auditor General regarding the provincial mental health plan.

How this bill, this new structure, is going to implement the provincial mental health plan is going to be interesting. What does the Auditor General have to say about our attempted delivery of mental health services to Albertans? "The mental health service delivery system in Alberta faces serious challenges. Service to clients and patients can improve by making access to the system easier, reducing wait times for many programs and coordinating care better." This is from the Auditor General.

I don't know if the minister of health or any of his colleagues on the front bench get time from their busy schedules to talk to the Auditor General. I'm certain the Minister of Energy must have after that report that was issued two years ago on royalty collection. I bet the Minister of Energy has the AG's office on speed-dial, he'd be getting advice from them so often.

Now, the Auditor General also indicates in this report – and this is from 2008, Mr. Speaker – that services should reflect the provincial mental health plan. "This report accepts the view that Alberta should transform its mental health service delivery system to reflect the principles outlined in the Provincial Mental Health Plan." That's fair enough, but I don't know if this bill does that. It'll be interesting to hear the debate and discussion. Hopefully it will. I'm not convinced it will, and after today in question period, where I found that the information that's provided on the Alberta wait-list registry of the department of health is inaccurate, I don't know how we can have faith in this government to deliver these health care systems, whether it's a medically necessary operation or to help someone who has a mental illness.

When the Auditor General is talking about working to ensure that the principles outlined in the provincial mental health plan are a focus, his report goes on to say – and I'm going to quote this because it's really important, Mr. Speaker:

This is not a radical expectation. Mental health professionals have promoted these principles for decades. There is evidence that the new approach costs no more than the splintered, sometimes ineffective care now offered. Demographic changes, workforce shortages, and the development of innovative programs also affect how the system should be transformed.

Now, the Auditor and the staff go on here to make recommendations on ways or means to improve Alberta's mental health services delivery in accordance with the principles. Has this been taken into consideration with the drafting of Bill 42? I don't know.

When we look at this bill and we look at section 2, for instance, it's on the severance and termination pay, which is a big issue these days. It's interesting to note, you know, all that information on the wait-list registry in the Peace Country regional health authority and how long people have been waiting since we fired the board

members. We look at the severance packages that have been delivered. The Peace Country health region severance package is still under negotiations, but in this bill we have conveniently placed in section 2 measures to deal with such severance and termination pay.

When there is a “change in governance or restructuring” – now, that’s an innocent sounding phrase if I ever heard one from this government. This is respecting the Alberta Cancer Board, the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, or the Alberta Mental Health Board, including the dissolution of such. We go on here and we talk about the transfer of the responsibilities for all or part of the operations of these outfits “or the Alberta Mental Health Board to another entity.” The minister is quite clear here: “to another entity.” In this case there is no reference to the memorandum of understanding, which, of course, is going to shuffle off the majority of these operations to the department. Now, we’re leaving the regional health authorities out of this entirely, Mr. Speaker, and I find that interesting.

I also find in section 3(4) that we are allowing an order that would make any issue “retroactive to the extent set out in the order.” Retroactive. I guess that’s a provision that the government feels it needs to rewrite the entire history of their efforts to deliver public health care in this province by reducing wait-lists and controlling costs.

If I was the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity and I was not here but I was still teaching school somewhere and it was report card time, the hon. member would probably give this government Fs on both issues. The hon. member would give them a failure for their efforts and their work to reduce wait times, and I’m certain they would get an F in their efforts to control costs. So the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity is busy writing his report cards. It would be a difficult day, and maybe many of the hon. members across the way, if they were schoolchildren, would be reluctant to go home for supper with that report card tucked in their satchel because they know their parents would not be happy. In this case it’s not their parents; it’s the taxpayers who are unhappy with them because there would be issues around the wasteful spending of money.

Mr. Speaker, we can continue through this bill section by section, but we’re going to get to this in committee. When you look at this bill initially, you would think it’s just a matter of housekeeping and it’s a matter of convenience. It has this innocent title, the Health Governance Transition Act. But when you think of the important programs that are delivered to people who need them through AADAC and through the Alberta mental health service, this is a major piece of legislation, and there are many questions regarding this legislation and how it will improve or enhance the delivery of so many vital programs to Albertans.

3:20

Now, the Auditor General had many issues, all of them unaddressed or unanswered in this legislation. When we think of the whole process of the delivery of the programs and services for mental health and how it relates to the regional health authorities, which were fired or eliminated or erased in May of 2008, when we look at mental health and where it fits into the entire health budget, we cannot allow it to become sort of the poor cousin, if I can use those words, of public health care in this province. It’s vital. The mental health budget is a sizable budget within each RHA. Regional health authorities’ mental health expenditures range between \$5 million and \$240 million. In total expenditures are just slightly less than \$500 million per year. This would represent between 2 and a half to over 9 and a half per cent of a regional health authority’s operating budget.

Regional health authorities always operated their hospital-based mental health services. Where are these services going to go now? I don’t know. I had a discussion with some constituents last Friday, and they’re also very keen to find out. Now, the services from the Alberta Mental Health Board to the RHAs changed in 2003. The RHAs acquired a significant community-based service component plus the operation of the specialized facilities.

Oh, I’m disappointed that my time is up, but I am looking forward to debate and discussion at committee. Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m also reading my way through Bill 42, so I’m glad of the opportunity to raise some of the concerns and issues that I see arising out of my reading of Bill 42, the Health Governance Transition Act. I’m sure the minister can clear this up for me fairly quickly, but I’ll put the question on the record so that he can answer it. The act includes the Alberta Mental Health Board in the sections on severance and termination pay for employees, but it does not mention it at any other time.

We have a situation where the mental health boards came under the service delivery model of the regional health authorities in 2003, and now that regional health model is gone. Those entities are gone. I haven’t seen any official transfer from those regional health authorities, which are now dissolved, to the superboard, so I’m wondering where the authority is, if he can direct me towards where that actual transfer of power and authority and funding exists and if he can describe for me what he’s anticipating for the future of the Alberta Mental Health Board because this act is silent. It’s very clear what’s being planned for the Cancer Board and for AADAC, but it’s not clear at all what’s being planned for Alberta mental health, so help us here.

I know that the minister likes to play his cards close to his chest, but for a lot of my constituents who are dealing on a daily or a monthly basis with mental health problems or who have family members or loved ones or friends who are struggling with this, they’d like some certainty. One of the things that’s very difficult to deal with when you have a mental illness is a lack of certainty. The uncertainty that’s created through Bill 42 for authority, funding, service delivery of mental health programs is very troubling to me as someone who represents a number of people with mental health problems.

I’m looking at – and I know my colleague from Gold Bar had referred to this in his comments – the Auditor General’s report, October 2008, on pages 151 to 206. There’s quite an extensive report here, including appendices. I’m not sure how some of the things that were being suggested are supposed to be implemented because I don’t know who is responsible for doing this. Where does the buck stop? We got no clarity from Bill 42. So what we’ve had is, as the AG said, a very splintered, sometimes ineffective care being offered. Now we’re looking at demographic changes, workforce shortages, and other innovative programs, which should affect how the system is transformed, but none of those things are clear as I look at what we’ve got in Bill 42.

Let me just take a step back. In second reading we’re talking about the principle of a bill, so what I’m being asked to concur with, the principle of the bill, if I’m understanding this correctly, that’s being brought forward in Bill 42, is to essentially dissolve the Cancer Board and anything to do with it. All of the acts that refer to it or the designated authorities or service delivery expectations, et cetera, and with AADAC have now been, to use the language in the bill, wound up. As I said, it doesn’t wind up the Alberta Mental Health Board, so I’m wondering what the heck is supposed to happen to it.

We have transitional regulations. For example, we have the actual repealing of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Act and the Cancer Programs Act. We have the amending of the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act, which is the endowment fund that had, I think, \$500 million put into it, but at the time we were told that it was going to be a billion put into it, and we're still waiting for the rest of that money. So that particular section of it has been repealed and is substituted that someone designated by the minister will develop a plan and a budget to carry out the purposes of the Cancer Prevention Legacy Act.

The Regional Health Authorities Act is amended to strike out the Alberta Cancer Board. The registry that's under the Cancer Programs Act, which, as we know, has been repealed, is continued in accordance with the act, but the Hospitals Act does not apply to the information in the cancer registry. If there is a conflict or an inconsistency between the regulations and the Health Information Act, the regulations prevail. There are no proceedings or damages against a physician or a lab person for providing information around the cancer registry. The Lieutenant Governor in Council can make regulations on the cancer registry. Then it goes into the revised statutes around health authorities and delivery of services and additional information around cancer, adds in that drugs that the regional health authorities may provide for cancer are now changed.

