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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

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

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Ron, QC, Calgary-Glenmore (PC), Deputy Premier, Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations</p> <p>Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (L)</p> <p>Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (L), Leader of the Official Opposition</p> <p>Tarchuk, Hon. Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC), Minister of Children and Youth Services</p> <p>Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (L), Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition</p> <p>VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)</p> <p>Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)</p> <p>Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)</p> <p>Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Energy</p> <p>Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)</p> <p>Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC), Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration</p> <p>Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Minister of Aboriginal Relations, Deputy Government House Leader</p>
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[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 18, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome back.

Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 54 guests seated in the public gallery. There are 44 students, seven parent helpers, two teachers, and one educational assistant. The teachers: Mrs. Ali Dixon, Miss Kari Archer, Mrs. Deanna Ruether. The parent helpers: Mrs. Rose Stewart, Mrs. Lori Klebak, Mrs. Jannine Bettac, Mrs. Carolyn Tarnasky, Mr. Daren Evans, Mrs. Debby Glauser, and Mrs. Shelly Kotyk. I would ask all of the students and parents and teachers to rise, and I wish everybody would welcome them with very warm applause.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege for me today on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and myself to introduce to you and through you 24 very outstanding students from the lovely area of Beverly-Clareview and, specifically, Balwin school. These students are here as a special project of that school in conjunction with two other schools to study how Bill 37, the Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (Holodomor) Memorial Day Act, was passed and the history that it made. They have made a videotape of this, and it will be aired on CTV on Thursday during the 6 o'clock news and again on Saturday at 12 o'clock noon. They are accompanied today by parent Patricia Pawluk, by Victoria school for the performing arts students Steve Ashworth and Ainslie Fowler, and by their own teacher, Luba Eshenko, who is a daughter of a Holodomor survivor.

[Remarks in Ukrainian] We welcome all of you. Please stand. [As submitted]

Would you join me in welcoming them.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to introduce to you and through you 44 of the best parents, teachers, and students in the province of Alberta. These grade 6 students from Edmonton's Meadowlark Christian school, which is part of Edmonton public schools, are leaders in the school. The students along with their parents and the staff are part of a caring community committed to developing excellence in learning, leading, and living. It is through their hard work that Meadowlark Christian school is a great place to learn and work. They're accompanied by their teachers and group leaders Mrs. Lynn Schroeder and Mr. Mike Krogen and by parents Mr. Ryan Brodrecht, Mrs. Donna Laird, Mrs. Brenda Graves, Mr. Rob Mulyk, Mrs. Patti Kern, Mrs. Carolyne

Champigny, and Dr. Brenda Wollin. Also amongst them we have a prime minister and a governor general that were elected in their school. If I can ask all of my friends from Meadowlark to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Dr. Mariusz Sapijaszko, an Edmonton dermatologist and regional representative of the Canadian Dermatology Association's sun awareness program, and Ms Tanny Nadon of the Alberta Society of Melanoma. Dr. Sapijaszko and his team are holding a skin cancer screening event in this building today to raise awareness about the importance of early detection of the disease, and I know that just after lunch a number of members took advantage of this. For those who haven't had the opportunity to get to the first floor in the rotunda, the screenings will continue until 4 o'clock this afternoon, and I encourage everyone to take advantage of this service. Our guests today are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Dexter Durfey, associate superintendent of Westwind school division, located in Cardston-Taber-Warner. Joining Mr. Durfey is Mr. Bruce Moltzan, associate superintendent of Chinook's Edge school division, and two members of their project team: James McKee, vice-president of the commercial division of Enmax, seated in the members' gallery, and Allen Crowley, seated in the public gallery, who is with EDC Associates.

Mr. Speaker, three southern Alberta school boards are reaping the rewards of an innovative electrical energy partnership with Enmax Energy known as the wind power consortium. The group visiting the Leg. today represents 40 school boards from across the province that have joined together as Alberta schools for sustainable energy. The school boards plan to build on and enhance the success of the wind power consortium to deal with the challenge of rising energy costs by pursuing a long-term energy agreement based on electricity supplied by renewable sources of generation.

These representatives are in Edmonton today to meet with Alberta Education staff to discuss this innovative green energy project. They are seated in both galleries, and I'd ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure to introduce citizens who travelled the long and arduous highway 63 to be here today. They are members of the public and Catholic school boards. Joining me today to watch the proceedings are Dennis Parsons, superintendent of the public board; Allan Kallal, superintendent, business and finance; Jeff Thompson, who is the chair; Glenn Doonanco, who is the vice-chair; Glenn Cooper, a trustee; Angela Adams, who is a trustee; and Elizabeth Eenkooren, who is a trustee of the public board. Also joining them is the chair of the Catholic board, Geraldine Carbery, and superintendent Kim Jenkins. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome and indicate how much they enjoyed the first 20 kilometres of the Minister of Transportation's new twinned highway 63.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks so much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. One is a group from Grant MacEwan College centre for the arts. Some are seated, I believe, in the public gallery and some in the members' gallery. There are 22 of them all together, and they are being led today by Mr. Roy Wood. I would ask them to please rise wherever they're seated and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. I should note that the Grant MacEwan College program for the arts is a jewel for this province.

The second introduction is a group of visitors from the University of Alberta International Centre, seven visitors altogether. I'm not sure they're here yet, but they will be seated in the public gallery. They are led by Ms Khadija Jetha. I would welcome them as well. Please give them a warm applause.

Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly members of the Transit Riders' Union of Edmonton. The Transit Riders' Union of Edmonton, also known by the acronym TRUE, is a group of concerned transit users whose goal is to channel transit riders' needs and opinions into a unified voice for an efficient, affordable, and accessible public transit system. TRUE is a working group of the Alberta Public Interest Research Group. On behalf of my constituents and all Albertans I would now ask that my guests Lorenzo Pagnotta, Isabelle Foord, Brendan Van Alstine, and Ian Young please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

Members' Statements

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

Métis Week

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Métis Week began Sunday, November 16, and continues to November 22. In fact, some of my colleagues joined Audrey Poitras, president of the Métis Nation of Alberta, and Gerald Cunningham, president of the Métis Settlements General Council, to mark this occasion with a commemoration of the life and leadership of Louis Riel.

Alberta strives to promote strong and vibrant communities in the province and has been a leader in addressing Métis issues. As a matter of fact, this province has the only legally recognized Métis land base in Canada: eight Métis settlements with a combined area of 1.25 million acres and a legislated governing structure with its own quasi-judicial process. We have, in fact, a Métis framework agreement, which exists nowhere else in Canada, between our government and the Métis Nation.

This Métis Week includes many activities that are being planned to highlight the cultural and social contributions to Alberta made by Métis people who call this province home. Tomorrow, for example, is Métis Nation children's day. Everyone is welcome to bring their kids to experience Métis culture and pride at Ben Calf Robe school in the morning and Prince Charles school in the afternoon. Métis Employment Services is hosting a pancake breakfast at their Edmonton office on Thursday morning. Later in the day the Métis Urban Housing society will host an open house to highlight their work to provide affordable, adequate, and appropriate rental housing for low- and moderate-income Métis families.

Métis people in the province are not only proactive but are also

part of the great mosaic of the cultural milieu in Alberta. I would encourage all Albertans to take a few minutes this week to join the Alberta Métis as they showcase their culture and their history.

Thank you.

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

Municipal Excellence Awards

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to acknowledge the excellent work that is being done by Alberta's municipalities and organizations to strengthen our communities and keep them safe. Since 2002 the Minister of Municipal Affairs awards of municipal excellence have recognized municipalities across Alberta that work to address issues such as sustainability, urban planning, public education, and municipal co-operation.

This year a new category was added to highlight Alberta's commitment to safe communities. I'm proud to say that the inaugural winner of the 2008 safe communities category is the city of Red Deer for its drinking establishment licensing bylaw. The bylaw calls on nightclubs and bars to improve safety standards to reduce violence, vandalism, and late-night disturbances. The city worked with the RCMP, the Alberta Liquor and Gaming Commission, and local establishments to create the bylaw. Its safety measures include additional security staff, enhanced surveillance, and better lighting in high-risk areas, providing a safer atmosphere for patrons and employees.

I would also like to note that honourable mentions were given to the city of Calgary for its Stop Grow Ops Calgary Coalition and the city of Edmonton for its Stop Marijuana Grow Ops Coalition. The awards were presented at the fall conventions of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties. The AAMD and C fall convention was held just last week in Edmonton, and this year's convention marked 100 years as an organization.

I would ask the Assembly to join me in congratulating the recipients of the 2008 Minister of Municipal Affairs awards of municipal excellence and the AAMD and C on their 100th anniversary.

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

Integrity in Government

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The song *Waiting for a Miracle* is Leonard Cohen at his most sardonic, a dark view of people in a hopeless state waiting for someone else to save them. I believe we are our own rescuers. We don't get better lives by waiting. We build better lives by getting involved.

The world is at a turning point, with serious challenges and different choices to make if we are to leave a better future for our children. Our economy, environment, and civil society are threatened, but people are longing for courageous, honest leadership. Too many have given up on our political system in Alberta.

As a physician and politician I've tried to create the awareness of our need for balance, social well-being, a protected environment, and a healthy economy: the triple bottom line. People want to see government with integrity lead rather than manage, stop abusing power, listen instead of brushing off real frustrations with lack of mental health support, children coming to school hungry, unnecessary red tape for small business. In this province in the past 15 years I've witnessed a profound decline in public engagement and a loss of trust in the political process.

People ask me how we could spend so much more than other

provinces and get so little, how we could waste our nonrenewable windfall, saving virtually nothing, and fail to see that the world is going to energy conservation and a renewable energy economy. Albertans ask me why we have the highest rates of family violence, alcoholism, depression, and suicide. This is not leadership.

In listening to energy producers for a balanced energy future, listening to health professionals about real health care reform, hearing our most vulnerable citizens and their caregivers plead for dignity, it's time to talk frankly also about our responsibilities as citizens. We cannot wait for a miracle. There is no time to lose. We must work together to create a vigorous, centrist politics of the people, a politics that stands for the public interest for the long term. As a Hopi Indian elder counselled his people many decades ago, we are the ones we've been waiting for.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

International Education Week

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday marked the launch of Alberta's fifth year of participation in the celebration of International Education Week, which takes place from November 17 to 21. This year's theme is Fostering Global Responsibility and Leadership. This gives an opportunity to explore new approaches to education from a global perspective. We're not alone in this kind of thinking, and that is why international education is being celebrated this week in more than 85 countries.

It's also a time for us to celebrate the diversity inherent in our school system in Alberta. We do not have a one-size-fits-all approach to education. We value learning in all its forms, whether it's straight academics or the pursuit of skilled trades. It is because we value this diversity, Mr. Speaker, and recognize the need to meet the desires of a wide range of students that we also have an international and global education strategy. School-based international education initiatives expose students to social and cultural differences, new education methods and systems, and unique global partnerships.

Alberta promotes international co-operation in education through agreements with foreign governments that build and enable programs of benefit to students. These include student and teacher exchanges, school partnerships, visiting teacher programs, foreign language consultants, and international student programs. These activities, Mr. Speaker, give our Alberta students and their fellow students from around the world the opportunity to learn about each other so that they understand what it means to be a global citizen.

I hope that my remarks today demonstrate that when it comes to international education, Alberta has clearly chosen to lead rather than to follow. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Fiscal Responsibility

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's official. The boom in Alberta is over. The opposition has been saying for years that this government's financial policies are unsustainable. The Premier boasts about having the highest spending, lowest taxing government in the land while everyone else can see that that's a recipe for financial disaster. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier finally admit that this government's financial policies have been reckless?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, over the last number of years this government has positioned the province of Alberta to withstand the economic storm that's actually crippling a lot of the economies around the world. We continue to be the only jurisdiction in North America that's debt free. I'm not aware of any other jurisdiction that sets aside \$7.7 billion in a fund to cushion any rapid drops in resource revenue, and I know that our competitive tax rates, both corporate, small business, and personal income tax, have attracted business and people to the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is right. A storm is brewing, and it could be a perfect storm for this province.

Next year the government is going to see markedly lower corporate and personal tax revenues, lower royalties, and lower income from investments like the heritage fund. To the Premier: what is this government's strategy to avoid going into deficit?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Continued very prudent budgeting, reading the signals, and ensuring that this province remains competitive not only within the North American jurisdiction but also compared to other countries around the world.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, this situation is eerily like the end of the last boom, when huge oil sands projects were cancelled and a bloated government was faced with collapsing revenues and rising expenditures. Over and over the people of Alberta have vowed never to repeat the mistakes of the last boom. To the Premier: what is your government going to do – give us some detail – to prevent this province's economy from going off the rails?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, continued prudent budgeting.

But let's just go back to the early '80s. You know, it's amazing how the Liberals always forget NEP, the national energy program. For those of us in this Assembly that paid the 24 per cent interest rates that devastated mortgage holders, devastated business, drove the largest migration out of the province of Alberta, I can assure you we're never going back and never following that hostile Liberal policy ever again in this province.

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

Provincial Spending

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Premier enjoys mocking Pierre Trudeau and blaming him for all kinds of faults. The simple fact is that Pierre Trudeau hasn't been Prime Minister in 24 years. My question is to the Premier. Does the Premier realize how out of touch his government looks when he blames Pierre Trudeau for today's financial crisis?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that's how long: 20 some-odd years of the debt that he created, that we're still trying to pay off in this country, over – I don't know – 400 and some billion dollars. How can you forget that?

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, we learned through today's second-quarter update that restructuring the regional health boards is going to cost an unbelievable \$80 million. To the minister of health: can the minister explain where that \$80 million is going to be spent?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can. I'll be happy to go into further details when supplementary estimates come before the House, I think later this week or next week. But just very briefly, when you merge 12 entities as we are currently doing, there are – this is not an exaggeration to say – dozens of IT systems. We have duplication when it comes to positions. That is the estimated cost that will be incurred in terms of making one efficient, effective health care board.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you. To the same minister: when the Chumir centre in Calgary couldn't fully open because of a shortage of staff and the Mazankowski centre sits empty for 18 months in part because of a shortage of staff and the same fate awaits the south Calgary hospital and the Edmonton clinic, both under construction, why didn't this minister spend \$80 million on a real solution like training 2,000 nurses or 400 family physicians instead of playing bureaucratic Whac-A-Mole?

Mr. Liepert: You know, Mr. Speaker, this is how far out of touch this particular member is. That's exactly what we are doing. Through the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology we've announced a whole bunch of new seats for medical positions around the province, and we'll be happy to provide the member with a detailed breakdown of exactly how many seats we have created.

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

Provincial Savings Strategy

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the second-quarter update the nonrenewable resource revenue is projected at \$14.6 billion, a record number we are told, yet the government has completely cut the \$3.1 billion allocated to savings. My questions are to the minister of finance. Even with the record-breaking revenues from oil and gas the government is choosing to cancel its savings program. Why?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, what I said today in the second-quarter forecast of the projected – projected – \$8.5 billion, was that we had projected that \$3.1 billion could be added to savings. I said that that particular amount of money obviously will not be available for savings.

I said further that the Mintz report, the FIPAC report, would be coming forward and would be public tomorrow. I'm not saying precisely when, but ultimately an investment and savings strategy will follow. What I did identify was that there was obviously no money from the surplus to go into savings.

Ms Blakeman: Well, to the same minister: how do you have a savings plan when you are not going to set aside any money to save?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, talking about the projected surplus, I've said that what we have left in the surplus, the good-news story – look, let's talk about the good news. You know, doom and gloom exist on that side of the House. We budgeted at \$78 a barrel of oil, and we have more than we expected to have in surplus. We're going to have \$2 billion of expected surplus now, with the amended forecast, added to the extra billion dollars from cash left over and reconciled from last year's 2007-08 budget, and because there's only a paper writedown on the heritage fund, we'll have

almost \$4 billion to spend on carbon capture and storage and Green TRIP. Is that a bad story?

Ms Blakeman: Well, let's talk about stories. The minister talked about the heritage fund reaching the same state as the \$200 billion Norway fund. That would be a story. How does the minister see this happening when this year the government is not even going to inflation-proof the heritage fund?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, over the last 10 years the heritage fund has earned in five- and 10-year intervals 7.3 per cent and 5.3 per cent successively. That is, in fact, a good-news story. The heritage fund contrasted with the fund in Norway: I don't think there's an Albertan that wants the 50 per cent taxation rate that they have in Norway. We can look at other funds and other management, but they've got all kinds of taxes that Albertans simply won't tolerate. Surely that can't be what the hon. member is suggesting.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Royalty Revenues

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This government has bungled things in the good times, and now in tough times it's going to cut services that Albertans depend on. Failing to collect full-value royalties and corporate tax cuts means Alberta has failed to save for a rainy day. Well, it's getting a lot wetter out there even as we speak. My question is to the Premier. Why has this government placed Alberta in a position that its health and education spending depends heavily on volatile royalty revenues, which are evaporating even as we speak?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the province of Alberta is blessed in two ways: one, geographically, because we're located next to one of the best trading partners in the world, the United States of America; and secondly, geologically, because we do sit on vast resources of coal, oil, and gas. So it is a blessing. This is one jurisdiction that not only receives a fair amount of money from the sale of resources but also shares with the rest of Canada. I believe over \$14 billion net was transferred to Ottawa last year, so not only Albertans benefit, but all Canadians do.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, given that government spending, in particular for health and education, depends heavily on resource revenues, royalties for oil and gas, and given that those royalties are evaporating, how is the Premier going to guarantee that we will not see in the next budget or the budget after that significant cuts to health and education spending in this province? Why have you left us so vulnerable, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our priorities are health and education and also advanced education because we do have to move this province over a period of time to a knowledge-based economy. I'd submit the question back to the member. It would be difficult to maintain health and education programs when his colleague in Ottawa wants to shut everything down. That would even be a worse picture than we're facing today.

2:00

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker. You know, he can't get out of this so easily as blaming somebody flying over the oil sands in an airplane.

I want to know from the Premier why the government's priorities have actually been cutting corporate taxes in half and having the lowest royalties in almost the entire world instead of saving for a rainy day so that we could protect our health and education programs in this province.

Mr. Stelmach: Actually, two statements made by the leader, typically, of a socialist party. I can tell you that to increase our corporate taxes would diminish significantly our global competitiveness. I don't know who he's been listening to because I keep hearing from many people in Alberta that our royalty framework today, the new royalty framework that we'll be adopting on the 1st of January, 2009, is fair. It now has raised it substantially compared to other royalties in the country and on the North American continent, but that doesn't mean that we won't be looking constantly at our competitiveness position. No one knows and can predict what's going to happen in the year or the year after, but we know that we have to adapt. If you look at long signals in the future, we will ensure that we can continue our global competitiveness.

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

Bullying

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bullying behaviour is unacceptable any time and anywhere. The government has been talking about bullying for several years now, yet alarmingly we still hear about froshing, cyberbullying, and humiliating treatment of children who are targeted each and every day. When teasing turns to taunting and push comes to shove, it's time for government to get results. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: when are we going to see strong measures and effective antibullying programs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a really good question considering that this is Bullying Awareness Week. I can tell the House that bullying is an issue that we take very seriously. We know that in the past school year of the youth that we have surveyed, 50 per cent have experienced bullying and around 60 per cent have witnessed it.

Our bullying strategy has been in place for four years. It is recognized among national experts as one of the best in the country. I can tell the House that our goal has been to effectively raise awareness on what bullying is, identify what people can do to stop bullying, and as well encourage a change in our societal attitudes towards bullying.

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I appreciate all the work that the government has done to raise public awareness, but it does not seem like all these messages are getting through to the people who need to hear them. Can the minister assure us that the government's bullying prevention campaign is reaching our children where they live, learn, and play?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to say that we do know that our bullying prevention strategy is working. Since we set up the website for children, we've had 3.3 million hits on that site. Our website for youth has seen over 400,000, and our site for

parents has had more than 450,000. As well, we've had 940 people call our 24/7 toll-free bullying helpline, and our information materials are still in very high demand at our community centres and our schools. I think the last thing I'd say is that I do believe our message is clear, and it is getting through that bullying is unacceptable.

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, I'm particularly worried that bullying has moved out of the schoolyard, where teachers and other students can see it and stop it, and into our homes through the Internet. To the Minister of Education: is the government keeping up with the times and taking appropriate action to protect our children from cyberbullying?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, again a very timely question. Just like other forms of bullying cyberbullying is about power and control. While technology is a very positive tool, it can also be negative. We've made available at no cost to teachers and school jurisdictions training resources that address cyberbullying and child Internet safety. New, updated resources are also available online, as my colleague has just indicated, on the antibullying website, which is bullyfreealberta.ca or b-free.ca. There's also the hotline available. But we should be clear that cyberbullying, like any bullying, can be a criminal offence if it's continuing harassment.

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

Public Health System

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This health minister doesn't get it. Prevention costs something, and in the long term it saves both lives and money. Good leadership acts not on opinion but on the best evidence. To the minister: in the face of the largest outbreak of syphilis in the province, including five preventable deaths, and the best evidence from his medical officers being dismissed, what confidence can this minister give to the public that he's committed to prevention?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, just to correct the record, I presume the member is referring to an advice to the minister document, which I'd be happy to table later in the House, because that's what was in the *Edmonton Journal* on the weekend. What the member does not allude to is the fact that in that advice to the minister was the fact that we have had an initial media campaign, and we also committed \$2 million to the then Capital health region. The advice to the minister also says that we should not overlap with the Calgary health region and the Capital region.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, this minister not only dismissed the evidence; he dismissed the medical officers.

We now have evidence that this minister's failure to act in 2007 has contributed to an outbreak in other parts of Canada. Will the minister take responsibility for failing the primary role of government, which is to protect the health and safety of its people?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'd rise on a point of order relative to the comments about the dismissal of the health officials, but quite frankly, it's not worth the effort because this particular member will continue to use falsehoods, so I'm not going to challenge that. As the member is well aware, we had four public health officials that

were on contract. A new contract was not reached when the existing ones expired, and they chose other options.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Either this minister does not understand public health or is simply more interested in cutting budgets and making change for change's sake. When is this minister going to act on the evidence, restore confidence in the system, and honour our public health system?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we could do one of two things. We could do exactly what we are doing, and that is committing funds through the delivery arm of health services in this province and continue with a focused initiative in those areas of high risk, or we could do as the opposition, which on one hand talks about fiscal responsibility and then on the other hand says that we should just throw money at problems and not have any evidence that it's going to do any good.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, there will be a point of order? [interjections] Okay. Cool it.

Is there a point of order, hon. Minister of Health and Wellness? Do you want to raise a point of order at the end of the Routine?

Mr. Liepert: No. I'm not going to waste my time.

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

Lottery Funding

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There was some discussion in question period yesterday about the community investment grants, and I'd like some clarification on this today. My question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. According to the Member for Edmonton-Riverview it is the policy of this government to give each Tory MLA an annual allotment of lottery money to distribute within their constituencies. I think he called this a personal slush fund for Tory MLAs. I doubt this to be the case. Could the minister please clarify how funding allocations occur?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, our community investment programs touch all 83 ridings across the province and almost every Albertan. We make decisions in our department based on a set of criteria, one being matching funds, another being need of the communities. There are some areas that get more than others because there are needs and there are projects and programs that are required. We look at each individually, based on their merit.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you. My first supplemental is to the same minister. As the Member for Edmonton-Riverview alleges, the government has forgotten what real fiscal accountability looks like. I would like to know if the programs are subject to audit by the Auditor General or Auditor General review.

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, they're absolutely audited by the Auditor General's department. They are each year. Also, each and every program that's approved is on our website, so it's clear and transparent to all Albertans and will continue to be so. It's actually thankful that our government's prudence in having funds allocated

for these projects actually helps a lot of our communities in these tough economic times.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you. My third question is to the same minister. Would you clarify to the House, do MLAs get to personally sign off on these grants?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, MLAs don't approve grants. The only person that can approve those grants is myself. My staff works closely with community organizations to make sure that grant applications are properly completed and coordinates the approval process for local needs and priorities. We do connect with government MLAs because we want to have community input, and they are an excellent source of knowledge. [interjections] Our opposition MLAs are certainly welcome to contact our office at any time as I've indicated to . . .

Ms Blakeman: Actually, we're not.

Mr. Blackett: Yes, you are.

. . . the Leader of the Official Opposition in writing. If you want to contact my office, you can certainly do so.

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

Provincial Spending

(continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions, too, are on the second-quarter fiscal update. My first one is to the minister of finance. This is from page 7, Pension Obligations: "Updated forecasts of pension obligations, reflecting recent developments in equity markets, are not yet available." In this House the hon. minister said that there are hourly updates to her department regarding these matters. My first question: what are you hiding from Albertans drawing public-sector pension plans?

Ms Evans: Absolutely nothing.

Mr. MacDonald: Now, my second question also to the same minister, and this one is regarding asset-backed commercial paper from the Alberta Treasury Branches. In the past we've learned that the Treasury Branches, unfortunately, have had to write down hundreds of millions of dollars because of this investment scheme. What additional provision for asset-backed commercial paper is now required by the Alberta Treasury Branches?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the asset-backed commercial paper issue has been reported in depth here in the Legislature, has been reported by ATB. In December there should be a final reconciliation with the Montreal accord at that time. No doubt ATB will come forward with some figures and some more information, but we have already provided everything that is available, and there shall be more. Stay tuned. Sometime about mid-December there should be a further report on the reconciliation of the Montreal accord.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. My third question is to the minister

of health. This is regarding the \$80 million transition costs related to moving to a single health board. Given that the Capital health authority has surplus office space, why is the Alberta Health Services Board renting really posh downtown offices in Manulife Place? Why don't we save a few dollars and have the Alberta Health Services Board locate in the Capital health authority building?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Health Services Board is provided a budget to run the operations of Alberta Health Services, and the decisions are not for this minister to make.

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

Elder Abuse

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The safety and security of Albertans is indeed important. Recently the government has announced several initiatives to reduce crime and to help prevent not just the symptoms but the root causes of it. However, much of the focus has been on protecting Albertans in general and hasn't looked specifically at the safety of seniors. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What is being done to help seniors at risk in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, violence against anyone, regardless of their age, is wrong. Abuse of seniors, often referred to as elder abuse, can take many forms, including psychological, physical, sexual, or financial. Seniors or anyone concerned about a senior who may be at risk are encouraged to reach out for help. More information about elder abuse and local assistance is available on the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Network website or by contacting my ministry. Certainly, if somebody thinks that a senior is at immediate risk for safety, they should be contacting their local police.

Mrs. Sarich: My second question to the same minister: how about those seniors who are being abused and have nowhere to go? What options are available for them?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, in addition to the emergency shelters available to all Albertans there are two safe shelters dedicated solely to seniors. The Alberta government provides financial support to the Kerby house in Calgary and to the Edmonton Seniors' Safe House in Edmonton. In addition, we partner with the Alberta government's prevention of family violence and bullying, which also protects seniors against abuse.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. I also know of some cases where seniors' savings or assets have been taken advantage of by family members, caregivers, or friends. Is there anything being done to make seniors more aware of this and how seniors can protect themselves?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, financial abuse is one of the most common forms of elder abuse, and it is often at the hands of someone they trust. This past summer for World Elder Abuse Awareness Day we focused on awareness of financial abuse, and we

distributed almost 4,000 information packages across the province about this issue. We work with the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Network to develop and distribute financial abuse information to help seniors and seniors' service providers understand what financial abuse is, indicators of financial abuse, and where to get help.

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

Commercial Vehicle Drivers' Hours of Service

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is not addressing a key aspect of transportation safety. The federal commercial drivers' hours of service regulations ensure that truck drivers do not drive when tired. After 10 years of national discussion these regulations were passed to set strong standards, ensuring that commercial drivers are safe and well rested, but this government has refused to adopt the safer standards. To the Minister of Transportation: why has the Alberta government not implemented the commercial drivers' hours of service regulations?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, this government never ever jumps to knee-jerk reactions and just goes along with whatever other people think is best for our province. We believe in consultation. We believe in talking to everybody. Yes, we do have people on both sides of the fence on this one. All of our large interprovincial companies are already regulated under the national hours of service regulation because they're interprovincially licensed. But we have a lot of small companies in Alberta. We have a lot of ma-and-pa operations. We have a lot of owner-operator operations. They're saying that they cannot survive under those new hours of service. We're looking for exemptions, but we're also making sure that our highways are safe.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, the evidence is to the contrary. All other provinces, the Alberta Motor Transport Association, the Petroleum Services Association, and other industry groups all support this regulation. For industry this is a no-brainer. Why does this minister and this government think that driving more hours without required rest is safer than standards agreed upon by everyone else in the country?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we're not talking about driving more hours here. We have a system that was brought in. We aren't the only province that hasn't signed on. Saskatchewan hasn't signed on, and we haven't signed on. Our hours aren't a lot different than the hours of service: what we run in Alberta and enforce and are very strict on. There are other parts of that that fall into effect that we're dealing with the federal government today. One of them is our weight threshold. We have thousands and thousands of trucks in Alberta that are licensed over 4,500 kilograms. In Alberta we believe they have to be 11,000, and that's what we're dealing on before we put all these people out of business.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, for 10 years we've been negotiating around this issue. Why is more consultation required? Industry wants to see more safe road standards. Who is lobbying you to protect these hours, these longer hours of driving in this province?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, nobody is actually lobbying me, but there are people bringing forward what they believe they need and what would still address all of the safety in Alberta. I can't believe the hon. member there would just say: "Oh, there are 10 years. Why

do we have to consult? Let's just put some people out of business. That's the way to go." I don't believe it's the way to go, and so do a lot of taxpaying Albertans.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Resource Development and Environmental Management

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In April the Environment minister deflected questions about the impact of tailings ponds on water quality, saying that CEMA, among others, had the matter in hand. At that time the minister had in his possession a PricewaterhouseCoopers report that said: "CEMA members have become frustrated. . . . Many are concerned that further delays are inevitable and the likelihood of environmental management catching up with development in the region is near impossible." To the Minister of Environment: how can Albertans trust this government to take real action to protect the environment when it took eight months to come clean about their failures in relation to CEMA?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's no secret that there have been issues related to CEMA. We have not hidden the fact that the First Nations participants have removed themselves from the process. There are some NGOs that have also felt that the process was not serving them well. As a result, we felt it prudent to have an outside review of the program. In fact, we had two reviews: one by PricewaterhouseCoopers and the other one that is dealing specifically with First Nations issues. One of those reviews has been completed, and the other one is still under way.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Eight months after the government received the first part of this report that they commissioned on CEMA, it was only finally made public around the same time that the NDP caucus FOIP on that report was due.