3:30

The act is clearly trying to deal with all the different pieces of cancer treatment delivery, research, and funding in the province and reassign it. Then it goes into AADAC and starts to deal with some of the same things there. But the third piece, the outstanding entity here, is the Mental Health Board, and as I say, the only reference I can find is the severance and termination clause right at the beginning of the act. We have a situation where certainty and stability are not being created for a very vulnerable population. I'm sure that this is not what the minister intended to create, that kind of instability, so I'm looking for some answers so I can go back to my constituents and explain to them what's actually going to happen here. How is this going to work for them?

We had a number of things that were suggested by a very thorough report from the Auditor General, and even then he was noting that the RHAs deal with the continuum of care. Well, we don't have RHAs dealing with the continuum of care for mental health anymore. He noted that the RHAs were implementing the principles of the Alberta Mental Health Board but unevenly and inconsistently. So we had inconsistent application under nine regional health authorities. Now we don't know where that is. I'm assuming it's supposed to be with the superboard, but that's not clear.

I'm just wondering if mental health – I guess I know the answer to this. Mental health is going to get bounced once again. It's always been the poor cousin. I mean, let's face it. Most people with mental health issues don't turn up on the voter rolls. They have no way of coming back at the government when they have to deal with the consequences of the actions that the government has taken. They could vote, but many of them are not able to on a particular voting day. So the government really doesn't have to fear any consequences from that particular sector. I worry about that because I think the government should pay attention to what happens to that particular sector. They say that 1 in 5 people will deal with a mental health problem at some point in their life. In fact, we think that it's much closer than that; it's more likely to be 1 in 3.

Some of the other things that go along with mental health that we understand now to be successful at supporting people with mental health to really contribute and thrive in our society, which is

possible, are things like security of food, to know where your meal is coming from and to know that you're going to be okay in getting it; housing, which is a huge issue for people with mental health issues; a social network, friends, a place, a community to belong to, activities to do; an opportunity to contribute to society through some sort of meaningful interaction, whether that's working or volunteering, contributing in some way so that they feel they have a right to be in that society. All of those that I've been talking about are social determinants of health, and I was hoping to see some improvement around the delivery of mental health services in the province. I'm quite concerned by the lack of any clarity in Bill 42 around mental health services.

A second agency that's being dealt with in Bill 42 is the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. This is another agency that's been bounced around quite a bit. Well, in my time as critic for different departments I think it's come and gone from under me a couple of times. It was under Health for a while, and then it was taken out. It was under Justice for a while. It was under Gaming for a while. I mean, without trying very hard, I can think of three different structural places that AADAC has held over a fairly short period of time.

Again, we've learned a lot about how to work with people with addiction issues, which is what the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission is trying to work with, both treatment but also the transition back as a fully participating member of society. Prevention was also part of what they were doing. Now, back in the late '90s the number of their prevention programs was cut, and funding for them was cut. There used to be a group that came here to the Legislature and did the tour, and I used to go down and meet with them. It was part of what they were doing to reintegrate people into society and help them to understand that, you know, there were roles for them to play and various institutions that they could both participate in and draw upon. That program was cut in the late '90s.

Now we have a situation where the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission itself is being cut. I have to presume that the government is going to put its programming somewhere, and what I've heard is that the programming is going to be split up into three different places. Some programs will go to Justice; some programs will go to Health, and some programs will go somewhere else, a third piece. I think they've already changed their letterhead to sort of wipe out AADAC.

There's a great deal of uncertainty with the employees there about where they're supposed to go and what's going to happen to their pension contributions. What we've got here in this legislation essentially says in the severance and termination section, which is right at the beginning of the bill – for anyone that's tracking it, it's section 2; it appears on pages 1 and 2 of the bill – that “this section applies only in respect of employees who are not represented by a bargaining agent.” So those that are AUPE members would not be included in this. [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired] Oh, it's 15. Right.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments. The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to conclude the comments that she was making at the time that the bell rang.

Ms Blakeman: Well, in answer to your question of what I was talking about . . .

The Deputy Speaker: May I just give a warning that the five minutes are for questions and comments, not to allow to finish the speech.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I'm answering the question that he placed.

The Deputy Speaker: All right. Go ahead.

Ms Blakeman: I'm happy to continue doing that. Thank you.

The question was around what's happening to the AADAC employees. According to this, my reading of it is that it does not include the AADAC employees who are represented by a bargaining agent, which would be AUPE: no employee "is entitled to severance pay or termination pay or other compensation if the employee's position is substantially the same after the change in governance or restructuring." What it's saying is that if they get essentially the same job under Justice or under Health or whatever the third agency is that this department is being broken up and sent to, nothing should change. That's, of course, what everybody's worried about, that somehow they'd end up doing substantially the same job for less money and less benefits. That's what the employees that are my constituents that have come to meet with me and talk with me have expressed concern about.

3:40

I would like to think that this government would really uphold that vigorously, but the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and if we look back to what happened to employees of government agencies and departments that were dissolved or reorganized in the mid and late '90s, that does not reflect what happened to them. Some of the lucky ones or the ones with great connections took a buyout package or severance package and then got hired immediately again to deliver the same services but as a contractor. They just got paid less this time because it was a lump sum funding for it.

On behalf of my constituents I'm expressing real concern about the job security and transition there as it moves from the AADAC agency as we knew it to some other version of it which is broken into pieces. People are really stressed and concerned about this, and I frankly would hate to see that level of expertise lost.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member?

Back to the bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to Bill 42, Health Governance Transition Act, which at this stage is to address the principles of the act. An important bill it is as we're going through another major transition in Alberta around the health care system, a restructuring, clearly, not a serious reform effort. Unfortunately, it's creating a tremendous amount of anxiety and disruption to communication channels, to lines of authority, to clarity about communications, frustration that front-line workers feel at not having any influence on where this health system is going and, clearly, not having vehicles for communicating with the Health Services Board.

The bill as it's written dissolves the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission and the Cancer Board. The minister's powers to effect change and facilitate the transition are outlined in the bill. There is no mention in this bill of the nine regional health authorities that were disbanded, and there is minimal mention of the Alberta Mental Health Board in this bill, which has been alluded to earlier, but it's presumed from our reading that the Alberta Mental Health

Board will be dissolved under this bill. I want to just take a step back and ask a more fundamental question: what is the health system for? Surely, all policies and all directions of this government should be to create the conditions for health and to make affordable and quality health care accessible to all Albertans. That's the screen through which I look at any bill associated with the health care system and the screen through which I look at Bill 42, the Health Governance Transition Act.

It was back in May that the minister of health disbanded the nine health regions, including AADAC, the Cancer Board, and the Alberta Mental Health Board. So we are looking for signs that quality, access, and cost-efficiency are improving. We have reason to be concerned that these steps, including Bill 42, aren't taking us in the right direction. They argue that the provincial health board will create a more streamlined system for patients and health professionals. That remains to be seen. As we've heard, statistics fail to show improvements in access in many aspects of our system. Professionals are increasingly frustrated. Rural areas, in particular, are concerned about the loss of connection to decision-making and their professionals, who are also feeling isolated and lack influence on the direction of their health care system.

The Alberta Health Services Board is responsible for health care delivery now and for setting, monitoring, and enforcing provincial health policy standards and programs. Clearly, there's an opportunity to create a more efficient system and a stronger set of standard guidelines across the province. It's not at all clear what the influence of the three advisory councils that have now been set up – that is, the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, the Cancer Board, and the Mental Health Board – will be on public policy and, specifically, on front-line services and the unique needs, especially, of mental health clients.

The bill does not make any mention, then, of the Mental Health Board. That is of great concern to many of us because as was recently stated in the Auditor General's reports both in April and in October of this year, there are serious concerns about Alberta mental health services. In fact, the Auditor General gave a barely passing grade on public education and awareness around mental health, on suicide prevention efforts, and on the mental health workforce plan.

It also found serious lack of progress in increasing service capacity for the growing number of folks who need mental health services and the lack of a plan for monitoring and evaluating our mental health services. Surely in 2008 we expect to have a plan that one can look at from time to time and assess whether our implementation of mental health services is improving, not improving, and in what areas. The Auditor General's report indicated that this is not present, and it's not acceptable.