Now, your own report states that to make CEMA work, the government "must enable a fully functioning regulatory backstop." Eight months later the government has done nothing. To the same minister. These recommendations are focused on a need to protect the environment. Why won't you act now to protect these areas?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we think it's wise and prudent for us to wait until the second report has been completed so that we can take the issues of all stakeholders into account. The member talks about an NDP FOIP request. Frankly, I think it's probably better if the government releases the report rather than the NDP releasing the report with their own spin on it.

Ms Notley: Well, we'd love to have the government do it if they'd do it within eight months, but I guess that's what we were pressed to.

Albertans want their government to take real action to protect the environment, not simply distract them with smoke and mirrors language, with processes and meaningless consultation. Your own report states that government needs to step up to make CEMA effective. Consensus decision-making can't be used as a tool for delay, and CEMA needs to be restructured so it's not dominated by industry. To the same minister: why won't you do this?

Mr. Renner: What the report also says is that CEMA should not be discontinued, that there is a role for an organization like this. I've

indicated to you, Mr. Speaker, that we've commissioned two separate reports: one that the member is referring to and another one that deals specifically with aboriginal issues. Once that second report has been completed, I can assure the member that the government is prepared to act.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Livestock and Meat Strategy

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to continue the questions that I had yesterday to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, but this time I want to talk about my producers in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, you know, who are concerned with some of the aspects of the Alberta livestock and meat strategy. Specifically, the producers are hearing that a lot of the available funding, which was originally \$300 million that was going to be used to cover payments to producers, that that \$300 million now presumably is not fully available to the producers and that administration costs are going to eat up a large portion of that. It's hard for me to believe this, and I'd like some clarification from the minister. Is, in fact, the \$300 million in total going to the producers for payments?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, some misconceptions and some things that are not true. All of the \$300 million that was announced in June is going directly to the producers, and it certainly is not being used for administration costs. To date almost \$190 million has been provided to producers. So if you do the math, this government approved \$300 million as part of the livestock and meat strategy; another \$110 million remains available for producers who meet the requirements.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Minister, for clearing that up. Back to age verification. You know, the issue about verification being mandatory bothers a lot of producers. Minister, why isn't this a conditional requirement rather than a mandatory requirement?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to explain this. I was told time and time again in Asia that without age verification we will not be expanding our market access over there. We're even losing market over there and the market share right here in Alberta to our competitors who are age verifying.

We knew this was important a number of years ago, in 2006. We were close to making it mandatory, and 1.4 million Alberta cattle were age verified. Industry assured us that they could keep these numbers up doing it voluntarily. Well, Mr. Speaker, on the advice of the beef industry we backed off mandatory, and the following year that number dropped to 140,000. So going from 1.4 million to 140,000: clearly, a voluntary system will not work.

Mr. VanderBurg: Again, thank you for that clarification. I have a feeling that a number of producers in my constituency and, Mr. Speaker, probably in your constituency as well won't meet the mandatory requirements. What are the penalties going to be for these producers, these families that decide not to meet the age verification compliance?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, within all of the legislation we've always taken a reasonable approach to our expectations of our producers. Education certainly is one way to ensure compliance.

Let me assure you that common sense will prevail. We will not have age verification police running around the province. What is important is the ability to identify animals, and that means getting our entire industry committed to making this happen.

Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that in your area and in the hon. member's area I will follow through on people who submit false information.

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

Postsecondary Education Affordability

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Postsecondary students in this province struggle to manage the responsibility and stress of their studies as well as the financial burden of paying for them. This government in 2005 said that Alberta's postsecondary system would be the most affordable in Canada. Alberta has one of the highest tuition rates in Canada, a 4.7 per cent increase this year above the national average, which is 3.6. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: how can the minister account for this government's failure to fulfill this commitment from 2005?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, I don't see that we are failing our students in any way, shape, or form. We're talking about access; we're talking about affordability. Tuition is one component of the affordability piece. Affordability includes the cost of books, which we're looking at reducing. It includes the cost of living within the province. It includes student loans. We're the only province that has the remission program on student loans and, in fact, the most generous student finance package in the country.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. To the same minister. Student usage of food banks is at an all-time high, student debt loads in the tens of thousands of dollars. Why is it that students continue to face skyrocketing tuition and residential fees when the government assured students that their schooling would be affordable?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member is spouting makes for good rhetoric. Unfortunately, a lot of it is not actually factual. Our students graduate with some of the lowest debt loads in this country. We are in the middle to lower end of the pack on tuition, and we have capped tuition increases to the consumer price index, which other provinces are moving towards. In fact, other provinces that had capped and stopped increases to tuition are now releasing those caps, and I think students in other provinces are going to find substantially higher increases in tuition than what our students enjoy in the province of Alberta.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you for that. But according to this, the increase was still above the national average.

Since current living allowances provided through student loans are still not enough to cover the cost of living for many students, even with the 14 per cent increase given last year, will the government act to adjust the living allowances to reflect the reality of the housing market that these students are facing?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member rightly pointed out that we increased living allowances 14 per cent this budget year. We are

in the throes, obviously, of working on the next budget year, and the hon. member has asked me a question about that. We're working with our student associations from across the province on the entire affordability framework. As well, the hon. member mentioned that this told her that the increase was higher than the national average. I'm not aware of what "this" is, so I can't suggest what the accuracy of that report might be.

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

2:30

Safety in Schools

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each day hundreds of thousands of young Albertans are sent off to school by their parents and/or guardians. We trust our school principals and our teachers with the most precious members of our society: our children. We expect them to enrol in schools that are safe and, most importantly, caring. My question is to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure. Can the minister tell us how he is ensuring that our schools are designed to provide a healthy and safe environment for our students?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The health and safety of Alberta's schoolchildren and the staff in those schools, I can assure the hon. member, are of the utmost importance to us. I think our example that we require buildings to meet a minimum LEED silver standard is evidence of that commitment. With the standards we require, we provide a healthier environment through improved air quality and the use of natural light. Numerous studies have indicated to us that improved air quality makes a big difference in the learning environment and the success that students have. We also design our schools in a way that the sightlines are good. For security reasons we ensure that the public cannot get into areas that we need restricted with security doors.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the hon. Minister of Education. We have had several incidents in recent weeks where students have been harmed while at school. Can the minister explain who is responsible for ensuring the safety of our children while attending school?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. While it's impossible to guarantee that no incident will ever happen, it is very important to ensure and to assure that our schools are safe and caring places. The School Act provides that a "student enrolled in a school operated by the board [needs to be] provided with a safe and caring environment that fosters and maintains respectful and responsible behaviours." It's a shared responsibility. The provincial government has a responsibility. School boards need to put in place policies with respect to safety in their schools. Of course, the operation of schools under the day-to-day administration of the school needs to adhere to the requirement of the School Act. It's a shared responsibility. We have a safe and caring schools program. The ATA has participated in that as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the hon. Minister of Education: with so many people involved in supporting our students in our schools – teachers, aides, and support staff – how can we ensure that our school boards are properly screening people that they are hiring?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, society holds teachers and others in the education administration to a high standard of conduct, being that they are entrusted with the care and custody of our children, often with minimal external supervision. As professionals teachers are required by legislation to conduct themselves in such a way as to maintain the honour and the dignity of the profession. The code of professional conduct sets out the standards of the profession that teachers are required to meet.

Mr. Speaker, last night I had the privilege of attending the Edmonton public school board's teacher induction, the ATA local induction. A hundred new teachers were inducted last night, and each one of them pledged to uphold that code of conduct. It was read out to them. They're well aware of it. They do, quite frankly, a very good job for our students.

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

Early Education for At-risk Children

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education used parental choice to justify the recent dramatic increase in funding for private schools. However, the Minister of Education remains unwilling to give parents the choice to put their kids into full-day kindergarten, claiming that it is too expensive in this current economic climate. Full-day kindergarten is an investment. Giving parents choices that will result in the best outcomes for their children should be the guiding principle behind funding initiatives. In 2003 the Alberta Commission on Learning reported that full-day kindergarten may reduce the long-term cost for special and remedial education. Why is the government unwilling to invest in full-day kindergarten for at-risk children?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. With every choice there comes an issue of priority and allocation of resources. This government is not refusing and this minister is not refusing to allow parents choice. In fact, school divisions right across this province are putting in place programs that respond to the needs of parents and their children, and many of them are offering full-day kindergarten. The question is: how do you allocate resources to maximize the opportunity for students to be successful? School boards are doing just that with the resources that they're given. Do they want more resources? Absolutely. Do we need to look at more resources? Absolutely. But I think you just heard the minister of finance in the House talk about the climate that we're moving into and the resources that are going to be available.

Mr. Chase: It's important that the minister pointed out that it is, in fact, school boards who are providing the full-day kindergarten. They're scraping because they know it's an important program not supplied by this government.

Why is the Minister of Education unwilling to give parents of at-risk children a real choice by reallocating the major increase for private schools towards supporting full-day kindergarten, the biggest bang for your buck?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the allocation of resources to the private schools amounts to \$8 million, which provided for a number of students, and if they had moved into the public system either under an agreement for a partnership program or because that school could no longer exist, it would have actually drawn more resources to deal with those same students. It would have diminished the resources available for choice in the public school system, not added to it. It's always a question of how you allocate resources appropriately. We share that responsibility with the school boards, and quite frankly they're doing a great job.

Mr. Chase: This business of privatization doing the public a favour is a joke. It's used for justifying private health care; now it's for private education.

Given the known value of identifying special needs early on, why does the government continue to support costly, too-late-to-make-a-difference provincial assessment testing instead of implementing badly needed early diagnostic testing? You want a good investment? Test early.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, if you want a good investment, test early, but don't test the grade 3s because it puts too much stress on them; don't test the other group because we don't want to be accountable.

The reality is and this member should understand that assessment is a very important part of learning. Using that assessment to assist in learning is the most fundamental piece, but using that assessment to report to the public the job that's being done by the education system is also important. People come from around the world to look at the education system here in this province because the fundamentals are strong. Those fundamentals are good teaching and good assessment practices.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, I have met and continue to meet with constituents who are either clients of or have relatives that are clients of the AISH program. Their situations are sometimes very different from one another due to individuals on AISH having varying abilities. Some are able to work part-time while others cannot. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What is the government doing to recognize the varying abilities of AISH clients?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the opportunity this summer to visit some jurisdictions with different programs, and I can honestly say that I think our AISH program is one of the very best in this country. In the summer, in July, we increased the AISH exemption for people who are able to work so that they are now able to collect more money from their work without losing any of their benefits, so now they can earn up to \$500 more per month. We've also got some pilot programs. Anybody who is entering the workforce can try out these pilot programs to see if they're capable of being in the workforce and if the workforce fits their needs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The income exemption helps those who can work, but what about those who cannot work?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, all AISH clients are eligible for a number of benefits, including premium-free Alberta health care

insurance, eye and dental care, and a waiver of Alberta Aids to Daily Living program fees. They may also be eligible for supplementary assistance to help support their unique needs, such as travel benefits, child care benefits, emergency benefits, and special diet benefits. AISH clients, like all Albertans, are also able to access supports from other provincial programs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is also to the same minister. On my visit to a community resource centre I was approached by somebody in the parking lot who brought up the issue of AISH support not keeping pace with the rising cost of living. How do you respond to their call for a rate increase?

2:40

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, we certainly understand that the increased cost of living puts a great strain on our AISH clients. That's why in January of this year we increased AISH by another \$50 to a maximum benefit level of \$1,088 per month, once again one of the very best income support programs in Canada. This was the fourth increase in three years, and those increases amount to about 25 per cent. In addition, we have committed to reviewing the AISH program every two years.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today.

We have two members still to participate in Members' Statements, and we'll proceed to that, then, after a 30-second break.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Edgeworth Centre

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The old adage that if you build it, they will come is perhaps overused, but in the case of the beautiful new Edgeworth Centre in Camrose it's more than appropriate. The Edgeworth Centre has been open now for about 15 months and has already played host to a number of very significant events, including international events. The most recent was the world junior A hockey challenge, which took place from November 2 to 9.

The facility is unique, Mr. Speaker, in that it was created by a partnership of the city and county of Camrose, various other municipalities, the University of Alberta Augustana faculty, and the East Central regional health authority. The centre is far more than several new hockey rinks. It is truly a wellness centre already boasting over 1,200 members in its fitness centre. I'd like to suggest, sir, that it should be a prototype for what other communities might be considering as they develop their facilities.

Mr. Speaker, you and my colleagues may know that Camrose has developed a bit of a reputation as a host of major international sporting events. The 25-year history of the Viking Cup would be a good example of that. This recent tournament featured teams from Canada, Russia, Germany, Belarus, and the U.S.A., and many dozens of NHL, college, and junior scouts were there to watch tomorrow's stars. I want to congratulate a very strong team from the U.S.A., which won the gold medal. We can also be very proud of our two Canadian teams in the tournament, Team West winning the silver medal and Team East winning the bronze.

It's safe to say that Camrose would not have been able to host this event, Mr. Speaker, without this new Edgeworth Centre. Although

it's much more compact, it has the feel of an NHL arena, and it's already gained a reputation both nationally and internationally as a first-class, premier facility. It has allowed the community to kick off the tournament with a Tom Cochrane concert and to finish the tournament with a national television broadcast of the gold medal game.

As important as buildings are, sir, it's the people that pulled off this tournament that are really the key to its success. I want to thank and congratulate them.

On to the next big event: the Continental Cup of Curling in December.

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

Cheadle Lions Canadian Foodgrains Bank Project

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Service clubs, church groups, and communities around Alberta and across Canada have for many years partnered with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank to help reduce world hunger. The Canadian Foodgrains Bank is a partnership of Canadian church-based, nongovernmental agencies committed to ending world hunger.

Beginning in 2007 the Cheadle Lions Club undertook a project to grow and harvest wheat to sell, with the proceeds going to the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. Last year, its inaugural year, the Cheadle Lions Canadian Foodgrains Bank harvest project grew, harvested, and sold 190 acres of CPS wheat, yielding 99.6 bushels per acre, and donated those profits to the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. This year 50 farmers using 42 combines and six trucks volunteered their time, labour, and equipment and harvested 139 acres of canola, which yielded 72 bushels per acre, another bumper crop by anybody's standard.

Commitment from the community was overwhelming, with support coming from as far away as Montana. The club estimates that this event raised up to \$100,000. With the government of Canada matching funds raised for the Canadian Foodgrains Bank at a 4 to 1 ratio, the amount raised could potentially reach nearly half a million dollars. Preparations for next year's event are already under way with plans to break the world record for the fastest harvest with over 100 combines on the field at the same time.

I'm pleased to rise today to salute specifically the Cheadle Lions Club for their project in support of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank and the many similar initiatives around Alberta and across Canada banding communities together to reduce world hunger.

I have circulated and placed pictures of this year's project on members' desks. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, the hon. member will be pleased to know that that world record he talked about was held in Westlock.

Thirty seconds from now we'll continue the Routine.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly six special guests. It's only fitting that they're here today joining us during International Education Week. With us is Marie Ulveland, a constituent of mine and a good friend, who is a member of the Edmonton downtown Rotary Club and serves on the student exchange services committee.

Accompanying Marie are five international Rotary exchange

students. Mei Lai Wong lives in Mexico with her parents and sister and currently attends Strathcona composite high school on her exchange. Her favourite classes are social and English, and it's her desire to attend university and take business or nutrition.

Anna Piela lives in Finland. She's also presently attending Strathcona composite high school, and her favourite subjects are English, art, and drama. Her hobbies are tennis and playing the piano, and she also hopes to attend university.

Scarlett Corboux lives in Normandy, France, with her parents and brother and is attending Ross Sheppard high school in Edmonton. Her courses of interest are languages, including French, German, English, and Chinese, as well as history. Her dream is to become a journalist or a writer and to take a trip around the world.

Carl Persson comes to us from Sweden and is presently attending St. Francis Xavier high school. He loves swimming, canoeing, and other sports as well as music. In fact, he plays guitar and bass.

We also are joined by Chang Wen-Yuan. Chang, or Casey as he is known, comes from Taiwan and attends Strathcona composite high school. He's very much interested in making and creating things, including woodworking and graphic arts.

Mr. Speaker, these are truly amazing students with many special talents. They all arrived here in Edmonton this past summer sponsored by various Rotary clubs of Edmonton and will be here for the year, departing August 2009. Rotary Club International does this international exchange student, introducing Alberta students to the world and world students to Alberta. It's a wonderful thing. I would ask our guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have 102 signatures to add to the growing number petitioning the Legislative Assembly to "pass legislation that will prohibit emotional bullying and psychological harassment in the workplace."

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to remind the House that I provided the government's 2008-09 quarterly budget report for the second quarter to all MLAs this morning. I also made the report public as required by section 9 of the Government Accountability Act. When a second or subsequent set of estimates is to be tabled, section 8 of the Government Accountability Act requires that an amended fiscal plan be tabled. Accordingly, I wish to table the required number of copies of the 2008-09 quarterly report for the second quarter, which serves as the amended fiscal plan.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the minister of health I wish to table the appropriate number of copies of documents referred to by the minister in his answers to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View earlier today.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 15 of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act and as chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund it is my pleasure to table the second-quarter update on the fund. Copies will be provided to all members.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As requested during third reading of private member's Bill 206 during yesterday's debate, I rise to table the requisite number of copies of e-mails referred to in the opening speech.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a draft government commission report on the Cumulative Environmental Management Association, which she referred to in her questions today.

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

2:50

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a document from the Alberta Health Services website indicating their new offices, which are located at 700 Manulife Place in downtown Edmonton.

The second document I have is the Alberta Health Services Board general bylaws. I would encourage all members to have a look through these documents.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies to table from Statistics Canada, to which I referred. The Minister of Advanced Education and Technology wanted to know what I was referring to when I said "this." This is the this, and I am now tabling it.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today, which is the program for the fourth annual National Housing Day. The keynote speakers were Dr. Jim Dewald of the Haskayne School of Business at the University of Calgary and Richard Gotfried, VP of corporate communications with Trico Homes, which in partnership with the Norfolk Housing Association, CMHC, and the Calgary Homeless Foundation has recently launched an exciting affordable housing pilot project.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. By the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Health and Wellness, the Alberta Cancer Board annual report 2007-2008, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the College of Alberta Dental Assistants annual report 2007-2008, pursuant to the Regional Health Authorities Act the Alberta Mental Health Board annual report 2007-2008, pursuant to the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Act the AADAC annual report 2007-2008, pursuant to the Regional Health Authorities Act the 2007-2008 annual reports for the following regional health authorities: Aspen regional health, Capital health Edmonton area, Calgary health region, Chinook health, David Thompson health region, East Central health, Northern

Lights health region, Palliser health region, and Peace Country health.

By the hon. Mrs. Jablonski, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, response to Written Question 1 asked for by Ms Blakeman on behalf of Ms Pastoor on May 12, 2008; return to order of the Assembly MR 1 asked for by Mr. Chase on behalf of Ms Pastoor on May 12, 2008; return to order of the Assembly MR 2 asked for by Ms Pastoor on May 12, 2008.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 44

Pharmacy and Drug Amendment Act, 2008

[Adjourned debate November 17: Dr. Taft]

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 44, the Pharmacy and Drug Amendment Act, 2008. This is an important bill that does quite a bit of clarifying and helps many of us, particularly those involved in the health professions, understand the new roles of pharmacists and how they will interact with other health professionals in the community, especially physicians. It clarifies the obligations of pharmacy proprietors and pharmacists; clarifies the authority of the Alberta College of Pharmacists with respect to inspections, investigations, and audits; and it clarifies the information to be collected by pharmacists and who this information can be shared with. The major question that many of us have that has been expressed here before is: what is the basis for sharing personal client medical information with provincial governments and federal governments, even law enforcement agencies?

For a bit of background, Mr. Speaker, the College of Pharmacists has the responsibility of delivering quality pharmacy services in Alberta and ensuring that all pharmacists are licensed in the province, that they maintain and update their knowledge and skills, and that the practice environment they operate in supports the safety of their clients. The college is governed by the Health Professions Act, which outlines the structure of the college, the responsibilities for licensing, pharmacy practice review, and how complaints against pharmacists are to be dealt with. Pharmacists that are members of the Alberta College of Pharmacists work in community pharmacies, all manner of pharmacies, actually, including hospitals and chain pharmacies.

Pharmacists are now acting much more independently in areas of health promotion; for example, screening for osteoporosis, diabetes, cholesterol elevation, and immunization. Pharmacists are also involved in some disease management, which includes education for hypertension, asthma, depression, blood sugar management, and blood pressure monitoring. They're also involved in ensuring effective drug therapy outcomes with medication reviews, even home visits, interim refills, and addictions and substance counselling, especially for methadone and opiate management. Pharmacists are also providing some degree of primary health care, including treatment of minor injuries and ailments, use of braces, crutches, wheelchairs, and walkers.

Select pharmacists, after passing competency tests and letters of collaboration with physicians, are now able to prescribe in their own right. They can refill prescriptions if a patient is unable to meet with the doctor soon enough, they can manage medication for chronic illness, and they can offer alternatives to patients when over-the-counter medications are not working.

Interestingly, in B.C. the legislation does not allow law enforcement access to patient records. The only people allowed are the patients themselves; the Minister of Health and other pharmacists for the purpose of dispensing drugs or monitoring their use; third-party payment agencies such as provincial, federal, and insuring agencies; the professional college; regulatory bodies; and scientific drug research.

I feel somewhat uncertain about the extensive new access provisions under this bill, and I think it would be important for us to be very much more clear than we are about the justification for free access by some of these bodies, especially the police force.

I guess, given the Auditor General's concerns in the last year about the safety of private information, that one has to wonder, too, with this expanded scope of access to patient records how secure these records will be when so many different agencies can access them.

If pharmacy clients do not provide informed consent, another question that arises is: what is the level of disclosure of this personal information, and will the Alberta College of Pharmacists still be able to give their information to the agencies outlined in this act? In other words, is written informed consent required under this act? It's not clear.

Those are some of the chief concerns that we have. Apart from those, there are real benefits in clarifying and ensuring that the pharmacy and drug issues in the province are dealt with consistently, that there are clear lines of authority, that there are clear lines of monitoring and enforcement of regulations and a complaint process.

I'm not yet certain how I'll vote on this, but I'll take my seat and hear any further debate. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

I'll recognize the next speaker, then. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise to Bill 44, the Pharmacy and Drug Amendment Act, 2008. This morning I was at the Standing Committee on Health meeting. One of the presentations that was given to us on the concerns of persons with disabilities, their organizations, was the fact that with many of the people with mental disabilities and mental illness – part of the discussion with this committee was the importance of the education of the people that are using medication. Medications are often overprescribed – I think there's a great deal of research on it – or they've used them for too long. I believe that by giving pharmacists a different role, they will fit right into what has been asked for this morning in that they'll actually be able to spend that little bit more time to be able to monitor how people use their medications.

Some people who can't afford medications – I'll use a very simple example of, perhaps, a urinary tract infection – think that if they take the medication for a little while and the symptoms are gone, then they'll save the rest of the medication in case it happens again. Well, I think we all know that that certainly is not how it works. Nor should medications be squirreled away; never mind the expiration date on them. That's just not how it works. It's the education and it's the monitoring that I think are going to be very good and will allow the pharmacists to be able to play that role to a much, much greater extent.

3:00

I would like to use perhaps my former colleague who was a pharmacist and sat in this House with us. He and his father have actually made their living as pharmacists out of a true pharmacy. It wasn't a drugstore where they sold everything else. The reason that

they were so successful was because they took the time to educate, took the time to listen to their clients. I can see that role being expanded in this bill.

One of the things that I do have problems with, though, is that there is a provision to share information with law enforcement and to ensure that standards are followed throughout the province but also with mail-order pharmacies so that when an issue of criminal investigation arises, the law enforcement agencies are able to investigate. My question would be: how are police given the permission to go and kick down someone's door to get into their house? I want the same permission that they have to get to go into my personal health care records and certainly into my personal medication records. I don't believe that that information should be shared without some sort of criteria that would be a short stopgap that the police would have to use to be able to get into people's records.

One of the other things that I have a problem with is that I don't see anywhere in here where I can have a choice – and we're not to the police state yet, so I want a choice – where I can say to my pharmacist: no, you will not put my personal records in your database. I believe that's a choice that we should have in this province, but I don't see it in this bill, which is, as I've mentioned, one of the problematic parts of it.

The other one that I would want to have explained in great depth is exactly how we monitor mail-order pharmacies. For instance, I can see going to a doctor and lifting his prescription pad, writing it out, sending it off to whomever, however far away. The supplier, what is his obligation from a foreign country to actually double-check that this was a legitimate doctor with a legitimate diagnosis and being able to prescribe this medication? I think it would be a very easy way to get some excellent painkillers that could well be sold on the street that probably would meet the criteria a lot better than having it disappear in the economic meltdown that we're having right now. I'm very, very concerned with how we control the drugs that are coming through the mail-order pharmacies.

As my colleague has mentioned already, B.C. does not allow law enforcement access to patient records. I'll go back to my mantra that I always go back to, which is: how does this fit in with TILMA, and how would TILMA be able to say, "Okay; you can't do it in B.C., but you can do it in Alberta" if we're trying to meld some of these medical regulations together?

I've already touched on this, but I really think that being able to give law enforcement agencies clients' personal information and health information may be just a small thing now, but I really do believe that it's the start of a slippery slope where later on that permission, that power to be able to have people's personal information would grow bigger and bigger as more people would be allowed access to it. Why would the provincial government but also other provincial and federal governments need access to clients' personal and health information? I just feel that this has gone far too far in terms of the sharing of information. I would want to know, too, how the government could guarantee the security of pharmacy-client personal information, when so many different agencies have access to it, to people who are willing to allow their name to be put into this database. What guarantee will they have that their information is safe?

In section 22 in the section regarding protection there's a comment that says that the minister and the employees of the ministry are protected from liability. My question would be: who is actually responsible? The buck has to stop somewhere, and I'm not sure that this bill tells me exactly where that might be. As I've said, I think that there are some very good things in allowing our pharmacists, our highly trained pharmacists, to be able to work to an even higher

scope of practice and be able to certainly help our citizens because many of our doctors simply don't have that kind of time to sit down and do the educational portion of medications.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. I would be pleased to recognize another speaker. Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 44 read a second time]

Bill 45 **Statistics Bureau Amendment Act, 2008**

[Adjourned debate November 17: Mr. Chase]

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 45 read a second time]

Bill 46 **Health Professions Amendment Act, 2008**

[Adjourned debate November 17: Mr. Anderson]

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise with interest to participate in the debate on Bill 46, the Health Professions Amendment Act, 2008, this afternoon. This bill changes the legislation regarding a health profession's college's ability to monitor and enforce their members' compliance with the standards of practice. It also adds provisions for inspections or inspectors. The bill, as I understand it, also gives a mandate to professional colleges to have plans around the treatment of, keeping of, and access to patients' records and also makes the colleges have to provide plans for abandoned patient records, to control those patient records and, hopefully, keep good control of those records. Also, pharmacy technicians will be included with this legislation, and podiatry will also be included with this legislation.

Certainly, there are many questions around this bill, and this is the latest amendment to this act. We have dealt with this a number of times in the Assembly, Mr. Speaker. Now, I have some questions that I'd like to get on the record, and hopefully these questions could be dealt with and addressed by the time we get to debate at Committee of the Whole.

3:10

I understand there is an initiative in the province for marriage and family therapists to become regulated within the Alberta Health Professions Act. Now, I don't know how all this is going to work. I don't know what discussions have gone on regarding this matter. But I'm told that such a regulation would enable students, families, and staff in over a dozen charter schools to have more reasonable access to services of those highly trained mental health professionals. If I could have an update on that. If this is not included in this legislation and if the minister has any thoughts on this, I would really appreciate an opportunity to hear back from the hon. minister.

Certainly, from other correspondence, whether it's by e-mail or by letter, this seems to be an issue with some individuals, and I would like to hear from the hon. minister why this matter has not been dealt with in this act. If it has been dealt with and I have overlooked it, I apologize, but I had a look through this bill, and I cannot find any sections that would address those questions.

Now, certainly, Mr. Speaker, we look at the Health Professions Act, and I said earlier that it was proclaimed in 2001. It had been discussed earlier than that, but we have to go back to 1994, when the ministers of health and labour made the Health Workforce Rebalancing Committee to look at the legislation that regulates the health care professionals. This committee concluded that the following principles should be represented in the legislation, and the majority of them, I think, are public protection from incompetent or unethical health professionals, greater flexibility in scope of practice for health professionals, transparency of the regulation of the health profession to the public or for the public, that the regulation must be fair and that decision-makers should be held accountable for their decisions.

Since 2001 we get the odd call from constituents, most of whom work and are governed by this act. Some constituents have issues, but they're not very common complaints to the constituency office, Mr. Speaker. There may be four or five a year, but there's certainly not one weekly, nor do we get daily complaints. Now, we certainly get complaints on health care and how this government is managing health care but not on how the Health Professions Act is being managed.