The Auditor General's report also asked for greater clarity on roles and responsibility and on interministerial priorities, referring here to housing, to the judicial system, to other parts of the education and technical training system. All of these relate to rehabilitation and improvement of the mental health of our people in Alberta.

There was also in the Auditor General's report the need to increase service capacity, as I've mentioned, and it's not clear how this bill is going to help to address that. It's the challenge today in Alberta. This newly formed provincial board and the mental health that it's apparently taking over are going to have to do some serious work, or we're going to have a major crash in terms of mental health problems falling into the system, not being addressed appropriately, blocking beds, and actually aggravating the very system that we're trying to improve through this and other previous bills on the health care system.

Most concerning, as indicated by the Auditor General, is the lack of an implementation plan to allow monitoring and reporting against

some standards. It's the sincere hope from all of us as Albertans and as members of the Legislature that we'll find that plan in the work that's coming through both this bill and the Mental Health Board in its new role. If the government does not implement province-wide standards, it is telling its most vulnerable people, fundamentally, that they're not as important as the other elements in the health care system.

In passing, the south hospital in Calgary, having faced tremendous overcost, has now been cut in terms of its funding for its mental health services. That raises serious questions for Calgarians. It should raise serious questions for all Albertans around the whole question of whether we have a priority for mental health, addictions, and dual-diagnosis patients in our system.

The Auditor General also highlighted that there's still work that needs to be done to provide clear direction to staff and to identify clearly who's going to be monitoring and reporting on the changes that are needed. There's clearly, according to the Auditor General, a lack of supportive housing, and we are clearly not going to address mental health issues if we can't get people safely and securely into housing. There will be horrible implications if we don't address very clearly in this bill and in other bills our responsibilities to mental health patients.

I just have a few questions relating again to the principles of this bill before I take my seat. I have real reservations about supporting this when there's so much unknown about what this bill is and isn't going to cover. Why is the Mental Health Board not dissolved clearly in this bill when the implications are clearly there? Another entity is identified in the bill, but it's not clear what that entity would be.

3:50

Secondly, why is it that all the orders under section 3(1) are subject to the regulations, yet the Regulations Act does not apply to the orders under this section? What type of powers does this give to the minister?

Thirdly, why is there not a limited period of time up to when the regulations made by the Lieutenant Governor under section 4 can be retroactive? Is it customary for regulations to have a time span of only two years? Does this give the government such flexibility because they have no real plan for the changes that they are making, and they want to hedge their bets?

Under section 7(4), where the Lieutenant Governor can make regulations regarding the drugs that regional health authorities can provide for cancer treatment, why is there no public consultation or a willingness to include other professionals in that?

Finally, under the amendments for the Health Professions Act, why is the Mental Health Board removed from the legislation, yet section 51(1)(a) still includes reference to the Mental Health Act? That may be simply an oversight, but it does raise questions.

Can the minister explain what exactly will be the difference between the three advisory councils that are being created by this bill under mental health, addictions, and cancer? Is this purely a matter of controlling their budgets, or is it an unwillingness to divest some authority over where money is going?

I guess that on a final note, then, Mr. Speaker, we got to this place by making decisions on what is needed in the health care system to improve access, quality, and cost-effectiveness. When asked, the minister said that he had no clear evidence for why the regional health systems were or were not working. Now I guess I have to ask the question again: what measures are going to be put into place to establish whether this new organizational framework, including this particular bill and the dissolution of these three boards – what evidences or monitoring indicators are we going to put into place so

that five years from now we're not left wondering the same questions? What decisions are we going to make, and what's the evidence upon which we're going to make those decisions?

That's clearly what Albertans are asking for. Whether you're urban or rural, they want to know that the government is doing its job, monitoring, using best evidence, and making decisions on the evidence, not simply on whim or on ideology. That's the message that I'm getting from constituents and professionals across the province. There is significant frustration because of the appearance that we are lurching from one decision to another to restructure rather than really looking in detail at what's working and what's not working.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat and listen to more of the debate. Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Under 29(2)(a)?

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Chase: Yes. I wanted to ask my esteemed colleague what his greatest challenge was when he was a community health officer and if he sees any solutions in this reorganization that would have combatted the challenges that he experienced in his role in community health.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you. The restructuring of the health system really does hold potential for standardization across the province. There's no question that one could get more consistent services, more consistent monitoring, more consistent evidence for making changes in the system and improving the system. Why we had to go through three iterations and now bounce back to a provincial direction begs the question: what evidence are we basing our decisions on?

My greatest challenge in community health was really to engage citizens in taking an active role in creating the conditions for health in their communities; that is, relating to environmental pollution, a failure to notify authorities when something was a risk to the rest of the public, a feeling that they had no influence on their own health or on the way the health system was going.

To sum up, then, unless this new structure provides a mechanism for people at the very lower levels of community to communicate through their representatives in a very meaningful way to this Alberta Health Services Board, I don't see anything but more frustration ahead. If we fail to very quickly identify vehicles through which individuals at the grassroots and professionals at the grassroots can get their messages through to those that are making the decisions at the top, we are going to have increasing frustration, breakdown, and lawsuits associated with a system that's simply not working as it was even five years ago for people.

When quality and access are being compromised, people very quickly go after their health professional when something goes wrong and sue them. That makes the quality of life for health professionals that much more untenable, and they don't want to stay here. They want to work less, and they want to pass on to other provinces. I think this is a critical area that we need to work together on. We need to work constructively, and we need to find vehicles for hearing the voices from the ground level.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) any other hon. member?

Seeing none, then the hon. leader of the third party on the bill.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to Bill 42, the Health Governance Transition Act. You know, since I've been involved, we've seen a number of attempts by the government to bring about some sort of health care reform. The Mazankowski report, the MLA Task Force on Health Care Funding and Revenue Generation, and the third way are all reports that the government has produced during my time in this Assembly recommending changes in the health care system. It was interesting that major recommendations in all of these areas dealt in one degree or another with an increasing level of private delivery of health care, in some cases the reduction in the services that are publicly covered in the health care system and various user fees or other schemes to try and limit the access to the health care system, all under the guise of reducing the costs to the health care system.

Mr. Speaker, almost all of the research that has been done on health delivery systems in the world identifies a link between the extent of private delivery in a system and its cost, not a direct relationship but a rough relationship between the cost of health care and the amount of private delivery. The more private delivery, the higher the cost. Of course, the United States, which has the highest percentage of private delivery of virtually any industrialized country in the world, also has the highest per capita cost for health care, roughly twice what we have here in Canada. Nearly 40 million Americans don't have health insurance.

Now, in this last election the government had very little to say about health care and where they wanted to go with health care. When I checked the website, there were just a couple of points, very benign points, nothing to indicate that the government was again planning an attempt to provide a thorough reorganization of our health care system or fundamental changes in how health is delivered.

4:00

Nevertheless, after the election was safely out of the way, the current Minister of Health and Wellness revealed his enamourment with the Mazankowski report, something that had been previously shelved by the government because there was widespread public opposition to some key features of that report; namely, delisting of services, an increasing amount of private delivery, and user fees. Now, since then the minister has more or less gone underground and is no longer sharing with the public his longer term plans for the health care system.

Nevertheless, one aspect has been revealed, without an opportunity for public discussion or ability for the public to put this particular change in the context of the broader direction that he has in mind. He put forward the proposal of eliminating the health regions and consolidating them into one so-called superboard. Now, there are perhaps some advantages to this direction. It's clear that there has been a lack of consistency in the application of safety standards and good health practices in some of the hospitals, and these are mostly in the smaller health regions, in smaller centres.

If we go back a little bit further to the origin of the health region, it came about with health reforms in the '90s, where they decided they were going to create health regions. Now, that made sense, Mr. Speaker, in the sense that at that time these health authorities were supposed to be responsive to communities, responsive to local areas of the province, and their boards were going to be elected. That was originally the government's proposal. It made a lot of sense to have these smaller regions if, in fact, local control was going to be your objective. But the government reneged on the promise, and when these boards were actually put in place, only a third of them were actually elected.

After they functioned for not very long, a few years at most, I

think, the government then eliminated the elected component, fired the elected members with one or two exceptions, and appointed replacements. Then you had a bunch of small regional health boards who were appointed centrally. The reason for having them, I think, was undermined quite a bit by that. Nevertheless, they still created an impediment to a uniform application of health standards, which we've seen now in the case of St. Joseph's hospital in Vegreville and in High Prairie, in Vermilion, and so on.

I think, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, that in the larger centres, particularly Edmonton and Calgary, these local health authorities were more successful. There's been a great deal of concern expressed among many members of the Edmonton community about the loss of the Capital health authority, which I think was an exemplary health authority in many respects, and of Calgary as well. But there were challenges that were presented by the Calgary health authority with respect to control of costs, which I know the government was kind of concerned about.

If you've arrived at the decision to have a centralized health system – in other words, you've come full circle; you've experimented with a number of different things, none of them worked, and you've decided to come back to a central direction for the health care system in the province – then the question is: why do you need a board at all? What is the purpose of the board? Why not simply run the health system through the Department of Health and Wellness directly?

Well, I think the board has a couple of important functions from the government's point of view, and I don't think they're necessarily in the public interest, but I think that they're in the political interest of the Conservative government. First and foremost, this health board provides a political buffer between the minister and the government and anything that can go wrong in the health care system, which we all know it can. It gives some distance and some political insulation for the minister in the health care system, and he can always blame the board if something goes wrong. That's the first thing.

The second thing is that it's an ideal model to privatize the health care system. It's not a government department; it's a board. You can appoint businesspeople to the board, which the government has done, who will be focused on how they can privatize the health care system. I think this is the second shoe to drop, Mr. Speaker, with respect to this government's plan. They haven't revealed their plan, and they certainly haven't put the centralization of the health care system in any context of where they want to see the health system go.

We are left to speculate about what their ultimate intentions are, but if you look back historically, the government has repeatedly come back to the situation where they want to increase private delivery of health care. I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, and to members of this Assembly that the model of a superboard not only provides political insulation and protection for the government but is an ideal model for the progressive contracting out and privatization of our health care system, something this government has been trying to do for well over a decade.

I would hope that the government and the minister will take the public and this Assembly into his confidence about where he sees our health care system going. I find the fact that he's proceeding according to some plan which he refuses to share with us here or with the public generally to be completely unacceptable and very undemocratic. It is, of course, the public's health system, Mr. Speaker. It is not the minister's and it's not this Progressive Conservative government's health system. It belongs to the people of Alberta, and they have every right to know where the government plans to go and to be consulted. It is, in fact, I think, that consulta-

tion which would perhaps undermine the government's direction.

We were very critical and very active in opposing the third way as a plan to create a second tier of private health care for people with means, but the third-way proposal of the government had the advantage of having an extensive public consultation component. In fact, the minister at the time, now the Finance minister, travelled around the province consulting and listening to people. It was the people of this province that persuaded the government to drop the third-way proposal. We did our best to encourage that, and we like to think that we played a not insignificant role in getting the defeat of the third way, but it was actually the people of the province that stood up to the government and said: wait a minute; we don't like where you're going.

That component of public consultation and information has been excluded from the present minister's proposals because, I believe, he knows and the government knows that if they told the people of Alberta exactly where they're going with their health care plan, the public would object, and the public would insist that it be changed. Instead, we've got reform, in quotation marks, by stealth as opposed to open, public consultation.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, I think that it's important that the government should unveil its previously secret plan for change. I want to say that if we're going to have centralization in the province, then the government should dispense with the superboard. We don't accept this direction. There are many arguments for eliminating the health regions, but I don't see any argument for retaining a single health region, and I think the government ought to move in a direction of dispensing with that board.

As well, Mr. Speaker, when I look at the people who have been appointed by the government to this board, I get very, very concerned. I've had the opportunity to deal with at least some of them in my time with the city of Edmonton, and I can assure this House that I have very little confidence in their commitment to a public and publicly delivered health care system. The results will be, I think, erosion of patient care, increasing cost to the public purse, and desire for and a pressure for a second tier of health care.

Mr. Speaker, that will conclude my remarks. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of question and comment. The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, to the hon. member. If we just take aside the hypothetical situations you've put about privatization and all of that and just simply go back to the math, we're at a point in our government now or in the history of Alberta where health care is eating up in excess of 40 per cent of government expenditures, and that's been growing at roughly two and a half times the economic growth. If all of that were left aside – privatization, not privatization, whatever – in simple math how long would you let health care numbers grow at two or three times the growth of the economy until you said: "Wait a minute. That's unsustainable"? If it hits 60 per cent of our income? If it hits 80 per cent? Or if it finally hits over a hundred per cent of the Alberta budget? At what point would your party say: "You know, I think we might have a problem here with sustainability. We may have a problem with passing on a health care system to our kids, so maybe we better talk about it." At what point would you put that pencil down and say: I think we've crossed the line?

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good

question. I want to indicate that, in fact, the increase in health care budgets across the country is a concern for all governments regardless of political stripe, and we don't take that lightly. We don't dismiss that. There need to be some ways to control costs, and we've put forward solutions. We put forward our ideas. For example, doing bulk buying of pharmaceuticals could save us \$110 million a year. We could improve coverage for seniors in the seniors' drug plan. There are lots of things.

The government has done some good things with wait time management and centralizing that, and they've made dramatic changes. There is a need for innovation. There is a need for cost control. The question is: what do you do about it? In fact, as I said in my speech, the evidence worldwide is that costs are harder to contain when you have more private delivery in your health care system. Every expert at the government's own symposium in Calgary a few years ago made exactly that point. They said that if you want to control your costs, one of the things you don't want to do is go to more private delivery because the costs will inevitably climb, and the ultimate example of that is, of course, in the United States. So I think that that's an issue.

Do we have all the answers to controlling costs in the health care system? Absolutely not. Do we think that we should be proceeding in an open way with the public and discussing these issues and putting the different options on the table and evaluating them? Yes, we do, and we don't think the government is doing that. We think the government has a plan, but they're not sharing it with the public, and that's the problem which leads us to conclude that yet again the government is experimenting with ideas of privatization and contracting out as a solution, which will only make the situation worse.

Mr. Snelgrove: I guess turnabout is fair play because I didn't really get an answer out of that question that I put back to you, so that's okay.

The other option, instead of trying to limit spending or cut services and that, could be the Oregon model, that you're probably familiar with, where they went down the list and said: public health is only going to cover this far. It stopped just above leukemia. They said that the public health system cannot afford the dollars invested to treat it. One of the members of the public panel had a child that suffered from leukemia, so you can imagine their anguish when they said: if we can only do so much, we have to draw the line, and those that, unfortunately, fall under there just have to wait. That's one way. If you deny that there's a funding problem, you can just quit providing those services.

Or like the former Saskatchewan health minister Mr. Nilson said when I asked him the same question: when would their province would like to sit down and talk about hitting the wall, at 80 or 110 per cent? His answer was: you know, you Albertans are always about money. Unfortunately, in this job it is about counting the money.

I would ask again: do you think we are in a funding crisis or a spending crisis? If you do all the bulk buying you want in pharmaceuticals, you know that's only going to affect 3, 4 per cent tops. You know that any single thing besides salaries can have no effect except in the top 25 per cent. So at what point of government expenditures – 50 per cent, 60 per cent, or 100 per cent – would you say in your party that, no, we have to do something different?

The Deputy Speaker: You've run out of time. Sorry.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Just in response to the minister

of the Treasury Board, we can play around with numbers. The number that the minister played around with was 40 per cent of our budget. Yes, that's correct. But the other part of the equation that isn't advertised by the government is the fact that it's under 8 per cent, and it has been under 8 per cent of our GDP.

When we're talking about worthwhile investments, I would say that health care is one of the most worthwhile investments. Yes, we can improve the efficiency. Yes, we can improve the delivery. There are a variety of things we can do such as bulk buying. A national system of purchasing drugs would go a long way to solving the problem because the most expensive portion of health care other than the wages aspect is the pharmaceutical. So greater regulation and greater buying would help. The hon. minister will have a chance, I hope, under 29(2)(a), so I'll move along.

Forty-two of my soon to be sixty-one years have been spent in the province of Alberta being served under various health authorities. From 1956 to 1959 my father and our family were stationed on the Namao air base just outside of Edmonton. We went to Ontario for a few years and then came back, and I've been here since 1966, so I claim to be a proud Albertan.