I said earlier that this legislation, as I understand it, is going to include the professions of podiatry and pharmacy technicians under it. Now, professions have to request this to happen, so is it fair, hon. members of the government caucus, for me to assume that they are all for these changes, these amendments? I am led to believe that they have been consulted and that there has been a discussion with these professional groups. I hope that's true.

This legislation also adds a new section regarding inspections that councils can proceed with against complaints against members regulated under this legislation. This is fine, but it only highlights the government's hands-off stance to regulating the health professions.

Now, we have to, Mr. Speaker, think of this government's response when there were single-use syringes being reused in High Prairie, Vermilion, and Lloydminster. We all know those cases. They have been discussed in the public in the last couple of weeks and certainly within this House.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The government basically said that it was up to the professional colleges to ensure that their members are practising their profession in the safest possible way. Well, that's fine, but we have to always remember that responsibility ultimately lies with the government. To pass that responsibility off to another body through legislation such as this, I think, is not proper. It's not right. I think the government has to accept full responsibility for the conduct that unfortunately occurred in the reuse of single-use syringes.

We need to be very careful whenever we talk about the government and the manner in which they want to regulate commercial health business. I don't think that can be left up to the employees of those businesses. I really shouldn't say business because I know the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood will probably be after me over what kind of businesses I mean. Well, hon. member, I mean private facilities, which is another word for private hospitals. We've got to be very, very careful about what this legislation can do – I should be more specific, Mr. Speaker – what this act can do to facilitate private hospitals. Now, that's another matter, and I think we're going to deal with this hopefully before the end of this session. I don't believe there is a full means of transparency here, and I'm concerned about that. I have my suspicions, but to date they have been unproven.

This legislation also does not give the Ombudsman the authority

to automatically investigate any complaints that are not solved internally. Now, the Ombudsman, as I understand it – and I could be wrong – covers 20 of the existing 28 professions in this legislation. The professions that the Ombudsman has jurisdiction over are chiropractors, dentists, dental assistants, dental hygienists, dental technologists, hearing aid practitioners, licensed practical nurses, optometrists, social workers, medical laboratory technologists, pharmacists, registered dietitians and registered nutritionists, speech language pathologists and audiologists, medical diagnostic and therapeutic technologists, occupational therapists, psychologists, registered nurses, registered psychiatric and mental deficiency nurses, and combined laboratory and X-ray technicians. That's quite a group. They're all essential, but I don't know why the Ombudsman would cover some but not all of these professions.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at this bill section by section – hopefully we'll have a good look at it in the House and we'll have a good look at it in committee – we will determine at that time whether this proposed legislation, which the government tells us will allow health professional colleges to monitor and enforce a member's compliance with professional standards of practice, will help improve the quality and safety of Alberta's health care. According to the hon. minister of health, allowing colleges to actively monitor whether health professionals are following standards rather than simply responding to complaints makes sense. The hon. minister goes on to say that it will enable colleges to better ensure that health care services are being delivered safely and appropriately. Well, whenever you think of the safety of the public and you think of what occurred in High Prairie and over in the Lloydminster-Vermilion area and previous to that in the Premier's own constituency of Vegreville-Fort Saskatchewan with the sterilization scandal in the hospital there, safety is a very, very important issue.

3:20

Now, whenever we talk about the amendments and how they're going to address care, custody, and access to patient records, hopefully this revised legislation requires the colleges to address situations in which records have been abandoned and provide the necessary tools to properly deal with all these types of records. I understand that the Member for Lethbridge-East has some issues and concerns about that, so I will leave that to the hon. member, Mr. Speaker.

We look at this bill, and we look at, again, in conclusion, how this act has worked since December 2001. There was, as I said earlier, a period of discussion and consultation before it was proclaimed. Actually, I think it was initially debated in 1999, and groups seemed to be able to work with this. So we will see what happens, Mr. Speaker. But certainly in regard to the questions around the Alberta Association of Marriage and Family Therapy and if there are any reasons why we wouldn't include marriage and family therapy under the Health Professions Act, I would sure appreciate it if the government could provide an answer to my questions regarding those groups.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much for your time. I look forward to further discussion on this legislation in committee. Thank you.

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

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak on Bill 46, the Health Professions Amendment Act, 2008. I'll be fairly brief. I'm going to speak on two sections, section 9 and section 12. I'll start with section 12, which is abandoned patient records.

Mr. Speaker, I guess I have some operational concerns with the maintenance of abandoned patient records. I spent quite a number of years as registrar of the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association. In the Land Surveyors Act surveyors are required to maintain their records essentially for posterity because land lasts forever, and it can become a problem. I recall one time when a member retired and left the province. He delivered a whole pile of boxes of files to the association office and said: here. It can be a very big problem. I appreciate that with health care records it may not be necessary to maintain them for posterity, but I don't see anything in the act or in the regulation-making power specifying a length of time that these records must be maintained for, and certainly that would be one concern.

Now, I suspect that with electronic storage the volume of files might become quite a bit less burdensome these days or in the future at least. But one of the major problems is not so much with storage of the files; it's with maintaining some kind of a database so that you can access the files when you need them. That can become a very time-consuming and costly process, so I think that's something that needs to be addressed, the method of managing and accessing these files once they're stored. It could certainly be very costly for the medical professions that have to maintain these patient records for I don't know how long. Those are my comments on abandoned patient records, more of a caution than anything, a bit of concern about the costs that we're imposing on professional associations with regard to maintenance of those records.

My second comment is with regard to section 9, which is part 3.1, on inspections. I certainly agree with inspections. I guess I understood – and I didn't get a chance to review the Health Professions Act – that it's been government policy since the model professions act back in I believe 1981, which was the Architects Act, where there was a practice review board created. A practice review board is essentially a body of professional peers that is set up to do inspections and to essentially be the coach, to make sure the individual professionals as well as the profession in general are maintaining the competency that's required for service to the public.

Now, one of the issues that seems to be a concern with the inspections is that the professional associations can only act in a disciplinary capacity once they get a complaint. Yes, that is fairly common, although with an inspection organization or a practice review board, which is very common with a lot of professional associations, once it's gone through its monitoring and its coaching process and found that a person is ungovernable or is not responding to the competency review, it does have the power to file a complaint and put the person through the disciplinary process. I certainly support the concept of inspections. I think the concept of assisting practitioners to bring their practice up to par and allowing them to continue to practise, perhaps with some assistance from a peer, is certainly the way to go as opposed to the punitive disciplinary process, which is also necessary, but it's more of a last resort.

Mr. Speaker, those are my comments, really just some concerns and some comments with regard to those two sections. I certainly will be supporting this legislation. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for my turn to rise and speak to Bill 46, the Health Professions Amendment Act, 2008, an important bit of legislation, to be sure, in that it clearly identifies in legislation the monitoring and enforcement role of the college with respect to all these professions, including the standard of

practice. It gives the plans for treatment, access to patient records, and requires colleges to have plans for abandoned patient records. Pharmacy technicians and podiatry are now included in this regulation.

Some of the important aspects to me relate to some of what has been alluded to earlier, that some professions are excluded from oversight by the Ombudsman. It does raise questions, especially with respect to some of the poor infection control practices that were under the auspices of the professions themselves, in this case the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and the two failures of hospital service to identify and remedy these problems well in advance of when they were identified. It raises questions about whether we do need a separate oversight mechanism, an ongoing monitoring process for government.

As appropriate and important as self-regulation is in the professions – and I do think it's important – there may be a place for an ombudsman or a similar role or profession to check in periodically, not just on a complaint basis but to examine periodically the data in particular professions and make sure that we are following the best practices in the country. Albertans believe and I think they have a right to expect that if we are spending \$700 per person per year more than almost any other jurisdiction in Canada, we should have the best standards, the best enforcement, the best monitoring of our health system, and, yes, in a constructive way be bringing the standards up where we see them to be less than what they could be.

3:30

I'm glad to see the flexibility in the scope of practice because, as many of us have argued, nurses could be doing a lot more than they are doing in the present health care system. Physicians are under duress. They're providing too many services, trying to see too many people with too many complicated problems, and, in fact, not using their time most cost-effectively when nurses could be doing a significant portion of what physicians are doing now. I have been one that has been quite vocal in supporting expanding the scope of practice for paramedical, nursing, and other professions.

I think that from a public point of view there must be a clear accountability process for professions. That includes the records. I dare say, having seen quite a number of records over the 30 years that I've been in medical practice, that there is a need for oversight. There are some medical records that need to be improved in quality and quantity. Self-regulation will go so far, but an objective, outside role, such as the Ombudsman has, is an important contributor to quality control and continuous quality improvement in the professions.

Under the legislation the Ombudsman can investigate complaints that have not been resolved by the internal mechanisms of each college. However, at this time the Ombudsman needs to be invited by the colleges to perform the review. I think that needs to be examined again. It would appear to me in light of these infection control problems in the province that the Ombudsman should be free to investigate if he or she feels there is a reason or simply as part of a routine process, similar to what the Auditor General does. I think all of us would want to assure our public that there is an oversight mechanism, that we can identify problems early and remedy them before complaints. This is called prevention and due diligence, and that's part of what government responsibility is about.

I was interested to learn that there is no provision under the inspections section that would outline when an investigation report will be made public. I think that's an important element of any legislation around professional practice, the transparency, public awareness of not complaints necessarily but judicial or college decisions on complaints. If there has been a sanction, if there has

been a remedy, if there has been a recommendation from a college to any of these professions, that should be made public. How else can we hold accountable these professionals for improving their standards or, indeed, meeting the standard if these are not made public? I think that would be an important amendment that I might want to make to this legislation, to ensure that college decisions, at least, are public. Decisions and recommendations should be public.

The legislation does not also give the Ombudsman the authority to automatically investigate complaints. I believe this needs to be opened up. Our responsibility is to the public interest. Inspection reports by colleges do go to the registrar and to the regulated member, but again this needs to be public knowledge.

The other question that I had – and I'll probably close here with an acknowledgement that there are many positive dimensions to this bill – has to do with accountability for abandoned records. Clearly, if each profession has their own records and they're not being held accountable for the disbursement or the management of those records when they retire or when they move out of province, when they move to other countries, this is a real problem for not only the individuals whose records are in the keeping of this professional but also for the next professional, who does not have the advantage of building on that record and learning from it in order to make the best possible health decisions.

Those constitute my comments, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to take my seat and consider the rest of the debate. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a health care professional I'm certainly interested in this Bill 46. There certainly are some good points.

I do believe in professional colleges being allowed to inspect and ensure that the standards that they want for their professional members are covered. One of the things I'm looking at here is that there was something that happened, of course, in High Prairie, I think, with the single-use syringes, and they were being reused. Now, I'm trying to put myself in the place of the nurse way back when. She said: this is wrong; this is not how we're supposed to be doing it. If her employer's policy was written such that they wanted to use and reuse syringes, then even if she goes to her own professional body, often that professional body won't step in. Here the employee finds themselves a bit between a rock and a hard spot because they find themselves between their own professional responsibilities and their own professional knowledge, yet the policy of their employer is diametrically opposed to what they believe should be proper practice. It would be interesting to see exactly how that got started and which health care professional probably recognized that and may well have tried to bring it up, but then it became the norm, and many years later it finally showed up as certainly a possible infection control problem.

There are a number of things where the college itself may not necessarily have the power to go in, which is why I believe that there really should still be outside eyes. I think the Ombudsman should be allowed to take a look at it. However, the Ombudsman really only looks to see that the process has been followed correctly. They really have no power to necessarily make recommendations as to how that particular problem had been addressed or would be addressed in the future.

The other part of that could be that some of these policies are set because of financial considerations, which are fair enough. But if it means that the public is at risk, then someone has to be able to look

at that outside of the profession. I really believe that we need some mechanism for outside eyes.

On the business of abandoned patient records, I'm not sure if there is legislation as to how long records have to be held. In my mind, I think they should be held for a long time. I think of adopted persons who may need health records and who have actually managed to track their biological parents. The only way that they can actually look at their own health records may be to check out their family's health records. I think that they're important. I don't think that they should just be given out. Certainly, there would have to be a process. But I'm not sure how long we should hang on to patient records. In my mind, I think it should be for a specific length of time, and it should be a long time.

3:40

The other thing that I have always kind of had a problem with – and I'm not sure how these records would totally tie in, but certainly they would tie in with private health deliverers – is sperm donors. It sort of always tugs at my heart when I hear someone say: who's my daddy? In fact, they really would like to know, and there are more and more people coming forward and saying: who's my daddy? These kinds of records probably could be delved into to find out who daddy is. Daddy may not want to be found, and there would be a way to be able to protect that information. But I'm not sure that it should be destroyed without perhaps a lot of further discussion and actually putting a time limit on it. I'm not sure what the time limit would be. Often, adopted persons find parents 20, 30, and even 35 years later.

One of the things that's been mentioned by my medical colleague is the ability for nurses, doctors, certainly paramedics, et cetera, to be able to increase their scope of practice and to be able to work to their full scope of practice. I think this is a very, very good thing. I think that we have a lot of wasted talent out there, and certainly we've got a lot of wasted training where people aren't being allowed to use their knowledge to its full scope.

I can see nurses in long-term care increasing their scope of practice. I believe that there are many people in active treatment beds who could actually be in long-term care and receive the same amount of care. Not the young but certainly the elderly that are in active treatment beds could well be in long-term care facilities with nurses that could work to their highest scope of practice and look after these people, which would then free up the beds in the active treatment hospitals.

Nurses, of course, in long-term care usually have geriatric training, which nurses in a regular acute hospital usually don't have. Certainly, the elderly are a specialty unto themselves. They do have different needs, and they certainly do have different reactions to the environment around them and different reactions to the medications as they're being changed. Geriatric nurses could take extra training and be available for palliative care. Again, long-term care could easily be delivered through a long-term care facility.

With those remarks, Mr. Speaker, I will take my place. There are certainly some exciting things to go with this, but I think there are some perhaps obscure points that I've brought up that should be discussed.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. It's concerning page 25 of the bill. In this bill under Bylaws, section 8.7, the council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta is eventually going

to be able to make bylaws, and they're going to have a lot of scope here to make bylaws. It is interesting to note 8.7(i): "describing the services that are major surgical services and minor surgical services for the purposes of section 2(2) and 29(r) of the Health Care Protection Act."

Section 2 of the Health Care Protection Act is the provision of surgical services. Does the hon. member think it's appropriate at this time to give the college this right to determine or describe what is a major surgical service and what is not, or does the member think this is just further privatization of health care by stealth or by the back door by this current government, who seems to be obsessed with providing more chaos to the health care system with further privatization?

Ms Pastoor: Well, I do believe that it probably is opening the door to further privatization. I'm not sure that this kind of power should go only to a college. I think that these decisions have to be made in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and Wellness and also the Alberta Health Services Board. As the minister explained, I think, in the House last week, the policy part will stay with Health and Wellness, and the actual delivery would go to the board side. I believe that all three of those levels have to be involved before they can go forward with what I agree is certainly a way to privatize, actually, major and minor surgeries, depending on how they set up their clinics.

I don't believe that that power should be only within the college. I think that it has to be within the three levels of decision-making. Also, I think all three of those levels assume a responsibility towards creating the privatization but also should assume the responsibility of the monitoring and ensuring that the standards are met within all of these surgical services that would be offered.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Again to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East: does the hon. member think that the government of Alberta owes the citizens of this province an explanation as to why these powers to make these new bylaws are necessary at this time?

Ms Pastoor: I find that question a little bit difficult to answer because I'm not sure that I actually understand the mechanisms of how they're doing this. I'll go back to what I've often said before. Often it's not so much what this government does; it's how they do it. I think that if they do things in an open, transparent way, don't use spin doctors, put it out on the table the way people can understand, then people have a way of either truly accepting it or rejecting it, but they really understand what they are accepting or rejecting, not based on some PR campaign that tries to change the way they think. Put it out on the table. Let's discuss how they arrived at it. Let me see the thinking that has gone on behind the decision.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

[Motion carried; Bill 46 read a second time]

Bill 47

Mines and Minerals (New Royalty Framework) Amendment Act, 2008

[Adjourned debate November 17: Mr. Knight]

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, when we look at the new royalty framework that is being discussed in this bill, it should be an issue of great interest to Albertans. It was of great interest to the Information and Privacy Commissioner, who has written a press release expressing his concerns and problems with the proposed amendments to the Mines and Minerals Act that are before us today. Again, we have another example of the government hiding behind this cape of secrecy. It's not a veil. It's a cape, and it's a very heavy cape, where no light ever penetrates.

3:50

Now, when we look at the conduct of this government and we look at the past history of the royalty rate and the system by which it is collected, there are a number of questions. I was sitting here, actually, during question period today listening to the various exchanges and wondering how different it would have been if this government not only had a savings plan but had been collecting a fair share of royalties for the last number of years, how different the fiscal update for the second quarter may have been. That didn't happen.

We know the size of the heritage savings trust fund. We know the shape it's in, and we know the original view that the Progressive Conservative government had in the 70s, when they were responsible and certainly thought it was prudent to set aside significant amounts of money from resource royalties for future generations. I'm certain they had plans of having a heritage savings trust fund that was much larger than the \$17 billion minus what we have lost. That brings its current value to less than \$16 billion, and that's after a lot of years.

But this bill, if it becomes law, will facilitate changes to the royalty system. It will allow for bitumen royalties to be taken in kind and allow for the provincial government to take back shallow, nonproductive royalty rights. I would only assume that that's for shallow gas production. I'm not certain, and if members across the way could correct me, I would certainly appreciate that.

Now, when we're looking at the new royalty framework that's to come into place in January of 2009, we have to look at the entire energy sector, Mr. Speaker, whether it's natural gas, whether it's conventional oil, whether it's synthetic crude oil, or whether it is natural gas that's produced from coal seams. I think coal seams should be included in any discussion on royalties in this province.

This bill shifts oil sands royalties further into regulation, and it also adds, interestingly enough, two new royalty powers, as I said earlier, shallow rights reversion and this bitumen royalty-in-kind. Many people don't know that we already have royalties-in-kind functioning through the Alberta petroleum commission. We've had discussions on that organization in the past. There have been many questions but few answers regarding the Alberta petroleum commission, but I guess that's to be expected. Whenever one looks at the Auditor General's report from last fall, certainly, there are many questions and few answers.

Now, we look at the bitumen royalty-in-kind and we look at one of the promises that was made about a year ago, Mr. Speaker, by the Premier in Calgary regarding the future royalty structure of the province. We were looking at the end of October last year when the hon. Premier announced Alberta's new royalty framework. We were looking at the current royalty and how there were going to be changes to that and to the income tax system in Alberta, but we all know that these changes are going to have a significant impact, or effect, on the oil and gas industry in Alberta, particularly on the economics of the oil sands projects.

Last year we had robust prices. In the middle of the summer we

had very high prices. Everyone was enjoying the high prices, everyone except those who were trying to hire a contractor, whether it be for a commercial, industrial, or residential project because certainly those estimates were just literally through the roof. There was chat around the coffee shops that oil was going to \$200 a barrel. We all know what happened. That did not happen, and now we have this new royalty framework that's going to come into play, and we wonder how it is going to work. Well, we look at the Premier's suggestions on the base royalty rate for oil sands and what it wouldn't do and where we would go if the price was \$120 and if it exceeded \$120. Well, it did. Unfortunately, it's gone back down.

But when you look at the new royalty framework that was proposed and, in my view, is largely reflected in this legislation, the government is after a larger share, and the government is also simplifying some of the rules. I think we need to agree with that principle, Mr. Speaker.

Now, the timing on this: well, that's another matter. If you had told me this time last year that our economy and the energy industry would be looking at some of the prices they are today, the cancellation of so many projects, I don't know if I would have believed you. I was certainly skeptical of those who told me that oil was going to go to \$200 a barrel, but to see the number of projects that have been cancelled or put on hold: well, it's frightening. It's happening so quickly. I think we need to be cognizant of that in this House.

I'm told that what is proposed in this bill is price-sensitive. As the price goes down for oil and gas – that's what has occurred – the government is going to take less and leave more for the producers, and as the price goes up, well, then we're going to get a larger share. That concept, those principles I certainly agree with and I would endorse.

Now, the Premier last fall indicated that we would, of course, in this province be taking bitumen-in-kind rather than cash to supply potential upgraders and refineries in Alberta. Well, my question in regard to this debate this afternoon is: what happens now that these upgraders and refineries in Alberta have been put on hold, so to speak? Where is this produced bitumen going to go? We know that we have two pipelines, the Alberta Clipper and Keystone, but when those projects are commissioned, what are we going to do? There are some in situ projects that are in the process of being commissioned in the Fort McMurray region, and there are the others that already have been.

4:00

Now, where will this bitumen go? We do know that the Premier during the leadership debate for his party stated that we've got to make sure that the bitumen is upgraded in Alberta, something to the effect of: to allow so much of the bitumen to be exported, it's like a farmer selling the topsoil. Well, perhaps the hon. minister of finance can update the House on this matter. The upgraders in Borger, Texas, to be specific: has that project been cancelled? The project over in southern Illinois that was planned – I believe it was southern Illinois. Has that project been cancelled along with those out in the Fort Saskatchewan neighbourhood, or are they still welding pipe and putting steel in the rack and getting ready to upgrade our bitumen?

When you upgrade bitumen, Mr. Speaker, it's important to note that it increases in value. If we look at the price of synthetic crude oil, whether it's produced by Suncor or Syncrude, it's worth so much more than a barrel of bitumen. So I would remind the House that that's why we need to facilitate upgrading in this province.

Now, there was talk of adjusting pipeline tolls as well. That may have the effect of subsidizing bitumen exports. I would like to know where in this legislation that is suggested. Also, expediting regula-

tory approvals for projects with upgraders: where are we on all of this? If I could get an update. I know that there are still t's to cross and i's to dot over Syncrude's and Suncor's 90-day transition programs because they had some very interesting deals that gave them, I think, an unfair competitive advantage over their neighbours in the Fort McMurray region. That's, I guess, their historical advantage. They were there first, and they got a pretty good deal.

Now, whenever we look at conventional oil and we look at the royalties there, again Bill 47, there's a price sensitivity there for natural gas. I think that when we look at what's going on with natural gas, we look at some of the drilling costs that occur, particularly in the foothills front region, this is one of the reasons why the subsidy was introduced here in the summer regarding deep wells. Hopefully, we'll see rigs this winter in the foothills region on the Alberta side of the border doing some deep drilling for not only natural gas but natural gas liquids. That's where the money is, Mr. Speaker.

We look at what's going on up in northeastern B.C. Well, there are some real good plays up there in, I think, the Horn River basin among others. There is action over in southeastern Saskatchewan.

That gets me to my next point. We discussed this earlier, and I haven't heard back from the government, unfortunately. This is in regard to TILMA. If we can have all this harmony with various trade patterns and trade negotiations and professions and trades and this deal and that deal, how come we can't work with the provinces of Saskatchewan and British Columbia to have a royalty rate that is just about if not the same in the three provinces so that we don't get the oil and gas companies working one province against the other by lowering royalties? That's not the first time I've asked this question in the House, but I haven't had an answer from the government yet, and I certainly would like one. I think that if the three western provinces got organized and set a royalty regime, then you couldn't get one province being worked over by the energy industry for lower rates on conventional oil and natural gas production. That being said, there are heavy oil deposits in Saskatchewan but very little, to my knowledge, in B.C.

When we look at the past royalty system and we look at what's proposed in this bill, it's clear that Alberta's current royalty system is not providing the resource owners with a fair share. This is interesting, Mr. Speaker. Mr. van Meurs pointed out that "at US \$60 per barrel [west Texas intermediate] or higher" – that's the price – "oil sands projects generate unusually high total profits for investors per project." We have to be very careful when, you know, people are told that the sky is falling. I know that costs have gone up. On a per-barrel basis the operational costs for the Syncrude joint venture, I believe, the last time I looked at a recent quarterly report, were around \$34. That was all in operational costs. At Suncor I think it was slightly less, and Suncor's bitumen production was around \$27 per barrel. I think those numbers are reflective of what has happened in the last year or less, where operating costs have increased dramatically.

Natural gas costs, of course, have gone down for fuel for those projects, but those costs are going up on a per-barrel basis. We have to be aware of that in this House. Certainly, whenever we look at the price sensitivity, as prices go up – and we have to remember, whenever we're making this law, that we're not only making this law whenever prices go down but also whenever prices go up. The oil sands projects, in my view, can be an attractive investment.

Now, we know that in the past the royalty was 1 per cent until payout. This was very low by international standards. What's outlined in this bill I think will still make those projects attractive to investors. Whenever we look at the history, others will probably in

this House be bringing up the Auditor General's report, and I'm certain that the Minister of Energy has the Auditor's office on his speed dial and is in at least weekly communication with him. But the government of Alberta has failed to meet its own Crown revenue target for the last number of years. Now, there have been countless reports in this government's care or possession that indicate that the current royalty structure is out of date.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other member wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Under 29(2)(a)?

The Acting Speaker: No.

4:10

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to rise, my first opportunity, on Bill 47, Mines and Minerals (New Royalty Framework) Amendment Act, 2008. This bill enables changes to the royalty system. It allows for bitumen royalties to be taken in kind and allows for the government to take back shallow, nonproductive royalty rights.

In my reading of this bill, a very serious issue for all Albertans and one that has fundamental impacts on our budget, obviously—the royalties at present can be changed through regulation at any time except for oil sands royalties, which are currently legislated. Under this new bill oil sands royalties will move into regulation. This adds new royalty powers both to shallow rights reversion and to bitumen royalty-in-kind. The bitumen royalty-in-kind is a mechanism that has the potential to significantly increase the value that Alberta receives from its oil sands. Presently the province receives its conventional oil royalties in kind, and producers give the government a share of the oil rather than the value of that share in cash. Natural gas royalties and oil sands royalties are both taken in cash.

Now, bitumen, the resource that is produced from the oil sands, is not as valuable as oil. To turn bitumen into synthetic crude, one needs to upgrade it, a costly process, but it adds significant value and, obviously, important labour interests and increases in Alberta. The differential between oil and bitumen prices fluctuates, but a working estimation is that the bitumen price is 60 per cent of the price of oil. If the government takes its share of bitumen production in cash, then any increase in value that occurs afterwards goes to the industry. If the government takes the royalty as in-kind bitumen, then it can get that bitumen upgraded and keep the additional value for the public purse.

In addition, the upgrading process is itself something that produces value for Alberta. Upgrading facilities are complex, cost billions in construction costs. They also operate for decades, providing long-term employment and a number of valuable petrochemical by-products, which in turn encourage other industries. Industry may choose to do their upgrading outside of Alberta, particularly in the U.S., and therefore the province would lose on the additional value that we would retain if we maintained and developed it here or, indeed, in the rest of western Canada.

We on this side of the House want to see that. We want to clearly send a message to industry that we want the upgrading done here, not necessarily in Alberta. We can't afford the current environmental and other costs: social costs, infrastructure costs. But with a paced development we can embrace it here, at least in Canada. It should not be going to the States, from our point of view. Industry may choose to do their upgrading outside of Alberta, in the U.S., but

that is not our ideal. By taking significant amounts of in-kind bitumen, the government can provide the feedstock to local upgraders, and the government then becomes an influential force in determining the location of the upgrading facilities.

With respect to shallow rights reversion oil and gas sit in layers under the surface. A producer will tend to approach one particular area, often leaving other areas above it, whether of the same product or completely different product, for example coal-bed methane. Thus producers who are given subsurface rights are holding those rights for minerals that they have no intention of producing. It's very different to be a CBM producer, for example, versus a deep gas or oil producer. By taking back or reverting the shallow rights, the government is not hurting the producer, and it's enabling alternative or additional production under government jurisdiction. What it does do is potentially increase the amount of development that an area experiences through the same infrastructure. There could be, then, an additional producer in the same area.

In general, Mr. Speaker, we support the bill in that we want to see increased royalties, in particular, from the oil sands. We've all seen and heard from the oil companies about some of the tremendous challenges they're facing with increased costs— inflationary costs, labour costs, material costs—and now the erratic up and down nature of oil and gas prices as well as the economic downturn and the credit crisis. This makes it very difficult for this industry at this time.

This is a policy that will address the need for certainty in the industry. Regardless of what other factors are coming to bear, they want to know that government is setting a standard on which they can count, on which they can plan future investment decisions, and on which they can at least have some certainty of a reasonable return on investment.

It is incumbent on us that we do come to a clear and consistent approach to royalties. It's a complex area, and it's been a tremendous learning curve to catch up on the 30 years or more of legislation and policy on royalties and with the paramount interest of getting fair rent for these public resources. We also, of course, on this side want to see an increase in value from our nonrenewable resources, and we believe that that would be improved by taking bitumen royalties-in-kind and perhaps holding those resources until it's appropriate or until we can develop the resource with secondary upgrading here in Alberta.

This amendment is in response to concern raised by the Privacy Commissioner in a public release in which there were concerns about openness, transparency, and ensuring that this important public resource is fully accountable to the people of Alberta. This is surely one of the most contentious issues that we deal with in the government, this important issue of royalties and the return Albertans get. It certainly must reflect a fair deal for all Albertans. It is a third or more of our budget at present, and it's obviously something that we cannot depend on. We do need to ensure that the government is spending within the means of our capacity to sustain funding over time. That's why many of us feel that we should be socking away at least a third of these royalties to be sure that we have a consistent approach to some of the fundamental needs for education, health care, water systems monitoring, and the other government services that any modern culture requires.

It's very clear from the Royalty Review Panel's report and the Auditor General's report of last year that the government has not collected the full share of royalties that are expected by this province relative to what other jurisdictions are taking. That's the only basis on which one can compare. I think most Albertans and, as I say, the Auditor General and other reporters, other experts have said that we could be, that we should be receiving more for our public investment

as a public resource. This bill, however, does not in itself change these amounts. The real changes will take place in the upcoming regulations. We should ask, however, that the government table their proposed regulations during the debate so that we can see how this will be translated into real returns for Albertans.