In the time I've been here, there have been some very dramatic changes. When I first came to Calgary, rather than health boards there were actually hospital boards, and each hospital had a significant degree of autonomy. The beauty of the hospital board situation was that you knew who was directly accountable for the service that you received. You went to the hospital. It was that hospital that was accountable for your health delivery. It may seem like an oversimplified way of delivering health services, but it seemed to work very well.

Now, the government decided that wasn't the way to go, so they went to 17, I believe the number was, regional health boards. This was done in the name of efficiency, in the name also of efficacy, the idea being that we would provide a similar level of health services throughout the province. The intent is positive, but the actual result was somewhat questionable.

4:20

The government, in terms of its "Let's reduce" business, "Let's centralize power," performed the experiment first in 1994 with school boards. They consolidated school boards. They took away the school boards' autonomy to collect what at that point had been 50 per cent of their operating budget based on the educational portion of the property tax. Did it create more equality in terms of delivery of education in rural communities? Was the quality of education in the cities reduced? Those questions remain unanswered, but the lack of local autonomy was a large concern of the school boards.

Of course, when it came to the hospital boards, they went from 17, if I'm correct, down to nine, down to nothing. This had nothing to do with efficiency. It had nothing to do with autonomy. It had nothing to do with individuals having a voice at their local level. It was all about control. It was all about centralization. The answer to the *Ghost Busters* question, "Who you gonna call," remains elusive because it appears that the only person you're going to call is the minister of health or his designate with the so-called superboard. Any notion of local service or local authority or local accountability has been wiped out.

Now, I know that the health regions, you know, had some difficulties. People were very concerned, for example, with the Calgary regional health board, that if you wanted to ask a question, you had to send it in a written format, which the health region might or might not choose to answer, rather than having an opportunity to directly participate in a discussion at the monthly meetings. But at

least there was some form of feedback. Here you send your message to the health minister, whoever that person is at the time. Do you expect to get an answer? We don't know because we haven't seen the inner workings.

A concern I have as well is what is happening with mental health. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View expressed concerns over mental health. When I first came to Alberta mental health was a kind of lock-up situation. It was the old-fashioned snakepit asylum, where people who suffered mental illnesses were spirited away to institutions who did their best, given the knowledge of the time, to provide treatment for mental health. Some of that treatment has been of very great concern, an example being shock treatment, the business of being immersed in cold, icy water to somehow shock a person out of whatever their mental illness was and back into reality; the electro-shock system; the idea that if there's a certain part of your brain that's suffering from mental illness, you just perform a frontal lobotomy, and you cure that particular problem. We've had some rather barbaric ways of dealing with mental illness.

Well, mental illness now has gone from the institution to the street. Over a third of individuals, for example, at the Calgary drop-in centre are suffering from some form of mental illness.

Now, I appreciate the fact that the government has sort of jumped in front of the parade of 10 years to end homelessness and that some small first steps have taken place. For example, the hard-to-house individuals, the 24/7 care, is a very good first step, but of approximately 4,600 individuals – that was in the most recent count – we've started with finding homes for about 30 of the proposed 50.

Another initiative that the government created, to its credit – I don't believe the facility is completely up and running and staffed yet – is built near the Inglewood bird sanctuary. That will house approximately 150 individuals.

Given the large number of individuals who are basically released to the street because the government is not subsidizing the in-home care or the supports or the support workers, people are basically reduced to almost the old style of abandoning the individual to the ice floe. In this case the ice floe is the streets. A number of individuals suffering from mental illness have such difficulties that even if they have loving families, without medical oversight and assistance the person sort of abandons any kind of a structured existence, and their family's best efforts are rejected. So I have great concerns about these people wandering around in stuporous states on the streets.

Last January I had an opportunity to ride with a group of paramedics out of station 3, which is directly across from the Stampede grounds. We delivered people to various centres. Alpha House was our first delivery when we found a person intoxicated. I couldn't believe the care and compassion that the paramedics provided to this individual. We dropped them off at Alpha House, and what treatment was there at Alpha House? About a half-inch-thick foam mat on a cement floor, but at least that night that woman would not have frozen to death because for that night, when it was minus 30, she had a bed to go to. While there was compassion at Alpha House, there wasn't treatment. They could potentially connect her with CUPS or other service-providing organizations.

The fact that people are basically sleeping a half an inch from the floor is a pretty sad comment on how we deal with individuals, whether they're suffering from addictions, from mental illness, or as is so frequently the case in this booming province, from poverty. This has to be addressed, and I don't see it being addressed in Bill 42, the Health Governance Transition Act.

As the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View pointed out, the Auditor General had great concerns that the government didn't seem

to have any objectives in terms of treating individuals with mental illness or a plan. Obviously, if you fail to plan; you plan to fail, as the expression goes.

I'm also very concerned about the atmosphere in which people find themselves: shoulder to shoulder, not on beds but floor mats, whether it be in the Mustard Seed or whether it be in the drop-in centre or in any of the nine shelters that the Calgary drop-in centre operates. The night I did the 15-hour shift with the paramedics, what I saw when I went into the drop-in centre was the equivalent of a moth flitting around a candle. There was this one individual in a wheelchair who kept cruising in and out and around, very restless in their moves, while other individuals were lining up for their nightly meal. I saw individuals who were in their 80s. I saw young individuals, you know, 16, all sort of thrown into this human detritus because the government was not providing any support, and that caused me concern.

4:30

I'm very concerned about what is happening with AADAC. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre talked about where AADAC may or may not end up and how it will be dismantled and portioned off to a variety of areas. As a former grade 9 teacher my students had an opportunity to participate in AADAC programming. They got sort of an external shock treatment of their own because they went to the hospitals and they talked to people who had been in accidents, mostly due to alcohol or drug related, and it was the equivalent of the scared straight programs. Although the majority of AADAC's money is spent in treatment as opposed to education and prevention, that one program that was available to grade 9 students was extremely effective, and I'm concerned that we'll lose that program.

I'm also concerned about the Cancer Board being basically tossed into the blender of health provision services along with AADAC and all kinds of health delivery. Premier Klein, to his credit, promised half a billion dollars in 2005-06 that would go towards the Tom Baker cancer centre in Calgary, and unfortunately nothing has happened since. I've been part of discussions where it was suggested that the Tom Baker cancer centre might be located where currently the Calgary Foothills hospital complex is. There have been discussions about it being potentially housed at the west campus of the University of Calgary, that I represent in Calgary-Varsity. But there's been no funding provided, so individuals suffering from cancer quite often have to leave the province to get particular types of treatment because the province doesn't recognize certain cocktails that apply to a variety of different cancers.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of question and comment.

Mr. Snelgrove: Given that, obviously, I guess Bill 42 isn't a real issue because a lot of what we talked about there were generalities around health care and really, honestly, had very little to do with the new governance model, I want to put the same question back to you. Given that since 2006-07 just the increase in health care spending would wipe out 12 departments in government completely or that just the increase in health care spending is equivalent now to the departments of children's services, Employment and Immigration, Justice, and Solicitor General, just the increase since '06-07, over \$3 billion, and given that we're spending around 40 per cent – and that doesn't include other health care fundings in seniors and children's services or the infrastructure – the plan is in excess of \$3 billion. Doing all of the perfect things that you would like to do, at what point in government spending would you say: this is a reasonable

amount of a government budget to spend on health care in Alberta? Given that it's at 40 now, is it 50 or 60 or 70, or when does it become a problem for the hon. member that it's unsustainable?

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Hon. minister of the Treasury, I share your concerns about the costs of health delivery, but what I'm seeing in our current system is a series of inefficiencies; for example, seniors in acute-care beds because there aren't any long-term care beds for them. So there is a correction we could make in terms of having greater long-term care. Another correction is to take them out of the institutions and provide in-home supportive care because that is a third or less of the cost.

I am not suggesting that we keep spending more and more dollars on health care delivery. I am saying that rather than creating superboards, let's create efficiencies. The greatest efficiencies that we can create are by supporting people in their homes as long as they possibly can, whether it's through organizations like Meals on Wheels, whether it's through the VON, whether it's support care workers. It's not a matter of how much money do we spend but of: how well do we spend the money that we have?

Mr. Snelgrove: Unless the assumption is that there will be no board and the department would handle all of the administrative aspects of health care, which I guess would be kind of a board or department, if no board is an option, or a multitude, hundreds of little boards like we had before, or in some cases some of the issues around homelessness, where I think in Edmonton there are like 41 or 47 groups, good people trying to do good work – with the co-ordination that we talk about, that you alluded to in the Auditor General's report, what would be the appropriate number of governance bodies, then, to effectively make sure that we weren't either duplicating or having people fall through the cracks in the health care system? What do you think would be the appropriate number of governance bodies to ensure that that co-ordination was there?