The other aspect of our royalty system is that it is opaque and not yet accountable to the owners of the resource, the public. Other oil producing countries do a better job of providing detailed information on the royalty system and ensuring that we understand what's being produced and what the expected returns are going to be for Albertans. The Royalty Review Panel, in particular, made a large number of suggested improvements in accountability. It's not clear to me that this amendment is going to address those in a consistent and open fashion.

When the two independent panels, including that of former Auditor General Peter Valentine – when the two reports were made, there was a lack of evidence for their position that these recommendations were being honoured and that there was more transparency and accountability for our royalty system. That's a problem. I think that as representatives of the people, as representatives of the public interest we should have a very serious commitment to trying to make this as open and accountable, I guess, as possible.

4:20

There are, therefore, one or two amendments that we're considering, particularly on this section that expands the paramountcy provision of information relating to royalties. This would mean that the information relating to royalties could not be released for five years even if the freedom of information act required that it should. We don't think that's in the public interest. We would like to see that more available.

That was, Mr. Speaker, I think, most of what I wanted to say about this, and I'm prepared to adjourn discussions at this time unless there are others that want to speak.

The Acting Speaker: Is that a motion to adjourn debate?

Dr. Swann: I would make a motion to adjourn.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

Bill 43 Emergency Health Services Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? Does any member wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this bill regarding the emergency health services and how these changes to the Municipal Government Act will facilitate or transfer responsibility for ambulance services from the province's municipalities to the provincial government and will hopefully improve emergency health services throughout Alberta.

We had a significant discussion on this at second reading, and I

just thought it was interesting that at this time the government is finally initiating this law or this transfer of responsibility. We can go back 12 years, Mr. Speaker, even further, and if we look at some of the fine, sound policy ideas from this side of the House, this is essentially another one of them. Again, when we were in question period today, I was sitting here thinking of the discussions around the stability fund, which was an idea from this side of the House to set aside a bit of money, the only money, essentially, that's been set aside by this government in the last number of years. We can call it the stabilization fund, we can call it a sustainability fund, but it's all the same. Fortunately, we have a fund of this nature during these turbulent economic times. That's an example of one good idea from this side of the House.

This is certainly another idea that for some time we had requested the government to implement, and now I see that this is one of the very few good initiatives coming forward from the latest privatization initiative of the government, the centralization of the regional health authorities into the consolidated board and then the privatization measures which are sure to follow.

Mr. Chairman, when we look at this bill and we go through it in committee and we look at the governance section, we look at the licensing, we look at the provision of emergency health services, one issue that I can possibly see coming is with section 15(1)(b), which states that an attendant can refuse service because they are not qualified. Could this be initiated so that they can downgrade the qualifications of ambulance attendants in certain areas as a way to decrease costs? I certainly hope not, and if hon. members across the way could enlighten me on that, I would be very grateful.

Now, section 17 and, again, section 18 state that no person shall operate an ambulance operation without a licence and without an agreement from the health authority. Subsection (2) of both sections 17 and 18 states that the minister can exempt any person from the requirements of sections 17 and 18. Again, why does the minister need this power? Is it not in the best interests of public safety that all operators have licences and service agreements?

How is all of this going to work with TILMA? I'm sure the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has some suggestions regarding TILMA and our ambulance operators or our workers. What kind of qualifications are we now looking at?

Government members in the past have been quite correct, Mr. Chairman, in reminding all members of this House just how an ambulance has changed in 20 years and of the training of the ambulance operator and the attendants, how those changes have affected front-line health care. A lot of those ambulances have very sophisticated life-saving devices in them. Twenty years ago, 30 years ago, you know, a lot of times an ambulance was just a vehicle to get a sick person or someone who was in an unfortunate traffic accident as quickly to a treatment facility as possible, but nowadays with some of the electronic gear that is provided in those vehicles, a lot can happen. As the trip from the accident site or the home to the hospital continues, there can be a lot of care provided to the patient.

So times have changed. I hope those changes are reflected in this legislation, and I think they are. When we go through this further, Mr. Chairman, we see inspections, investigations, and enforcement, sections 23 through to 30, which outline the powers of the authorized person, the identification they must display, the procedure for the removal of items during an investigation, and how they report. This seems pretty straightforward.

There is certainly an appeals section. Part 7 deals with offences. Part 8 is a general section regarding the ambulance operator or the health authority, what information must be provided to the minister

in the time frame and the form that the minister requests. Section 41 regulates that the minister or his or her authorized person, in this case an investigator, can report to a regulatory body or a peace officer. These all seem to be very well-thought-out, reasonable, rational sections to implement this bill.

Now, section 44(1)(b) indicates that the minister can impose service requirements, standards, and protocols for an RHA, in this case the Alberta Health Services Board and the operators. This is, in my opinion, probably where diversion from emergency response may come into play. The minister can make that decision as to where the patient goes.

4:30

We know the red alerts and what's going on with the emergency system these days, and it doesn't seem to be getting any better. I looked in the fiscal update, and if you compare what we spent in 2007-08 and what we spent in the six months this year, we've spent an additional \$481 million, or if you compare the budget for the six-month period in the fiscal report, it's a 9 per cent increase. But those red alerts are still occurring. If you visit an emergency room in a large urban hospital, there are a lot of people waiting. People are phoning our office. They're explaining to us how long they have waited for care and attention and what could be done to improve the service. We're spending a lot of money. Whether we're spending it wisely, that's another question.

I don't think this notion of private delivery is going to improve the bottom line, nor is it going to improve health care wait times or wait times for operations. I can't see it. I think we would have been much better off just leaving the system alone, letting the professionals that are there work out the problems. This constant focus on changing this and that hasn't worked out. We had a good system, and we can't say that any longer.

There are many other questions that I have at committee, Mr. Chairman. Now, in section 44(1)(c) the minister can enter into agreements with anyone for the purpose of this act. I think this should be more specific. What types of individuals or service providers do we have in mind here?

Section 45 allows the minister to "exempt any person from the operation of this Act," its regulations or provisions. Should this be allowed if this act is to ensure public safety? I'm sure that after the scare with the syringes in High Prairie the government must be quite sensitive to ensuring public safety and ensuring that the public has confidence in their ability to manage and ensure that public safety is the number one priority. Public safety in health care, well, people have doubts about that. The conduct of this government and the mysterious way in which senior public health officials were let go by this government, people are still asking questions about that, Mr. Chairman.

Now, we look at section 48, and this outlines the ministerial regulations. I had a look down in the library not long ago about the regulations that are written and passed by this government, and I'm continuing with that investigation. This is another example of more regulations, and the important ones are staffing, equipment, supplies, vehicles, and the establishment of different categories or classifications of ambulance attendants. My question in committee here is regarding this. Is the hon. minister going to make more categories of attendants, change requirements in qualifications?

Section 48(j). This is the same point I made previously regarding the requirements, qualifications, duties, categories, and classes of attendants.

The transportation of patients in section 48(p). Where will the minister have the power to change where patients are taken to? We

all know there are so many different classifications of hospitals, and if you look at the Alberta Health Services Board, we're having urban hospitals, we're having acute care urban hospitals, we're having rural hospitals. I don't know what's going to happen to them, but I'm not confident. I think they're going to just become nothing more than glorified medcentres, and I think that's a bad public policy decision. But that's what I think is going to happen, and if an hon. member can correct me, so be it.

Now, under section 48(2)(a), the minister can restrict or broaden the definitions of ambulance and EHS. This will give the minister the ability, in my view, to limit what services are given under the definition of the EHS. We need to get some answers from the minister regarding the future of EHS.

We've got lots of regulations here, and again it raises questions of how much power the minister has over the delivery of emergency health services. We all know the powers that the minister has created for himself over the Alberta Health Services Board through the Government Organization Act. If the minister was not interested in power, he wouldn't have made those changes, which I disagree with, with the consolidation of the regional health authorities through the Regional Health Authority Act. But the minister wanted that absolute political power, and he took it upon himself in the Government Organization Act to seize that. That's the reason why I have concerns about the delivery here in this act of emergency health services.

Mr. Chairman, those are some of my questions for debate in committee on Bill 43, the Emergency Health Services Act. With that I will cede the floor to another hon. member of this House, and hopefully I can get some answers during the course of debate on my questions.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm privileged to rise and just speak for a few moments about this very important bill, Bill 43. I had the privilege of serving nine years on Lethbridge city council, and I learned one thing during that time, that the citizens of Lethbridge very much supported our protective services, which included our fire, ambulance, and police services. We have what's called a combined service in Lethbridge. A combined service is not unique in the province. There are many of them. But it's extremely important to the citizens in Lethbridge. Our combined service has been running for almost 100 years in Lethbridge and also includes a combined dispatch for police, fire, and ambulance together.

The combined fire/ambulance service is very effective, and it's very cost-effective for the citizens of Lethbridge and, I believe, for citizens of other communities around the province. It allows us to respond to a variety of types of calls. If there's a car accident, for example, we can respond with police, with an ambulance, and with a fire truck. If there's a fuel leak, the fire department trained people can deal with the fuel leak, the ambulance can extract and provide support to anyone injured in the accident, and the police can provide the services that they do. So it's a very holistic support to protective services, and the citizens in Lethbridge are very, very supportive of this.

Mr. Chairman, I must say that when I first got elected, probably one of the things I was most concerned with was what was going to happen to our combined protective services and especially our ambulance service in Lethbridge because it is extremely valuable, and with an aging population it is becoming busier and busier and busier as calls for service continue to increase. What I have seen is

that through the course of negotiations this minister and this government have shown a significant ability to be flexible, to work with the local agencies to help provide combined services in the future that will work. All I can say is that I support the legislation and recognize the many benefits that it will bring within the health services area and trust that the department will continue to recognize the many benefits of an integrated service as we have in Lethbridge and many other communities.

Thank you.

4:40

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 43, Emergency Health Services Act. This repeals the Ambulance Services Act and the Edmonton Ambulance Authority Act. The bill transfers the responsibility for delivering emergency health services from municipalities to the Ministry of Health and Wellness. Most municipalities are in agreement with this action, although some that have the joint emergency response system with police and fire, have some real problems with this, as I've understood it.

One question regarding the bill is to what extent the entire province's emergency health system will be or potentially could be privatized. Clearly, that has implications for costs and impacts and access and use of the facility by those who are on fixed income and those who might be most inclined to need the service. So that raises some concerns for me.

Another question is: what will happen to areas that have integrated, as I say, the fire and ambulance services into which municipalities put funds and have created the system that works best for them?

Still another question relates to what will happen to the assets of the municipalities after this transition? Clearly, this also will make ambulance workers essential service workers and limit their ability to strike. As I've said in the House, I feel that ambulance workers are emergency workers, and there should be a restriction on their ability to strike, but I know that there are lots of different views on that one.

Currently the emergency health services are provided by municipalities, and in 2005 the services were supposed to be transferred to the ministry of health, but as a result of, I would say, a lack of information or a failure to plan appropriately, there was a big furor over the high cost of such a transfer. It's not clear to me how much this is going to cost now relative to 2005, but I'm sure Albertans would want to know how this is going to be affecting the budget of the Alberta government and want to know the benefits of making this shift. Clearly, emergency services should fall under health, but I guess the question is how we do it and how well it will meet the fundamental needs of the people of Alberta.

There are currently more than 80 emergency service providers operating in Alberta. As I've indicated, it does allow flexibility to provide ambulance services either directly from Alberta Health Services or to contract out to a third party.

Some of the concerns I've mentioned regarding the cost implications, potentially, for people who use the service. Currently ambulance users pay 33 per cent of the cost, but under the new system this will drop to 10 per cent. As long as that is a reasonably accurate figure, I think we're looking at a favourable response from most in Alberta.

The bill will allow emergency health services providers to decide whether the patients, however, should be transferred to an emergency department or to other health providers. That raises important

questions for the jurisdiction, the capacity, the responsibility of emergency workers to make those kinds of decisions based on good information rather than on the basis of what is cheapest for the particular service.

There are many different service delivery models in Alberta, and some municipalities have become ground ambulance service providers operating their own ambulance systems either separately or in combination with other emergency services, such as fire departments. Edmonton and Calgary are examples of municipally operated ambulance services, but some smaller municipalities also operate their own ambulance services.

In some areas municipalities have banded together, forming regional nonprofit ambulance boards or commissions, and provide services using the ambulance systems they jointly operate. In addition, some municipalities or groups of municipalities have entered into contracts for service with private, for-profit ambulance service providers.

There are three levels of ambulance service in Alberta: first is the emergency medical responder; second, basic life support; and third would be advanced life support. Municipalities will have the option to continue to deliver their services under a contract from Alberta Health Services. Under this plan it is a possibility that 30 current dispatch centres will be reduced to nine dispatch centres, which will service the areas that correspond to the former nine regional health authorities. EMS workers will also be declared an essential service.

Well, our take on this, I guess, in summary, Mr. Chairman, is that municipalities have waited for years for the province to take over delivery of the emergency health services, and for the most part they support this transition. Questions remain regarding how these will be contracted, how much privatization might occur, how they will integrate if they have already done so with other emergency services, and what will happen to the assets that the municipalities own. Will the government, I guess, commit to not totally privatizing emergency services? I know that those of us who believe that especially essential services should be under the public purview would have some real reservations if there was any attempt to privatize emergency services. Clearly, that would offend a lot of Albertans, and those of us who believe in the national approach and principles of publicly funded health care would also have great difficulty with that.

I guess the other aspect that isn't clear here is how the minister ensures that the service attendants will have sufficient training to determine where patients should be sent to. I know that in some of the smaller centres, where ambulance attendants are voluntary, they do not have, for example, advanced life support, do not have capacity to read cardiograms, do not have the capacity to inject drugs. I would be reluctant to think that they would be making decisions about whether an individual needed to go to an emergency department or to a clinic. That needs to be, I think, clarified in favour of taking the safest option rather than leaving it to someone who may not be qualified to make those decisions.

Under the sectional analysis, part 2, the governance, section 4 states that the minister can approve or propose amendments to the service plan and that the health authority can also propose amendments to the plan. Well, clearly, there is no health authority, so it's unclear, with the minister having complete control over the health authority, how this is going to serve both the profession and the interests of public health. I think it's the view of many in the medical profession that this should be a decision made on the basis of proper medical assessment as opposed to a ministerial decision. Again, privatization is a key issue of sensitivity for most of us on this side of the House.

Under section 15, part 2, is it a possibility that attendants can refuse service because they're not recognizing the seriousness of a particular case? Could this be laid out more clearly so that we could understand the decision-making scope of practice of emergency attendants? Again, the public interest has to be paramount.

All in all, Mr. Chairman, I think that this bill helps to clarify and make what has been uncertain more certain and move us towards a more consistent approach to emergency services. I think it's one that is clearly supported by most of the province, but I think we'll have some serious concerns expressed by those, especially in the bigger centres, that have been very happy with the municipal control and the municipal integration of emergency services. I'm hopeful that these can be worked out on an individual basis and that the benefits of the consistent service through the auspices of the health department will outweigh some of the disadvantages and risks that some of us see in any change.