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Again, it's a very good question. The government has a very definite role in terms of what we believe in terms of stewardship. The government has a seniors ministry. It has a health ministry. It has a Children and Youth Services ministry. But there is not very much co-ordination between the various ministries to achieve the best results. People get shuffled from ministry to ministry to ministry at expense both to the individual and to the government before their situation is resolved. The government has a role in co-ordinating services.

Unless there are further questions in the 29(2)(a) portion, I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 10 Security Services and Investigators Act

The Chair: We will continue on from the last adjournment. We will discuss amendment A1.

Ms Blakeman: We're still on A1?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms Blakeman: I'm sorry. Is this a general discussion on A1, or have we been going through by the alphabet sectioning and voting it as we went? If so, where are we?

The Chair: General discussion on A1.

Ms Blakeman: We haven't voted anything yet?

The Chair: No. We have not voted.

4:40

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Thank you very much. All right. I had the opportunity to spend five hours travelling at the end of last week, and of course, as everyone who knows me would understand, I spent the time reading *Hansard* of various committees to go back over what the discussions had been around Bill 10.

A couple of issues continue to come up for me that I am not satisfied with. One of them is around the issue of training. The sponsor of the bill, who's the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, had answered some of my previous questions by saying: well, no, that had been looked at, and it will be dealt with in the regulations. It was around training issues in particular. But as I go back and look at his responses to the questions that were raised during committee and in response to the issues identification brief that was presented to the committee, I'm not satisfied by the responses from the member because there's no additional information there. It just says: don't worry about it; we'll look after it. I want to get a much clearer idea of what he is anticipating because surely he's not making those statements without having an idea of exactly what he intended or that he understands the government intended to do around training and the specifics for training.

You know, some of the areas that are giving me concern are that there are sort of back-end things that are mentioned, like that there should be concern that the companies will hire a fit and proper person but nothing up front about actually training and screening employees who are being brought on for this kind of work. I'm looking for information. Firms will be taught to weed out employees with authority issues. This appears in the July 23 policy field committee *Hansard* on page 24. Well, who's going to teach them how to do this, and what exactly is anticipated here? Is any firm that is going to be involved in security going to be sent out to Grant MacEwan or any college that is available to teach them how to weed out employees with authority issues? You've got to give me much more concrete information than what I'm getting because as I go back and look at your previous comments to see what you meant, I'm getting more questions out of it.

Again, it talks about minimum training on the use of force and that it's not necessary to have any kind of minimum requirement for school education. Then there's a discussion about: well, you know, no requirement; no grade 12, no grade 11, no grade 10. "No, no," they say. For that I say: well, then, what's your expectation around evidence collection or note taking on evidence that's obvious at a scene or report writing? That's not to say that someone without a grade 10 education can't write a report, but I think that if we're really looking for a standard or a level of quality that is going to stand up in court, we'd want to have some kind of basic understanding here.

You know, you're playing both sides against the middle here. You're telling me: don't worry about this; the training is all going to be looked after. When I go in and look at what you've said in all the conversations we've had about this bill, I get more concerned.

You're worrying me that you don't require any level of school education, yet you have an expectation that these people in these companies will be taking notes on evidence and writing reports and going to court.

This member, I know, has very firm ideas about the relationship between the police and the court system and lawyers and judges and sentencing and prison, yet what we know is happening, part of the frustration of this member, I'm sure, is that people who've done bad things don't necessarily always serve the time the member and others believe they should because things don't go well in the court. Things like evidence are part of the things that can go wrong. Now you're telling me in the bill that the member is bringing forward: well, that's okay. Somehow these people are just supposed to know this stuff without any specifics. I'm not gaining any reassurance here that there is a clear path that is being followed here, a plan that is being followed, that once these regulations all go into place, there is a concerted training program that will be available.

Now, I'll remind the member that what I had asked for was the licensing of anyone that is working – and every single category in here requires a licence and a fee to be paid – and that particularly those that are working as guards or front-line workers in this particular area would be required to attend a training session at a local college for a period of one or two days. They pay a fee for this, and their licence is granted to them upon successful completion of the course. Now, you want to be able to weed people out. You want to be able to keep an eye out for – what is that wording? – employees with authority issues and fit and proper persons. There's a way that you're going to have somebody watching them for two days who's likely to have a fairly informed opinion that they could put forward on that. I have increasing concerns around the training.

In response the last time I raised this, the member warmly nodded at me and said: yeah, and we're going to look after that under the regs. Well, I'm not seeing the regs. I would truly, honestly, really like to be able to trust the government on regs, but experience, bitter experience, cynical experience, has taught me not to do that because it doesn't show up, and then two years from now when I'm trying to ask a question in question period as to why this isn't happening, I'm told that I should have raised it in a different venue and would I please do a written question or bring it up in Public Accounts. You see how these things start to go off. You've got to do this stuff right up front. If I'm being hard on the member, too bad. You need to do it right the first time.

Again, on July 23, page 20, they're talking about the emotional fitness of someone to be working in this field without giving any context for how that emotional fitness would be determined.

Now, I want to move on to some of the things that came up as I worked my way through all of this material that doesn't seem to be included in the bill, nor did it come up in any of the amendments that we are currently anticipating. The amendments are essentially following the recommendations that came out of the committee.

One of the things I'm looking for here is call centres that are outside of the province. I got in trouble the last time because I made up the name of a company, and then I got asked for the spelling. I didn't get in trouble; I got questioned about it. So I'll just be clear here. I'm making up the name of a company: Alarm Responder. God, I hope that's not a real name. Anyway, Alarm Responder Inc. Co. Canada. They have call centres that respond. So you might be hooked up and your alarm goes off, and it's answered by somebody in Hamilton, Ontario. Now, those people are not bound by the rules that we are putting forward in this legislation. So how am I as a citizen to expect that they will be operating under rules that I understand? How can they be held to account according to what we set out that we want to have happen in this province?

Is the member anticipating some kind of reciprocal agreements with somebody? That's showing up under section K, and it's saying that if they want to provide services or work in Alberta, they're supposed to provide a copy of their licence to Alberta, and they will get a licence to operate in Alberta. But that's not telling me that a national alarm-answering company that's got a call centre in Pictou county or Hamilton or Penticton is going to treat my personal information in the way that we expect it will be treated through our privacy legislation in Alberta. That's the next question I have.

Finally, who has access to – somebody raised this in one of the discussions I was reading. We're increasingly moving to security systems which are operated off biofiles – an iris imprint or a thumbprint – and the information is travelling or being verified by cellular or satellite. Same problem: who's got access, and how do we control this? I mean, the short answer to that is that we can't because they're operating outside of our jurisdiction. Well, then I start saying: "You're the government; you have to protect me. What are you doing to protect me so that my iris imprint isn't scanned and taken up by cellular or satellite transmission and stored in some ABC security company's private database?" [interjection] Exactly. Then I go to fly on my little holiday somewhere and end up getting picked up because there's a misunderstanding about something.

4:50

I have real concerns about those two particular issues, about how we're going to be protected from companies that are operating in Alberta but, in fact, are physically located outside of the province. The reciprocal agreements that are talked about in section K do not cover what I'm talking about.

I will take my seat for the time being and try and read my other notes while I listen to the member respond to my questions. Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Chair, perhaps we could do this in a little bit different way. The hon. member is jumping over some of the amendments, and other things she's talking about have nothing to do with the amendments. Are we having a general discussion about the bill here, or are we talking about specific amendments? If we're talking about amendments, let's pick some amendments. Let's talk about the specific amendments and maybe bundle them up. I mean, there are 10, 12, 15 amendments here. I would propose that if there are specific amendments that we need to vote on and discuss and give answers to, we talk about those amendments and not just jump around to the bill in general and talk about that.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I'm happy to. I've already raised one very specifically under section K, reciprocal agreements, which is not covering what I was looking for. So where can I expect to find that? It's not in these amendments. It's not in the bill. Where can I expect to find it?

Mr. Anderson: Definitely we can address that question. I'm just saying that the other statements that you made had nothing to do with the amendments; they had to do with the bill in general. Again, if there are specific amendments that the hon. member wants to go over and vote on, that sort of thing, let's go ahead and do that, but if we're going to have a general discussion about the bill, it doesn't make sense to go about it this way.