Overall, I'm going to support this bill. I think it's going to move us in the right direction, with some of the provisos that I had about extra costs and the privatization question.

Thank you. I'll take my chair, Mr. Chairman.

4:50

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Are you ready for the question on Bill 43?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 43 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Bill 42 Health Governance Transition Act

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Bill 42, the Health Governance Transition Act. I cannot at this time support this legislation. I just think it's so unfortunate that we're going down this road towards privatization. This is labelled the Health Governance Transition Act, but in reality it could be the privatization act. This is a bill that is going to dissolve the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission and the Alberta Cancer Board. I don't know what's going to happen to these two organizations and the people that they serve on a daily basis.

I know we're blending this into the Alberta Health Services Board. I had an opportunity to attend their meeting last week in their new offices. They're great offices. I'm not going to focus on that because we're discussing Bill 42. Here we have an outfit that's supposed to save us money, consolidate everything, but there seems to be movement afoot for an uptown office downtown. It astonishes me why we couldn't use space that's – there must be lots of space in the Capital health authority that could be used for those folks, but that's not the case.

While I attended in the boardroom for the Alberta Health Services

meeting, there was a discussion held among some of the other members from the public who were there regarding AADAC and the Cancer Programs Act. Now, the government hasn't provided any answers to the questions that have been asked.

If we look at the budget here, Mr. Chairman, for health care delivery, it's in excess of \$10 billion now. We have a government that's requesting these changes through this bill but readily admits that there was no cost-benefit analysis done to see how this was going to improve service, reduce wait times, and control costs. Now, no reasonable person running a 10 billion dollar a year business would ever contemplate such changes without carefully considering the benefits of the changes and what may go wrong, but we have a government here that did just that.

This innocent-sounding bill, the Health Governance Transition Act, is far from that. There are many people who are concerned about those who have addictions, whether it be alcohol, whether it be drugs, or whether it be gambling. How is this bill going to help them out, help them get straightened out? How is this bill going to improve cancer treatments throughout this province? How is all this going to work? We're just going full speed ahead without any direction.

Let's have a look at Cancer in Alberta: A Regional Picture. One of the things that they state here, Mr. Chairman, is a cancer-free future. We can only wish, and I certainly hope that that would eventually come true. We look at the report and the data, and we look at the overall picture of the disease in Alberta, and we look at the Alberta Cancer Board and its role. Now, this is a report that's prepared annually by the Alberta Cancer Board for health professionals in Alberta's health regions. It can be used as a reference document providing current data on cancer, comparisons between regional health authorities, and trends and projections for cancer. When we have these changes, I don't know how we're going to compare these regions or what regions are going to be compared one to the other, whether it would be urban and rural or whether it would be north and south or east and west.

The Cancer Board has unveiled its vision for a cancer-free future, Mr. Chairman. That is a vision that I'm certain all hon. members of this House would support. The Cancer Board strives towards this vision by focusing on the common purpose of achieving the following milestones for the year 2025:

- Prevent more than 61,000 cancers by reducing the projected cancer incidence by 35%.
- Save more than 45,000 lives by reducing mortality by 50% compared to the numbers predicted for 2025.
- Work to eradicate suffering in all its forms, so any day spent living with cancer can still be a day spent fully alive.

How is this bill going to support or enhance these statements? No one on that side of the House has been willing or able to answer that to date.

Now, we know that the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Act, that was proclaimed in 2006, provides an opportunity to bring true innovation to the field of cancer prevention in order to benefit all Albertans in the future. This act established a \$500 million endowment fund to facilitate the above-mentioned visions that I was discussing. I'm not going to change the subject, Mr. Chairman, but it is worth noting that that \$500 million fund was invested in a different way than a lot of the other investment pools that the hon. minister of finance has under her control. It was – and I want to use the words – conservatively invested in bonds, and it certainly has not seen the losses that other pools of money under her care have. But that's off the subject here.

When we look at the funds and we look at the research and prevention programs and the screening programs, we need to ensure

that this vision of a cancer-free future is going to be sustained. There is no commitment from this government to date on whether or not that will happen under this legislation. The Cancer Board and the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission are going to be swallowed up into this superministry. They are stand-alone statutes. We've got the Alberta Mental Health Board, which is governed through regulation. What is going to happen to these organizations if Bill 42 becomes law? We don't know.

5:00

Now, we look at cancers in Alberta. We look at some of the most interesting comparisons that are done in this report, and we look at the regional snapshot of this province. Some of these statistics are going back two and three years, Mr. Chairman, but we look at new invasive cancers by site in Alberta. We look at cancer deaths by site in Alberta, and by site we mean breast or brain or bladder or lung or pancreas or stomach. This is information that I think all of us should have a look at before we decide which way we're going with this legislation because I don't want to see the good work that has been done over the years by the Cancer Board jeopardized in any way by this consolidation, this political power grab by this government on our health care delivery boards and agencies.

If we look at cancer and the impact it has on the lives of Albertans, of all causes of death in Alberta, all ages, 29 per cent are caused by cancer, 28 per cent by heart disease. Those would be the two biggest. Cancer is a major issue for all Albertans, and I'm not convinced that this bill is going in the right direction. Now, when we have a look at all causes of death in Alberta between the ages of 35 and 64 – and this is for the year 2004, Mr. Chairman – 39 per cent are caused by cancer, 30 per cent by other, and 19 per cent by heart disease. It is important to note the fact that among the group aged 35 to 64 cancer is the leading cause of death, yet we're taking a fine board, and who knows what's going to happen to it.

We know that the Cancer Board is dedicated to controlling cancer. We know how people feel, families and society feel, and the majority of them have nothing but good words to say about the treatment and the support they get when there is a family member affected by this disease. But we look at where we're going with this bill, and I don't have confidence that the public interest here is being protected.

If we look at new cases; for instance, let's pick males and females with lung cancer. In 2004 there were 825 cases for males; there were 723 for females. Now, for breast cancer there were 1,869 new cases; for prostate cancer there were 1,986 cases. So you can see where there is, unfortunately, always someone leaving a doctor's office with bad news for themselves and their families.

Now, we look at the actual and projected number of new cases of invasive cancer in Alberta. This is for a 40-year period between 1990 through to 2030. The actual new cases – let's go to 2005 here, Mr. Chairman – is 12,422. The projected number of cases 25 years later has more than doubled, to 27,640 projected new cases. So the good work of the Alberta Cancer Board has to continue, and I want a guarantee from this government that with this new scheme of theirs that it is going to continue. I'm rather doubtful if I'm going to get that.

The lifetime probability, the risk, of developing cancer or dying of cancer is significant. Everyone in this House knows that, as does the general public. The trend in Alberta for all cancers, fortunately – and it's reflective of the work that's been done in the past by doctors and other professionals involved in this despicable disease – is that the relative survival rate is improving, and that is comforting to see. Hopefully, it will continue.

Now, what is the picture for the regional health authorities? Well,

we know they no longer exist, but in this grouping they're listed as one through nine. We can certainly figure out who's who here by the population totals, and it is quite interesting to see some of the regions and what's going on in those regions, Mr. Chairman: age standardization, incidence rates for all cancers by regional health authorities. It is certainly interesting to note when you compare the regions between male and female populations that many more males appear to be developing cancer than females, but it is interesting to note region 7, the Aspen health region here, where the rate per 100,000 population for males is the highest in the province at 500.

Dr. Swann: What was that?

Mr. MacDonald: It's at 500, hon. member, in the Aspen health region.

Now, one that always seems to cause issue and concern is Northern Lights health region in the north end of the province, individuals who may live downstream of some of the oil sands developments and how they may or may not be affected by environmental cancers, if we can call them that.

There are quite a number of interesting issues. I have no idea why Aspen, which is the health region that would stretch north of the city of Edmonton from Jasper sort of in an arc across to Cold Lake, over that way, would have such a high rate of cancer, you know, compared to other regional health authorities. Certainly, the Capital health authority has a very high one, as does Calgary. Palliser region is one of the lower ones, and I also find that interesting. The further south you go, it seems to be, the better off you are with this horrific disease.

I'm not going to go through this at length, Mr. Chairman. My hon. colleague with his medical background may wish to do so, but certainly there are significant statistics provided here by the Alberta Cancer Board. I don't know what on earth will happen to all this good work if we pass Bill 42 in its current form. Certainly, when we look at the incidence rates for breast cancer here and have a look at the incidence rates for prostate cancer by regional health authorities, I think it's about time that we . . .

Dr. Swann: Focused more attention rather than less.

Mr. MacDonald: . . . focused more attention rather than less. Also, I think the tests for prostate cancer should be under the Alberta health care system completely. If you look at the incidence rates, prostate cancer is certainly high.

5:10

With that, Mr. Chairman, I would certainly urge all hon. members of this House to reflect on what will happen to the Alberta Cancer Board under Bill 42, the Health Governance Transition Act, and what exactly will improve, if anything, if we pass this legislation. I'm certainly not in favour of it, and I intend at the appropriate time to amend it.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, from the outset I think many of us had great difficulty with the transition from nine health regions to this Alberta Health Services Board. As a physician, someone who bases decisions on evidence, I have a great deal of difficulty with the continued restructuring of a system without evidence. If the three main criteria of a good health system are quality, access, and cost efficiency, which they should be, one would

think that there would be measures in place that would allow us to measure quality, access, and cost efficiency under the three different systems that we had in place prior to this latest restructuring.

I guess Albertans have a basic expectation that government will do its job. Once again it appears that the government has not done its job in terms of both addressing the question of building evidence for changes in the system and gathering information from around the world in which some of these questions have been researched and evidence has been brought to bear on it.

We have a somewhat unique situation in Canada, where we have committed ourselves to a publicly funded health care system accessible to everyone regardless of ability to pay, but that doesn't mean we are going to rest on those principles without an ongoing monitoring and evaluation system. The decision at the ministerial level without full consultation – and the Auditor General also raised these questions – in relation to mental health services and the lack of consultation, the lack of diligence on the part of government in looking at what would best serve mental health in the future for Albertans.

There appears to be an unwillingness to actually bring to bear the best of evidence and make decisions based on one step at a time, incrementally, as opposed to radical changes that disrupt not only the delivery and the lines of communication and raise questions about the direction but also undermine staff morale and give the impression to staff that this is simply an exercise in change for change's sake. It's clear that the minister is not listening to front-line workers, not listening to researchers and people who have looked at efficient, effective health care systems both in Canada and abroad. It raises real anxiety, if not anger, across the health care system as professionals see this willy-nilly changing of the system because it's not working in some respects. I would say that on all three of those major criteria there are very few Albertans that would say we are progressing in this province towards a better health care system.

It's a disappointment to me to have to say that I can't support this whole transition act. It's taking into one body of 16 members mental health services, alcohol and drug abuse issues, Cancer Board issues as well as the plethora of public health services that we've talked about in this House relating to some failures that could be addressed systematically at the regional level and must be addressed at all levels across the province and the whole hospital and clinical care services system.

It's very difficult to stand up and feel that without seeing what the goals of this are, without being clear about where the evidence comes from, without setting in place some indicators now so that 10 years from now we will look back and say: this is what worked about this new system, this is what did not work about this new system, and this is how we will change it. It's, again, a frustrating position that it puts all of us in, especially when it appears to compromise rural areas particularly with the central control and the much more difficult access that rural areas will have to decision-making, to policy changes that would be more unique to rural areas, and to the staffing needs that are increasingly stretched in the rural areas.

The amount of detail and definition in this bill is totally insufficient to help us decide whether we will or will not improve quality, access, and cost-efficiency. I'm not sure why it's not been possible for this government in such a major budgetary area, such a significant issue for Albertans, to put a plan forward, a bigger, longer term plan that we could all understand and get behind or make suggestions for improvement. It hasn't even been defined what the other entity would be that would be the transition centre for operations of the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission and the Cancer Board. It would be nice to know under what model the minister is basing this plan and this major decision to centralize all of health care.

It would be nice to know what the minister is thinking in terms of public health, which is the area that I'm most familiar with. There is no evidence here that public health services are clear and distinct and going to be adequately funded to provide preventive services on food, air, and water quality issues. The one advantage of centralizing, of course, is that you can standardize. I can't say that there's no advantage to this movement, but it's not clear the extent to which acute care, medical care, high technology, and specialized care will not once again start eating away and eroding the preventive services.

We see the evidence, as we discussed today, with the highest rate of syphilis in the country, in these last few years over a hundred cases. This is a disease of the 19th century. We didn't identify it early enough and act on it quickly enough to prevent five deaths, and now it's spread into other communities across the country. This is a profound failure of a health system that was built upon primary care, early intervention, monitoring, investment in front-line workers, early identification through the laboratory system when there is a case, immediate contact tracing, immediate treatment of the contacts, and education and a public alert so that people know what they're dealing with. This is profoundly disappointing for someone in the public health care system that has seen this health care system spiral into chaos in the last 15 years through neglect and a lack of leadership, really. Leadership is about doing the right thing, and I fail to see how, without evidence, one can have confidence that this health care system is going to improve under this kind of direction.

Mr. MacDonald: Were you fired for speaking out?

Dr. Swann: I myself have had significant impacts from the health system. I think there are a significant number of professionals who are reluctant to speak out and challenge the system. I have become more confident in speaking out, Mr. Chairman, as you well know, since our interaction in Medicine Hat some years ago.

Again, where is the cost-benefit analysis? Where is the evidence that this streamlining, as the minister has called it, would create the kinds of benefits that Albertans are looking for?

My final comment, Mr. Chairman, is that with mental health being so close to the edge, so marginalized in this province, cuts being talked about in the south Calgary hospital around mental health services, the ill-prepared deinstitutionalization of mental health services, one has to wonder just where the priorities of this government are. I would specifically be concerned about mental health services, that we need to make it a higher priority. This movement of mental health services back to a centralized body will make it that much less responsive, that much less attentive to these very vulnerable people. It's going to add rather than subtract if we don't more systematically address the needs and supports for these people with mental health problems in the community.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will sit down and allow others to speak to this Bill 42. Thank you.

5:20

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak? We're in Committee of the Whole. You can speak as many times as you wish. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I have spoken to this a number of times, but I would like to just get back on the record very quickly that I really am very concerned with what's going to happen to AADAC. I would hate that it would get swallowed into the larger picture. I think that AADAC has been sort of one of the crown jewels of what has happened over the past number of years. They've had some very good success in their treatment centres. More importantly, there

have been transitional homes, halfway houses if you will, that have been supported by AADAC dollars, and although they may have paid staff, certainly the boards are all volunteers. For people who are involved with the AA programs, they are a very, very effective way of helping those that have an addiction to certainly alcohol and any of the other addictions, gambling, et cetera.

I did want to make sure that I expressed my concerns that AADAC may not be as powerful and be able to stand on its own.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will adjourn.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report Bill 43 and progress on Bill 42.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 43. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 42.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we now call it 5:30 and adjourn until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:23 p.m.]

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