The Chair: The chair has an understanding that there is an agreement or understanding that the discussion is on the amendments all together, and then when we call for a vote, we will vote on each one at a time.

Mr. Anderson: Okay. Specifically going back to the question of the regulations and whether or not training standards should be in regulation or in the bill, the intent of this bill and the intent of the Solicitor General's office going forward is to make sure that we follow the national standards that are already in place. If you look to B.C. and to Ontario, they have very high national standards in place for very similar legislation. We want to make sure that we have the same or even higher standards here in Alberta. That's the type of training that we're going to pursue.

However, to put it into the legislation, I have to disagree with the hon. member. It doesn't make any sense. I mean, training standards change over time. They can change from year to year. They can change from month to month if there was an inquiry that said that, you know, such and such a practice should be changed to be something else. We have to be able to change and be flexible and make sure that we always have the highest standards. If we put all of the standards in the legislation and are unable to change them on a timely basis, then the people of Alberta are going to suffer from that.

I mean, if there are specific regulations that the hon. member has issue with, by all means, let's bring them forward to the Solicitor General and Public Security office, and we'll take a look at them and make sure that they're responded to accordingly. To put them all in the legislation I don't think is appropriate.

As for K, I think the member was alluding to this reciprocal agreements clause. Yes, that's right. The point of that clause is very simple. It's just to make sure that when we have agreements in place that would cover this area with other provincial governments, we're going to respect those agreements. There's no way we can put into this legislation all the agreements that would fall under this clause. I mean, there's just no way to do that. We have to, you know, one agreement at a time, and if it's appropriate in certain circumstances and the minister feels it's appropriate, then this clause will apply. So people, say, from B.C., if they have adequate training, can come to Alberta. They still have to be licensed, but they don't have to go through the training all over again if the training was good enough to satisfy our standards.

Again, I think it goes back to – this is something that's in here. It recognizes that sometimes there are reciprocal agreements in place, but those reciprocal agreements have to be appropriate, and the minister's the one that's going to determine whether that is so or not.

I hope that answers those questions.

Ms Blakeman: Well, with respect, no, it doesn't. I was raising issues under section K, which is being proposed in this amendment to be put into the bill, and saying: how are you going to deal with the fact that somebody is physically existing outside of the province and offering services inside the province? Clearly they are not covered under section K, which I think you've now confirmed. But in listening to what the member is saying, what he's saying and what's actually in this amendment are two different things. This amendment doesn't say anything about meeting the standards in Alberta or doing any additional tests. It says that if an agreement exists between Alberta and another jurisdiction to recognize licences to perform security work, then if that person is licensed somewhere else, they can turn it in and get a copy and get licensed to work in Alberta. It says nothing about meeting standards. It says nothing about meeting training requirements here in Alberta. It says that if you've got a licence somewhere else, you can trade it in and get one in Alberta.

This is where I'm having issue with what the member is proposing because there's a suggestion that things are there that, when you read it, aren't there. No place am I asking for training to be written into

the legislation except for the two-day plan. What I'm saying is that I'm being asked to believe that somehow this is going to turn up in regulation, and there are no regulations for me to look at. I've now just heard the member say: we're going to look and build off of what Ontario has done. Okay, fine. Now I can go look at Ontario and see what it is you're considering and be able to react to that. But that's the first time I've ever had anything connected with this bill to hang some information on and go and look at so that I can come back and go: "All right. I've seen what Ontario does. If you're going to do the same thing, I agree or I disagree."

That's the problem with putting everything in regulations: we don't get the information. I'm hearing that we'll just accept across the board anybody that turns up with somebody else's licence. They provide a copy to us of that licence, and we issue a licence out to them. There are no standards or training required in that.

The last issue that has been raised – and I think there was a minority report about it – was the concerns around striking out the Law Enforcement Review Board and making an appeal to the director. The director will perform a review, which is the intention that that's as high or as thorough as – that's where the buck stops: an additional review by the director.

I do have concerns here about striking out "the allegation of use of excessive force." Later on in a different section you put back in: if there's an allegation of a criminal offence. So you're willing to accept the allegation of a criminal offence, but you're not willing to accept the allegation that someone has used excessive force. Can the member explain that apparent contradiction to me, please?

5:00

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Yes. That's a legitimate question. The thought in the committee when this was discussed was that an allegation of use of excessive force was a very vague term, and what's excessive to one person may not be so excessive to another. Yeah, it is quite subjective. What we thought we would do instead is create kind of two instances which were a lot more clear. One is where there's an allegation of criminal use of force. In that case, then, the employer, the licensee, would be required to report that allegation to the registrar so that the registrar could deal with it. That's very black and white. When someone makes a criminal allegation – everyone knows what that is – you make the report.

The second category was any use of force – the hon. member, I'm sure, will love this – as prescribed in the regulations. The reason for that is so that we can specifically go through the different types of force that could be used in the security services' and private investigators' scope of work and define what should be kept internally, on the internal company records, and what doesn't need to be. For example, if a security guard goes over and escorts somebody out and maybe touches their elbow when he escorts them out, that's not likely going to be something that they need to keep on their internal records of an event happening. That's pretty every day. That's an everyday happening, and it's not serious. However, if there was a situation where, say, a patron was attacking another person in the store and needed to be removed and put down on the floor by the security guard, that might be considered excessive to some, but it might be very appropriate to others.

Regardless, that sort of thing should be kept on the internal company records so that if an allegation of criminal force ever did come up in the future, they could go back, and they would have a clear record of that use of force. The registrar can make the appropriate determination of whether there was, indeed, criminal force used or whether the force was appropriate or not. That's the reason we separated those two.

Ms Blakeman: I'm sorry. Where is he referencing the criminal use of force? What I'm seeing is a section that's been added in this amendment under (d.1), which is about an allegation that an individual has committed a criminal offence. There's a big difference between criminal use of force and a criminal offence. [interjection] The member is saying that a criminal offence and criminal use of force are the same thing. Okay.

The rest of this has been around the changes in the review agreements and how the review is held.

Okay. Those are my questions on the amendments. Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. If at any point you're failing to see my connection, I'm primarily talking about: part C, section 19 is amended, the (a), (b), and the (d.1). I have concerns that sort of fit into three categories: one is training; one is equipment; one has to do with standards and oversight.

In terms of equipment I believe that regardless of what your occupation is, whether it's security or whether it's a member of the Legislature, you're most important piece of equipment is your brain. When it comes to the security function and dealing with any type of threat, especially of a physical nature, then the second most important piece of equipment is your feet or your mobility, your ability to walk away if you can and get the assistance or the backup that's necessary. That's not just within a policing or a security provision. That's on a regular, everyday situation.

Now, in part C, section 19, with the various amendments there is a concentration on excessive force. I would just like for the record to indicate that I'm no stranger to testosterone. I played rugby for 17 years until my wife wouldn't pick me up at the Foothills emergency anymore. I have gone through a series of courses in martial arts: judo, ju-jitsu, shorinji kempo, kung fu, hard and soft forms of karate. I've participated in and I've coached wrestling. I've also refereed wrestling. I can remember, for example, in rugby getting psyched up before a game and basically running on the spot with our cleats banging against the concrete floor, turning ourselves into a frenzied circumstance, and then in some cases being baggiped onto the field. It was more as though we were going into battle than we were going in to play a game. There is no doubt that testosterone was flowing given that circumstance. But that's where the brain comes in to mitigate the effects of the testosterone.

Also, I was an equal-opportunity coach in wrestling, and along with an individual, Herb Coburn, who at the time was coaching at T.B. Riley junior high school, we were among the first coaches to introduce wrestling for young women. I know that not only does testosterone drive you, but to be fair to both sexes, estrogen can be a driving factor as well, so it's an equal opportunity in terms of motivation and the potential use of excessive force. This is where I'm concerned with C, section 19, (a), excessive force.

Under training I'm concerned about the various levels. In some security organizations your level of training is how long it takes you to put on your uniform and a manual to read while you're doing the night shift on the construction site. In the case of our Alberta government police force, the sheriffs, the training for a new recruit who doesn't have a background in policing could be in the weeks, a very few short weeks, versus the years of training provided at Lethbridge University, Mount Royal College, and so on. The various standards are not clearly outlined in Bill 10, and that's a concern.

Regardless of your training there is the possibility of making mistakes. Obviously, the longer you've been under a training circumstance, the less likely it is to happen, but sometimes police

individuals in the public's best interest put themselves into a dangerous circumstance. We had a very unfortunate circumstance such as that years ago in Calgary on the Deerfoot Trail, when the police had wisely abandoned a chase, but they decided instead to lay out a spike belt. Unfortunately, a police officer was killed while on duty in the attempt to stop this person from killing someone, including themselves.

Even with the best training, things can go awry, but with the backup of courses such as at universities or at colleges a person has a better understanding and a better potential.

Also, along the lines with regard to training and testosterone and excessive force there is the potential of a macho glamour associated within the security interest that is very similar to rugby. I can remember in my younger, sillier days sporting T-shirts with slogans like Take Violence Off the Street and Put It Back on the Field Where It Belongs, Play Rugby; or Donate Blood, Play Rugby. I'll save some of the less polite forms that also were expressed on rugby T-shirts.

5:10

In terms of equipment, knowing how to handle that equipment can be the difference between life or death, an injury, or a serious wound. When I had the opportunity to work in Kananaskis Country and operate the Cataract Creek wilderness campground, I had the pleasure of meeting with a conservation officer, Pat Ronald, who was in charge of the sheep ranger station. Pat had done his training through the University of Lethbridge. One of the stories he told me was of a situation where he was making an arrest on an individual, and he wasn't wearing his vest at that particular moment. He had the person sort of down on the ground but didn't realize the person had a concealed weapon, and the young individual pulled out a knife. It was only because of the training that Pat had that he was able to subdue the individual and prevent the individual from being injured or himself from being injured.

The equipment and how it's used is very important. If the equipment is being used in a defensive manner, to protect, it's great, but if you put on your flak jacket or your vest and you go out as though you're going into battle because you've got the armour, then that kind of mentality is a concern. If you don't have the training that matches the equipment, then there are concerns associated.

Also, for example, in training is the use of restraints. Now, having coached wrestling, I know after a fashion and through the martial arts the least likely types of restraints to injure someone. If you put someone in a chokehold, such as is legitimate in judo, then chances are they're going to pass out and fairly quickly if it's done under a controlled circumstance. That's a very questionable form of restraint. Sometimes just simply embracing the person and putting them in the equivalent of a bear hug is a sufficient restraint, but there's always the possibility of getting a head to your nose, and having taught a variety of self-defence techniques, I know the possibilities. But if a person doesn't know how to properly restrain individuals – and this has happened in bar situations – then people have their air passages blocked, and serious damage is being done. So the method of training and the equipment and the holds are extremely important, and that doesn't happen when a person is just simply given a brown or a blue uniform and sent out to a job site.

I have concerns with this bill that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere brought out about: well, standards change rapidly, and we can't respond to them with the rapidity necessary if they're laid out in a minimal fashion in legislation. I disagree that the Legislature can't respond in a quick and efficient manner and that standards cannot be updated through amendments through legislation. We meet at least twice a year, so there are opportunities to phase in

standards. But if we don't know what the rule book is – you know, to use sort of the police lingo: throw the book at him – if we don't know what's in that book and how to interpret what the regulations are, then how do we operate?

My last concern has to do with standards and oversight. It's my concern that credibility is lost without some form of civilian oversight, and after a fashion that's what we are in this Legislature, a form of civilian oversight. The business of the Law Enforcement Review Board, which is an internal situation but at least is the equivalent of a jury, that power being given directly to a director, which is the equivalent of a judge, concerns me greatly.

Also, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out, I have concerns about the record keeping, the file security. We've had discussions in this House with regard to our health records and the fact that computers were stolen. Information bills, such as the PATRIOT Act out of the United States, cause me to have concern about how our information is shared and to what extent the reciprocal agreements allow that information to be shared.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre talked about eye scans and various other forms of surveillance and under what circumstances that information is being legitimately transferred. We have the circumstance of the Arar case, where an individual's information was manipulated and he found himself in a Syrian prison courtesy of some of our police force sending information of a questionable nature to the States. So we have great concerns about the direction that is being taken in terms of our security. It's great to have agreements between provinces and across the federal government, but with regard to the reciprocal agreements being the sharing of questionable information, then we have concerns.

Mr. Chair, I see that we're running out of time. If I may, I call for an adjournment at this point and look forward to continuing at a later date.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 32

Meat Inspection Amendment Act, 2008

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I know that this bill actually started out being pretty innocuous, but just given the timing of it, it raised a lot of other issues of concern because this is around meat inspection. Of course, what it brought back to mind was the whole listeriosis situation but also, wider than that, the issues around public health and what kind of a relationship government has in regulating, monitoring, and enforcing various procedures to make sure that there is public health.

5:20

One of the ways that they do that here is around meat inspection. This is essentially transferring the responsibilities for the mobile butcher facilities to Agriculture and Rural Development. That clusters all of those requirements under Agriculture and Rural Development and in this particular case is moving the mobile butcher facilities – I would have called them abattoirs – away from the regional health authorities, which, of course, don't exist anymore.

I know that I'm expecting some brilliance by way of an amendment to this bill. I'll just allow the member to get a bit organized here.

You know, with all of the other things that have been said around this bill or the concerns that have been put on the record around public safety, in the end we are cautiously willing to support this bill. I didn't have any particular issue with any one given section. But I understand that there is going to be an amendment coming in, so I'm going to give way and listen carefully to what is being proposed by way of an amendment to Bill 32.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased to have this opportunity to speak briefly to this bill. I find the bill very acceptable except for one section, and that has to do with the mobile butchers. They provide an extremely important service out in the countryside. I do not agree with section 5, where we were going to take out 4(2) and repeal that section, because what that would mean, then, is that a mobile butcher would have to have the live animal inspected prior to slaughter. Of course, the cost of doing that would be totally prohibitive and totally unnecessary because currently the meat from that process can only be used by the owner of the animal and/or his immediate family.

I'm going to be proposing an amendment that would repeal section 5. It would then mean that the protection that the mobile butcher has under 4(2) would still remain in the act. Currently what we have here would basically have meant that the protection would have to be in regulation, and we would much prefer to see it in legislation.

The Chair: The pages have distributed the amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House. This shall be known as amendment A1 to Bill 32.

On the amendment the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I just want to make sure that I'm in the right section. It says: part A, section 5 is struck out. I just want to understand. The hon. member was suggesting that if the meat is for one's own consumption, the requirement of the inspection be waived. If that could be provided so that I understand it, then I'll continue, if I may, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Yes. Mr. Chairman, if you read 4(2), it says:
Subsection (1) does not apply to a mobile butcher who slaughters or assists in the slaughter of animals the meat from which is to be consumed by the producer of the animal or by the members of the producer's immediate [family].

We want to leave that in the act, and Bill 32 would strike out that section. We don't want that section struck out. We want it left. That's what the amendment is about.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Not to prolong, but you're saying that "a mobile butcher who slaughters or assists in the slaughter of animals the meat from which is to be consumed by the producer of the animal or by the members of the [family]" should be taken out?

Mr. Lund: No. Bill 32 would take that part out. We're saying that we don't agree with taking it out. The amendment that I'm proposing would leave it in.

Mr. Griffiths: If I could just enhance the hon. member's comments. There is nothing in the bill that was going to remove the exemption, that on-farm slaughter for a person who had produced the animal. That was not going to be removed. It was going to be moved from legislation into regulation. But there was some discussion about the security that goes for mobile butchers knowing that that animal can be exempt, that they don't have to endure the extra cost. Rather than move it to regulation, it will simply remain in legislation, so nothing is substantially changed within that. Nothing is being removed. It's just moving it back into legislation.

Since I have the floor, since this is my bill, Mr. Chairman, I did want to express that I give full support to this amendment, and I encourage all members to support it.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. What the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House is basically saying is the same as for a hunter. A hunter slaughters his deer. It's for his own family's consumption and therefore should not be subject to the same type of inspection. Therefore, the butcher of this mobile circumstance – I believe the correct term is "abattoir" – is excluded from the required inspection process if the meat is being eaten where it was slaughtered. If that is the case, then I am fully in support of the amendment. I believe I understand it.

The Chair: Do any other hon. members wish to speak on this?

Seeing none, then the chair will put the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: Back to the bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Right. I'm quite willing to adjourn debate at this point, but I'm not willing to call the question.

The Chair: It's 5:30. The committee will stand recessed until 7:30 p.m.

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

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